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### Faith Comes by Hearing: The Interrelationship of Theology, Faith, and Practice

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To my children, Josiah, Caleb, and Anna Olson; God has spoken His Word of promise and has elicited faith in your lives. To God be the glory.

“You are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother’s breasts.  
On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother’s womb you have been my God.”  
Psalm 22:9–10

Saving faith, then, is always an act of the believer, though it is an act wrought by the Holy Ghost.

John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (Philadelphia: Concordia, 2003), p. 329.

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## PREFACE

This work is the result of my own personal struggle to understand the nature of faith. Throughout my Christian life, I have struggled through numerous conversations with fellow believers regarding what faith *is* and *how* it is a central component to the Christian life. This has particularly surrounded discussions regarding infant faith, the efficacy of the Word of God, and the means of grace. Many close friends and family members have deeply held to the position that the Word of God and His means of grace are only effective in so far as man allows them to be. Others have believed that the Word of God and His means and grace were only symbols of the grace that God had already sovereignly bestowed. Therefore, instead of faith being conceived of as “trust,” I have often been faced with a conception of faith as a “passive reception,” “rational assent,” or “quality.”

This has been a particular hardship for me growing up in the Lutheran Church, as it has often been perceived to be a direct attack to my own testimony of faith. I was baptized as an infant and never remember a time that I did not know the Lord. In many ways my testimony is similar to that of King David, who writes, “You made me trust in you even at my mother’s breasts.” (Psalm 22:9–10) However, this faith has been challenged repeatedly from those who would call themselves Christians. Instead of supporting this faith, they have asserted that I did not have the intellectual capability to have faith or perhaps was not even sovereignly chosen at all. In their minds, faith is supposed to be a commitment that I make once I reach a certain age or is something that God has already sovereignly decided. In many ways, this aroused a great discomfort in my own heart regarding the topic of faith, as a relationship with God was described as either a total work of man or a total work of God.

Furthermore, in my debates and discussions with those who held to a different view of faith, I also found that it was very frustrating to even attempt to have a discussion about the topic. Often times, I felt that I needed to have three or four other conversations regarding key foundational principles (Original Sin, Total Depravity, etc.) before even being able to address the topic of faith directly. Consequently, this process opened my eyes to the reality that there is much more to one’s conception of faith than just a definition to set forth.

When I would try to explain this to people, I would often get a blank stare. People would ask: “You’re going to write about faith? Doesn’t everyone already know about that?” In many ways, it seemed like such a simple issue. However, when I realized how interconnected the topic was and how much confusion Christians had in their understanding of faith, I realized that it was a more complex topic than I could have ever imagined. This recognition has led me to believe that this is an issue worth exploring.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many who have been instrumental in shaping my life and contributing in some way to see this project come to completion that I must limit my thanks to those whose contributions have been the most direct.

First, I want to thank all those who gave sacrificially to impart wisdom and knowledge into my life. During my academic study at the Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary, I was able to study about the nature and function of faith from Drs. Phil Haugen and Francis Monseth. Both men were grounded in their understanding of the Word of God and in their understanding of the faith which it elicits. I am extremely indebted to these men of God and am thankful for the hours of mentoring and teaching they afforded. Furthermore, in my last year of study, I was approved to specifically address the question of infant faith for my senior research paper, as I studied under the supervision of Rev. Brent Olson. During that time, Rev. Olson served not only as an academic supervisor, but as a good friend and has remained so ever since. As a student from Concordia Seminary himself, he also provided the encouragement needed to take the preliminary research done for my senior research paper and to pursue doctoral studies at Concordia Seminary.

Before arriving to Concordia Seminary, the Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary commissioned me to a yearlong pastoral internship at Ruthfred Lutheran Church in Bethel Park, PA. Under the pastoral supervision of Prs. Steve Carlson and Adam Osier, I continued to be encouraged in my pursuit of doctoral studies. They and the congregation have been one of the biggest financial supporters along the way and truly the reason that this academic journey was able to proceed with the rigor that it has. May the Lord continue to bless you richly for the kindness you have shown and the life of faith you have modeled.

Throughout my time here at Concordia Seminary, there have been many who have been a listening ear and a supportive voice along the way. Special thanks to Kent Burreson, and Peter Nafzger for hours of reading and for serving as part of the doctoral committee for this project. Notable mention also to Dr. Joel Biermann for the profound influence you have had in shaping and molding my own theology, showing me the influence that one's view of law and gospel can have to shape one's doctrine, and for being a champion on my behalf in getting this degree completed. Truly, without your supervision for the independent study course, this process would have been delayed significantly.

Undoubtedly, the most enriching aspect of my doctoral training from Concordia Seminary has been the hours of time spent in collaboration and in friendship with my Doktorvater Joel Okamoto. Of all the professors I have studied under, he has had the most notable influence on my thinking. He has always helped in adding clarity to the circumstance, putting things in their proper perspective, and in asking the timely question. Not only has Dr. Okamoto had a profound influence on my way of thinking, but he also represents the type of theologian and advisor I desire to be for others as I continue in my ministry.

However, of all of those who have contributed to this project, none has labored more intensely, worked longer, brainstormed further, listened more patiently, and brought more encouragement to me than my father, Dr. Kevin Olson. He has been a sounding board, an extra pair of eyes, an encourager, a colleague, and a good friend. Truly, this project would not have been possible without him.

In addition to my father, I am also extremely indebted to my mother Pamela, who first taught me about faith in Jesus Christ when I was a young child. Not only was she the first one to proclaim to me what God had done for me and enact the promise of His Word, but she also has faithfully mirrored a life of faith for me all these years. It is to my parents that I dedicate my 12 years of higher education, which now formally culminates with this Doctor of Philosophy degree.

By God's grace, my brother Andrew Olson and sister Naomi Paige and their spouses have also provided the needed support and the encouragement along the way. Thank you for believing in me, sharpening me through arguments and discussions, and for praying for me along the way. Thanks also to my father and mother-in-law Kevin and Paula Hoops for allowing me to drag their daughter and grandchildren around the country in following the Lord's call, as well as for your own prayers and support in this adventure.

To my beloved wife Emily and our precious children, I owe a profound debt of gratitude that words cannot repay or express. You have sacrificed more than any family ought to. You have been my biggest cheerleaders through this process and have provided a solace to retreat to when needed. When I have come home to the smiles on your faces, you have given me the joy that I have needed to press on in this study. It is to you that I dedicate this work, the shared labor of the past years. May the Lord continue to increase our faith in Him and in one another. Amen.

## **COPYRIGHT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- BC        *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.* Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds.
- CA        Augsburg Confession (Confessio Augustana)
- Ap        Apology of the Augsburg Confession
- SA        Smalcald Articles
- SC        Luther's Small Catechism
- LC        Luther's Large Catechism
- FC        Formula of Concord
- EP        Epitome of the Formula of Concord
- SD        Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord
- CD        Karl Barth. *Church Dogmatics.*
- ESV        English Standard Version
- LQ        Lutheran Quarterly
- LSB        *Lutheran Service Book*
- LW        *Luther's Works.* American Edition. 55 vols. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehman, eds.
- LW        *Lutheran Worship*
- WA        *Dr. Martin Luthers Werke.* Kritische Gesamtausgabe .

## ABSTRACT

Olson, Nathan, J. "Faith Comes By Hearing: The Interrelationship Between Faith, Theology, and Practice." Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, 2017. 202 pp.

This work provides a constructive systematic framework which sets forth a conception of faith as Trust in a Promise, utilizing an understanding of justification as God's declaration of man being made right with Himself, a theology of the Word as an effectual promise and effectual act, and a pneumatology which acknowledges the Spirit's role to elicit faith by killing and making alive in those who hear the gospel. Through a critical assessment of selected church practices and of the law and gospel debate in contemporary theology, this work also illustrates how various understandings of faith are operative in the Church's secondary and primary discourse and how a conception of saving faith as Trust in a Promise is operative and coherent in ways consistent with the teachings and practices of the Lutheran Church.



# CHAPTER ONE

## UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF FAITH

### Introducing the Problem

The most dangerous problems often persist unnoticed. They lay hidden before our very eyes, only revealing themselves subtly. Such problems lurk where none is thought to even exist at all—in plain sight. This work deals with a problem such as this, as it seeks to give an account of the nature of faith.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, it asks and answers the simple and straightforward question: “What is faith?”

At first glance, this may seem like an unimportant question. Why even bother asking about faith? In fact, it certainly seems fair to ask: “Doesn’t everyone already know about faith?” The reason for this is that faith is often mentioned and stressed in the Bible. Abraham lives by faith, the disciples are called to have faith, Paul fills pages of the New Testament talking about faith, and the author of Hebrews even gives a “one sentence” definition of faith. Therefore, at a quick glance, this topic may seem to be one of the least worrisome. However, upon closer observation, life in Christ’s Church demonstrates just the opposite. While it is generally observed that all believers are united in saying *that* faith is a central component to the Christian life, this unity is quickly dissolved when believers attempt to explain *what* faith is and *how* it is a central component to the Christian life. This, of course, is a genuine problem, as disunity regarding an understanding of faith creates confusion related to both doctrinal and practical matters in the

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<sup>1</sup> While there are a variety of ways that the term “faith” is used in modern Protestantism, both broadly and narrowly, this dissertation will specifically be addressing the confusion that exists regarding the nature of faith in a *narrow sense*, as it seeks to address the “saving” or “justifying” relationship that man has with God personally.

Church.

This reality is first evidenced *externally*. What this means is that when one evaluates how Christians talk, live, and interact with one another, such outward actions point to this confusion. This is particularly seen through relevant discussions regarding key doctrinal topics or ministry practices, such as the “law and gospel distinction,” justification, or baptism. Regarding the important “law and gospel distinction,” some believers hold to the position that the law always accuses, while others believe that it is the manifestation of God’s will. Furthermore, some believe that the law should always precede the gospel and others believe that the gospel should always precede the law. Regarding justification, some understand it as a gift, whereas some understand it as work of man, or as a response to a promise. Regarding baptism, some Christians understand it as a commitment they make, others as an act of passive reception, and still others as a promise to be trusted. Each distinct perspective coheres with a certain understanding of the nature of faith.

Furthermore, such *external* signs are not merely hypothetical possibilities. Instead, different understandings regarding the “nature of faith” have been seen to play a central role in modern theological debates. This can be seen in the recent “Law and Gospel Debate,” the “Joint Declaration on Justification,” as well as in current debates over baptism. In the “Law and Gospel Debate,” those who understood faith as a passive reception presented the law and gospel as propositional, whereas those who understood faith as a quality presented the law and gospel as the united grace of God. In the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” those who understood faith as assent looked for how man played a role in intellectually apprehending his justification, whereas those who understood faith as trust presented justification as the result of trust in the declared promise of God. In modern debates over baptism, those who understand

faith as a passive reception often present baptism as an acceptance of God's grace, others who understand faith as rational assent present baptism as a commitment to be made, and those who understand faith as a trust present baptism as an effectual promise by God which elicits trust. As seen in these modern debates, not only does each position *cohere* with a different understanding of the nature of faith,<sup>2</sup> but each understanding of faith also functions as *operative* to the discussion.<sup>3</sup> What this means is that depending on one's conception of faith, there will be certain theological and practical implications which necessarily follow or are effected. This serves to bring about a variety of distinct and different implications for both the practical and doctrinal life of Christ's Church.

Such varied reactions and inconsistencies at an *external* level, both practically and doctrinally, have led me to conclude that there are different frameworks for conceiving of the nature of faith. Each perspective strives to offer a satisfactory account for an understanding of faith that stands in coherence with a proper recognition of God's work, as well as man's response. However, often theologians want to emphasize one side or the other. Rather than try to rehabilitate one of the majority opinions, it seems appropriate to attempt to approach the question about faith with a different perspective altogether, a new framework, and a fresh start.

The validity for this project can also be seen *internally*. What this means is that when one

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<sup>2</sup> This dissertation uses "coherence" to describe the essential relationship one topic has with another. According to *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, coherence is defined as a "Suitable connection or dependence, proceeding from the natural relation of parts or things to each other, as in the parts of a discourse, or of a system." Thus, in saying that a proper understanding of faith stands in coherence with a certain understanding of doctrinal treatises or ministry practices is to say that one's understanding of faith has necessary connection with a certain understanding of doctrinal treatises or ministry practices.

<sup>3</sup> When this dissertation uses the word "operative," it refers to "accomplishing what is desired" or an "effective" action. See *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, s.v. In a theological setting, this dissertation is setting forth the assertion that certain understandings of "faith" are therefore "effective" in bringing about certain practical or doctrinal implications.

evaluates the inner-workings of the Christian faith, the fundamental premises and core doctrinal treatises, one should find a basis for how believers are to talk, live, and interact with one another. For Lutherans, one sees that the centrality of faith, *sola fide*, serves as a key touchstone and an essential core to the Lutheran tradition.<sup>4</sup> Although it is true that faith is primary for all believers, the recognition of its importance for Lutherans stems from the observation that there is something inherent for Lutherans in terms of talking and thinking about faith—faith is not only central for how issues are discussed,<sup>5</sup> but it is also seen as the article by which the Church stands or falls.<sup>6</sup> Thus, it is a grave problem because there is deep confusion that exists within the Lutheran Church regarding the nature of faith.

The basis for this claim comes directly from an examination of the Lutheran Confessions, as AC IV, “Concerning Justification,” states:

It is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ’s sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight, as St. Paul says in Romans 3[:21–26] and 4[:5].<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> While this dissertation will be uniquely talking about the Lutheran tradition, this project also has implicit and explicit consequences for the Protestant Church as a whole, as “To some degree, all Protestants derive their identity from Luther.” R. Scott Clark, “Iustitia Imputata Christi: Alien or Proper to Luther’s Doctrine of Justification?” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (2006): 271, accessed August 4, 2017, <https://cs1.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0001623722&site=eds-live>

<sup>5</sup> As an example of this, Oswald Bayer specifically engages with the theology of Martin Luther through the lens of faith, demonstrating how central “faith” is to the Lutheran position. Oswald Bayer, *Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Lutheran Quarterly Books. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Carl E. Braaten, *Justification: The Article by Which the Church Stands or Falls* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles P. Arand, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 38–40.

As the AC sets forth, it is through faith that one receives the forgiveness of sin and becomes righteous in the sight of God. It is not through one's work, one's merit, or one's satisfaction, but only through faith. Therefore, for the Lutheran Church, a proper understanding of the nature of faith is a vitally important topic and highly relevant.

It is also central to Lutheran theology that such faith is produced in a specific way—through the Holy Spirit's use of the law and the gospel, in conjunction with the practice of the preaching of the Word of God and administration of the sacraments. In other words, faith does not come about without means, but comes about in those who hear the promise of the gospel through the Spirit's work. This is the clear testimony of AC V:

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ's merit, when we so believe.<sup>8</sup>

A Lutheran understanding that the Word of God is the chief means of grace which brings about faith is further demonstrated in examining Ap IV. In seeking to show how the relationship between faith and the Word of God should be understood, the Ap asserts,

God cannot be dealt with and cannot be grasped in any other way than through the Word. Accordingly, justification takes place through the Word, just as St. Paul notes [Rom. 1:16]: the gospel "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith." Likewise [Rom. 10:17], "Faith comes from what is heard." At this point we could even take up the argument that faith justifies, because if justification takes place only through the Word and the Word is grasped only by faith, it follows that faith justifies.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, since God can only be dealt with through His Word, the Lutheran Confessions strive to emphasize that justifying faith is that which is elicited by the hearing of

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<sup>8</sup> AC V, 1–2; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Ap. IV, 67; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 131.

that Word: The gospel. This of course naturally follows the exhortation of the law:

The proclamation of repentance, which accuses us, terrifies consciences with genuine and serious terrors. In the midst of these, hearts must once again receive consolation. This happens when they believe the promise of Christ, namely, that on his account we have the forgiveness of sins. This faith, which arises and consoles in the midst of those fears, receives the forgiveness of sins, justifies us, and makes alive.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, justifying faith, in light of Lutheran theology, is understood as elicited by both the proclamation of the law and the gospel and is properly understood as a “trust.”

### **Formulating a Conception of Faith**

While this work acknowledges that definitions are necessary for categorization and daily operation, it also acknowledges that the meaning of a word is not exhausted by a definition. Instead, a definition is at most a good starting point for understanding a concept or a proposition involving the word being defined and by itself does not necessarily make things clearer. The disunity that exists regarding faith is not something that can be solved terminologically. For even though two people may use the word “faith” or agree on a certain definition, their understanding of faith may stand in sharp contrast with one another. As Ludwig Wittgenstein asserts, this becomes particularly noticeable when one compares the practice of two individuals.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, in regard to “faith,” even though all believers may use the same “word”—and think that they are all referring to the same thing—one finds that there are major differences and inconsistencies at both a practical and doctrinal level between individuals. This is of course a genuine problem and

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<sup>10</sup> Ap. IV, 62; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 130.

<sup>11</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 317. Wittgenstein theorized that the foundation for meaning starts not in definitions, but in *praxis*. His dilemma particularly arose in trying to access how it could be that two people could use the same word, but in two distinctly different ways. One would use a word simply, while the other would use a word in a deeper sense. This ultimately led Wittgenstein to conclude that the only way to truly understand what someone meant would be to look at their actions—it was their practice which gave words their meaning. Therefore, as it relates to this dissertation, one could find two different people speaking about the nature of faith, thinking that they are referring to the same thing, but having two completely different understandings, or more importantly, operating in two different ways.

demonstrates a great disunity and confusion within Christ's Church.

In order to get past the postulation of a "definition" of faith, this work will be an exercise in problem-solving. The general methodological implication has been explored by philosopher Karl Popper, who noted there are two different methodologies in philosophy. On the one hand, designations of terms or concepts may be considered, which may be formulated into words, which may be reduced by way of definitions to that of undefined concepts. On the other hand, ideas can be looked at as statements of propositions or theories, which may be formulated into assertions, which may be true and be reduced to that of primitive propositions.<sup>12</sup> While Popper outlines both of these possible methodologies, he concludes: "In matters of the intellect, the only things worth striving for are true theories, or theories which come near to the truth."<sup>13</sup> The reason for this understanding, Bryan Magee assesses, is that Popper

believes that habitual discussion of the meanings of words is not only boring but harmful. The notion that we must define our terms before we can have a useful discussion is, he holds, demonstrably incoherent, for every time one defines the term one has to introduce new terms in the definition (otherwise the definition is circular) and one is then required to define the new terms. So we can never get to the discussion at all, because we can never complete the necessary preliminaries.<sup>14</sup>

Popper concludes: "Most of the futile arguments on which we all waste time are largely due to the fact that we each have our own vague meanings for the words we use and assume that our opponents are using them in the same senses."<sup>15</sup>

At this point, some might ask: "How is it possible to have a discussion about faith if it is impossible to utilize a formal definition?" This is a fair question and properly acknowledges how

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<sup>12</sup> Karl Popper, *Unended Quest*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 19.

<sup>13</sup> Popper, *Unended Quest*, 18–19.

<sup>14</sup> Bryan Magee, *Philosophy and the Real World: An Introduction to Karl Popper* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985), 47–48.

<sup>15</sup> Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 5th ed., vol. 2, *Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 2: 16–17.

bound the Church is to definitions. While this work acknowledges that definitions are necessary for categorization and daily operation, setting forth a definition is not the point of this work. Instead, I intend to uniquely address the current problem that exists in the Lutheran Church regarding a proper understanding of “faith” by setting forward a conception of faith in ways consistent with various aspects of Lutheran theology and practice.<sup>16</sup> In an attempt to do so, it will be the purpose of this work to provide a new framework for conceiving of a proper understanding of faith which stands in coherence with other doctrinal treatises, as well as ministerial practices.<sup>17</sup> The philosophical reasoning for this interconnectivity is drawn from an understanding that the nature of faith is like the “web of belief” metaphor put forward by W. V. O. Quine.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, in setting forth this framework, I will also argue that what one does and what one believes should always be consistent and that there is an inherent connection between the two. In other words, what one does shapes what one believes and what one believes shapes one’s practice—or at least it should. If there is a breakdown, it is certainly worth investigating. Thus, in striving to set forward a proper framework for conceiving of faith, one’s conception of faith should correlate both with one’s doctrine and one’s practice.

### **Modern Understandings of Faith Operative in the Church**

In order to begin the process of setting forth a framework for a proper conception of faith

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<sup>16</sup> When this dissertation refers to a “proper” understanding of faith, it will be referring to an understanding of faith that is consistent with the teachings and practices of the Lutheran Church.

<sup>17</sup> Again, this dissertation uses “coherence” to describe the essential relationship one topic has with another. Thus, in saying that a proper understanding of faith stands in coherence with a certain understanding of doctrinal treatises or ministry practices is to say that one’s understanding of faith has necessary connection with a certain understanding of doctrinal treatises or ministry practices.

<sup>18</sup> W. V. Quine and J. S. Ullian, *The Web of Belief*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 1978).



amidst the current confusion, it is also important to recognize what conceptions of faith are already operative in modern discussions. This serves to validate that there is indeed a problem at hand. In evaluating what conceptions of faith are already operative in modern discussions, there are four that I believe can be readily seen.

*Rational Assent:* A comprehension of faith as an intellectual understanding which is both convinced and persuaded through increased knowledge and words of explanation. While I realize that the fourth article of the Ap. uses the word assent when defining justifying faith, the concept of assent presented in the BC is distinct from today’s modern understanding. In modern times, assent is understood as “An act of the understanding.”<sup>19</sup> However, for the Lutheran Reformers, this was not the case. As can be seen in the Latin text of the Ap., assent is used to expressly contrast against a form of “knowledge,” which was akin to the Roman understanding of faith. Instead, Melancthon demonstrates that “assent” is not to be understood as “intellectual understanding,” but parallels assent with the statement: “To desire and to receive the offered promise.”<sup>20</sup>

*Passive Reception:* A comprehension of faith as a non-action. Instead of there being any active nature to faith, it is that which is there to receive what God says and does. Man has no place to respond in any fashion. He just receives what God gives to Him. Such reception is a non-work—an inactivity.

*Quality:* A comprehension of faith as an inferred essence—an infused grace. This is

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<sup>19</sup> *Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, s.v.

<sup>20</sup> Ap. IV, 48; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 128. This reality is made clearer when examining Jonas’s German translation of the Latin text, which serves to provide a fuller context for the understanding of the Latin wording. In it, one finds that the German understanding of the Latin’s use of “assent” is actually “trust,” as it states: “It is the certainty or the certain trust in the heart, when, with my whole heart, I regard the promises of God as certain and true, through which there are offered me, without my merit, the forgiveness of sins, grace, and all salvation, through Christ the Mediator.” F. Bente, *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolic Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, (St. Louis, Concordia, 1921), 135.

something that God imparts and is part of the identity of the individual, regardless of any action or inaction on their part. What this means is that God's revelation does not play a role for faith, rather God's sovereignty does. Therefore, the revelation of God comes not to elicit faith but is received by those who already have faith, as ordained by God.

*Trust:* A comprehension of faith as trust in a promise. This is the elicited and active response to a promise made by one who is in the position to make such a promise and carry it out. The gospel is that promise of God which declares God's mercy and grace. In doing so, its express purpose is always to elicit a response of faith, a trust in that promise as its object.

Now, some might wonder if such diversity is actually demonstrable. This is certainly a fair question and constitutes a foundational piece of this project. Thus, in an attempt to address the problem that there is truly a confusion regarding the nature of faith, I will seek to demonstrate (1) that faith is operative for discussions within Christ's Church and (2) that multiple understandings of faith are operative in those discussions. This will be displayed by assessing both relevant theological and practical topics in the Church.

### Multiple Understandings of Faith Operative Theologically

In considering how there are multiple understandings of faith operative theologically, one highly relevant discussion within Lutheranism which demonstrates this is the distinction of law and gospel. Not only does the distinction of law and gospel directly correlate with one's understanding of faith, as it is principally the function of the Word of God as law and gospel to create faith in the heart of man,<sup>21</sup> but it is also a theological field which has seen much confusion. In fact, despite being such a relevant aspect of Lutheran theology, the distinction of law and

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<sup>21</sup> Ap. IV, 67; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 131.

gospel has been centrally debated amongst the Lutheran Church without resolution. This is particularly concerning as blatant confusion over the role and function of law and gospel has immediate and necessary implications for one's understanding of the nature of faith.

In looking to the early beginnings of the recent debates over the law and gospel distinction, a key illustration for this is the famous “Law and Gospel Debate” of the twentieth century between Karl Barth and Werner Elert. Both men argued for a certain view of law and gospel with no resolution. However, for those who looked in at the debate from the outside, it was their conviction that the disagreement was far more than terminological.<sup>22</sup> Herbert Richardson alludes to this reality in his introduction to Forde's work: *The Law Gospel Debate*. He writes: “The law-gospel question concerns the basic relationship between doctrine itself and the fact of being redeemed, i.e., between all human understanding and faith in God.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, this debate reflects much more than a disagreement regarding law and gospel—it represents multiple understandings of faith as operative within the theological discussion.

Although many years have passed from this early debate, disputes over the “law and gospel distinction” still have not been resolved over the past century. In fact, in many ways, the famous “Law and Gospel Debate” has only been repristinated with different names and faces. Therefore, this project will also assess current debates over the law and gospel distinction to demonstrate the ongoing correlation between such debates and confusion over one's understanding of the nature of faith. In doing so, this work hopes to illustrate by such relevant conversations that there are indeed multiple understandings of faith operative in the modern theological discussions over the distinction of law and gospel and that even the current debates over “law” and “gospel” serve

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<sup>22</sup> Gerhard O. Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate: An Interpretation of Its Historical Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1969), 170.

<sup>23</sup> Forde, *Law-Gospel Debate*, xiv.

to demonstrate this.

### Multiple Understandings of Faith Operative Practically

The reality that multiple understandings of faith are seen to be operative in the Church is also seen in the ministerial practices of the Church. Throughout this work I will specifically illustrate this by assessing multiple understandings of faith that exist in the practical realm of baptism, evangelism, sanctification, and confirmation. In each of these areas, my goal will be to compare and contrast various views of faith which are presented through such practices and demonstrate how common Church practices are enacted through different understandings of faith. While there are numerous Church practices which could be highlighted, these four represent ones which are both common and central to the ministry of the Church.

In baptism, those who have an understanding of faith as Rational Assent credit faith to the child baptized only if a knowledge of God can be comprehended intellectually. For those who have an understanding of faith as Passive Reception, baptism is talked about as the gift of God to the child. Additionally, there are still some with an understanding of faith as Trust who set forth an understanding of baptism as the means by which God makes an effectual promise to the baptized so that one is indeed adopted as God's child through faith in that promise. Each of these represent extremely different understandings of faith operative in a central ministry practice such as baptism.

Similarly, evangelism reflects multiple conceptions of faith. For some, evangelism amounts to "getting someone to agree with you." They believe that if the information was only presented persuasively enough, someone would believe. This understanding of evangelism correlates with a conception of faith as Rational Assent, where the goal is to persuade someone and get them to understand. There are others who think of evangelism as the giving of a gift. Often this looks like

explaining correct and historical propositions about who Jesus was and what he has done. There is no call to action regarding such propositions, but simply the recognition that one has now received the pronouncement of God. This correlates with an understanding of faith as Passive Reception, where one sets forth information which now governs life for the individual. Lastly, there are some who understand evangelism as “declaring good news to be trusted,” which correlates with a conception of faith as Trust in a promise. Again, each of these reflect multiple understandings of faith operative in a central Church practice.

When it comes to the topic of sanctification, questions often persist in the Church regarding how sanctification is connected to the life of the believer. Although all Christians can look at the Word of God and read about God’s call to holy living, some look at their good works as a way to make them right with the Lord, while others consider their works as a result of being made right with God. Again, each of these is a very distinct way of conceiving of sanctification and reflects multiple understandings of faith operative in Christ’s Church. For some, it is Trust in God’s promise that His Spirit is going to work through them. For others, it is a Rational Assent to all of the things that are required in the Christian life and the personal commitment to do them. Therefore, even though those in the Church may agree with the platitude that sanctification entails “living by faith,” there are many interpretations of what “faith” is.

Lastly, in considering confirmation, some view confirmation as a rite of passage, where the person who has completed the correct amount of homework assignments makes a commitment of faith based on what they “understand,” correlating to a conception of faith as Rational Assent. Others in the Church view confirmation as an opportunity for profession of faith and a pointing back to the faith of one’s baptism. For some, this understanding is associated with a conception of faith as Passive Reception as they look back to their baptism as a time when they received the

grace of God as a gift and their confirmation as an acknowledgement of that. For others, this understanding is associated with a conception of faith as a Trust, as they look back to their baptism as a time when God made a promise to them and their confirmation as an affirmation of trust in the promise of God. Thus, even in confirmation, there can be seen to be multiple understandings of faith operative in such a common practice of the Church.

### Multiple Understandings of Faith Operative Are Incongruent

In light of the modern confusion both theologically and practically, two truths arise: (1) faith matters to relevant discussions within Christ's Church and (2) multiple understandings of faith are operative in these discussions. While some may be willing to admit this, the problem remains in the fact that some believers think that they still talking about the same thing from a *different angle*. However, in addressing this problem, it becomes apparent that believers are not talking about the same thing, but different things altogether. For instance, a view of faith as Rational Assent is diametrically opposed to a view of faith as Passive Reception or Quality. One view conceives of faith as the work and activity of man (*synergism*) while the other conceives of faith as the sole work of God and man's inactivity (*monergism*). Furthermore, these opposed understandings lead to radically different perceptions of Church practice and theology. Practically, those who understand faith as Rational Assent practice evangelism as "getting someone to agree with you," taking an apologetic approach in their practice and using reason and logic to try and convince someone else of their perspective; whereas those who view faith as Trust in a promise practice evangelism as the declaration of good news to be trusted and believe that salvation does not result from increased explanation.<sup>24</sup> Theologically, those who understand

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<sup>24</sup> In his word, Forde emphasizes that salvation does occur through added knowledge or words of explanation, but through the proclamation of the gospel. Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress,

faith as Passive Reception perceive the gospel as propositional information which explains the good news of Jesus; whereas those who understand faith as Trust in a promise perceive the gospel to be a declared commitment that God has made to each individual.<sup>25</sup> Again, these different practical and theological perceptions stem from distinct understandings of the nature of faith.

### **Addressing the Problem**

In order to address this confusion regarding the nature of faith, the proposed dissertation will be an exercise in problem-solving. As noted already, the problem at hand is that there is grave confusion in the Church regarding the nature of faith and there are various theological and practical problems associated with such understandings. Consequently, when one holds to an understanding of faith as Rational Assent, Passive Reception, or Quality, relevant doctrinal and practical matters become incoherent and inconsistent with the teachings and practices of the Lutheran Church. This dissertation will attempt to address these conceptions of faith and their implications by means of an inductive approach, rather than trying to formulate a definition for the nature of faith and disperse it into a variety of different fields. Of course definitions matter, but once again, the purpose of this work is to solve a problem, not just to set forth a definition. Therefore, in order to solve this problem, this dissertation will provide a constructive systematic framework which gives an account of faith as Trust in a Promise, utilizing a theology of the Word as an effectual promise and effectual act, an understanding of justification as God's

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1990).. An illustration of this is also given by Willimon of the great evangelists of the past, specifically comparing Charles Finney and Jonathan Edwards. On the one hand, Charles Finney is both practical and rational in his evangelism. On the other hand, Jonathan Edwards looks to the Great Revival as a miracle. William H. Willimon, *The Intrusive Word: Preaching to the Unbaptized*, Reprint, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation*.

declaration of man being made right with Himself, and a pneumatology which acknowledges the Spirit's role to elicit faith by killing and making alive in those who hear the gospel. Through a critical assessment of selected theological and practical topics, this dissertation will illustrate how various understandings of faith are operative in the Church and how a conception of faith as Trust in a Promise is operative and coherent in ways consistent with the teachings and practices of the Lutheran Church. This work will proceed in three parts.

First, I will illustrate how faith is operative to both doctrinal and practical discussions in Christ's Church and that as a concept the nature of faith is confused. Doctrinally, it will seek to demonstrate this by examining the famous "Law and Gospel Debate" to evaluate the different understandings of faith operative. Practically, it will seek to demonstrate this by examining the practices of baptism, evangelism, sanctification, and confirmation in the Lutheran Church. Secondly, I will provide a constructive systematic framework in which to conceive of faith as "trust," namely, that which utilizes an understanding of justification as God's declaration of man being made right with Himself, a theology of the Word as an effectual promise and effectual act, and a pneumatology which acknowledges the Spirit's role to create faith by killing and making alive in those who hear the gospel. Thirdly, I will seek to demonstrate the natural outworking and application of a proper conception of faith for Christ's Church, including implications regarding the relevant doctrinal and practical matters in the Church which were discussed earlier—the law and gospel distinction, baptism, evangelism, sanctification, and confirmation.



## CHAPTER TWO

### MULTIPLE UNDERSTANDINGS OF FAITH ARE OPERATIVE

#### Introduction

What is saving faith? Christians are confused when they answer this question and they show themselves confused about saving faith in the ways they teach and live. They explain it one way, but often do something that reflects a different understanding. Several theological topics could demonstrate this, but the distinction of law and gospel clearly and succinctly illustrates this reality. The reason for this stems from the recognition that it is the function of the Word of God (i.e. Law and Gospel) to create faith in the heart of man.<sup>1</sup> The distinction of law and gospel is also a relevant aspect of Lutheran theology which has been centrally debated, making it relatively easy to quickly show areas of confusion.

There are also multiple understandings of faith seen to be operative in the *ministry practices* of the Lutheran Church. This is not a hypothetical assertion, but can be clearly seen through assessing baptism, evangelism, sanctification, and confirmation in Lutheran congregations. In these practices faith is either presented as a Rational Assent, Passive Reception, a Quality, or a Trust.

The work of showing confusions concerning faith could be a full project in and of itself. However, that is not the intent of this chapter. Instead, this chapter briefly surveys understandings of faith which are operative in both the doctrinal formulations and ministry practices of the Church to demonstrate that there are multiple understandings of faith operative

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<sup>1</sup> Ap. IV, 67; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 131.

amongst believers.

### **A Theological Illustration: The Law Gospel Debate**

#### **Karl Barth's Understanding of Faith as Quality**

In first considering the illustration of the “Law and Gospel Debate,” one should take seriously the statements of Karl Barth, who intentionally put Lutheranism in his crosshairs and was ready for a fight. Barth attacked the core law and gospel distinction for Lutheran theologians in two primary ways: (1) He asserted that the gospel really comes before the law and (2) that the gospel and law are both to be understood as the united presentation of God’s grace. While some may look at Barth’s statements as simple propositions regarding law and gospel, there is certainly more to them than first meets the eye. Instead of being statements simply concerning a distinction, the assertions Barth makes illustrates a certain presupposition about what faith is and how it connects with the Christian life.

#### **Gospel First, Law Second**

In his recounting of the “Law and Gospel Debate,” Gerhard Forde states: “What startled the Lutheran theologians was Barth’s assertion that the traditional order should be reversed; instead of going from law to gospel, one must proceed from gospel to law.”<sup>2</sup> The basis for this understanding for Barth is rooted in the fact that he only sees the function of the law according to its third use—as a guide for the believer. The law need not function for the purpose of terrifying the conscience of the believer because he or she has already been predestined by God to eternal life. Instead, the law comes to teach believers how to live as chosen children of God.

In allowing Barth to speak for himself, he states: “The gospel is not the law, just as the law

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<sup>2</sup> Forde, *Law-Gospel Debate*, 137.

is not the gospel, but because the law is in the gospel, comes from the gospel, and points to the gospel, we must first of all know the gospel in order to know about the law and not vice versa.”<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Barth claims that if the gospel does not come before the law, the law is only misunderstood and not truly comprehended at all.<sup>4</sup>

For Barth, speaking of the gospel first meant speaking about divine election. As a Reformed theologian, Barth believed that there were those who God had predestined before the beginning of time. This was evidence of God’s mercy and grace for the chosen. He writes:

The truth which must now occupy us, the truth of the doctrine of predestination, is first and last and in all circumstances the sum of the Gospel, no matter how it may be understood in detail, no matter what apparently contradictory aspects or moments it may present to us. It is itself evangel: glad tidings; news which uplifts and comforts and sustains.<sup>5</sup>

To further emphasize this point, Barth also states in the same volume: “The election of grace is the whole of the Gospel, the Gospel *in nuce*. It is the very essence of all good news.”<sup>6</sup> Good news for some, that is, if you were among the elect. The reason for this qualifier is that for Barth, the emphasis of the gospel was the sovereignty of God. There was no consideration of the response of man to the good news proclaimed. Barth writes: “In electing, God decides according to His good-pleasure, which as such is holy and righteous. And because He who elects is constant and omnipotent and eternal, the good-pleasure by which He decides, and the decision itself, are

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<sup>3</sup> Karl Barth and Will Herberg, *Community, State, and Church*, trans. A. M. Hall and G. Ronald Howe (Garden City: Doubleday, 1960), 72

<sup>4</sup> Forde, *Law-Gospel Debate*, 172.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Barth, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 2: 12.

<sup>6</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God*, 2: 13–14.

independent of all other decisions, of all creaturely decisions.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, in a Divine dice role, God has chosen certain people to be His.<sup>8</sup>

For Barth, this concept of the gospel is that which must be spoken of first.<sup>9</sup> In Barth’s mind, before one can begin to speak about what God demands, one must speak of the one from whom God makes such demands. In regard to Barth’s reasoning, John Hesselink points out that one should not assume that this perspective is void of Scriptural support. Rather, “Barth bases this approach on passages like Galatians 3:17 where the apostle Paul points out that the law followed the promise. Moreover, the law is fulfilled in the promise.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, it would be unfair to criticize Barth of being a “radical” or an “unbiblical” theologian. Rather, his understanding of law and gospel was congruent with a certain theological framework and understanding of man’s relationship with God.

Nevertheless, there is theological baggage that comes with this perspective and it is appropriate to observe it for what it is. Due to Barth’s particular understanding of the gospel first through divine election, which particularly emphasizes the sovereignty of God, McCormack observes that it is impossible for Barth to look back on a date in his past and say: “On that date I was justified.”<sup>11</sup> Instead, the gospel has not been presented to people in the form of a promise

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<sup>7</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God*, 2: 19.

<sup>8</sup> While Barth in some ways may sound very Lutheran, as Lutherans also emphasize the election of God, the difference is that for Lutherans, election is seen through the lens of God’s promised Word. This stems from the recognition that “if a person wishes to think or speak about the election and *praedestinatio* (or preordination) of God’s children to eternal life correctly and profitably, one should as a matter of course refrain from speculation over the naked, secret, hidden, inscrutable foreknowledge of God.” SD XI, 13; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 643.

<sup>9</sup> See Barth, *Community, State, and Church*, 71.

<sup>10</sup> John Hesselink, “Law and Gospel or Gospel and Law? - Karl Barth, Martin Luther, and John Calvin,” *Reformation & Revival Journal* 14, no. 1 (2005): 141.

<sup>11</sup> See CD IV/1:583; Bruce L. McCormack, ed., *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges* (Edinburgh: Baker Academic, 2006), 194.

unto salvation, but as a preordained election to God's grace.

### **Gospel and Law as the United Presentation of God's Grace**

In his debate over law and gospel, Barth's second proposition is that law and gospel are both the united revelation of God and that this revelation functions to instruct the believer in how to live.<sup>12</sup> In his work, "Gospel and Law," Barth writes: "The word of God, when it is addressed to us and when we are allowed to hear it, demonstrates its unity and that it is always grace; i.e., it is free, non-obligatory, undeserved divine goodness, mercy, and condescension."<sup>13</sup> This principally comes from the understanding "that the very fact that God speaks to us is itself grace, regardless of what God says."<sup>14</sup> In an attempt to emphasize this, it appears that Barth finds himself in some sticky situations. On the one hand, he will say things like, "We would contradict the whole of Holy Scripture if we were unwilling to distinguish between the two," while on the other hand he will say things like, "We would also contradict the whole of Holy Scripture if we wished to separate the two."<sup>15</sup> In seeking to describe this tension in the theology of Barth, Timothy Scheuers writes: "While law and gospel are distinct from one another, they are not two separate and self-contained entities, existing independently from each other.<sup>16</sup> Instead, they truly are to be seen together as the united grace of God.

For Barth, the reason for this is that he understands the law as something which is

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<sup>12</sup> Forde, *Law-Gospel Debate*, 152.

<sup>13</sup> Barth, *Community, State, and Church*, 72.

<sup>14</sup> Forde, *Law-Gospel Debate*, 150.

<sup>15</sup> Barth, *Community, State, and Church*, 76–77.

<sup>16</sup> Timothy Scheuers, "Law and Gospel in the Theologies of Wolfhart Pannenberg and Karl Barth: A Comparative Study," *Mid America Journal of Theology* 26, (2015): 114, accessed April 12, 2017, <https://csl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLAn3850364&site=eds-live>.

completely enclosed in the gospel. It is not a second thing alongside and beyond the gospel. It is not a foreign element which precedes or only follows it. Instead, insofar as the gospel serves to make a claim addressed to those who believe, its form is the law. Thus, Barth argues that it cannot be heard unless its claim is obeyed.<sup>17</sup> Put more explicitly:

Ruling grace is commanding grace. The Gospel itself has the form and fashion of the Law. The one Word of God is both Gospel *and* Law. It is not Law by itself and independent of the Gospel. But it is also not Gospel without Law. In its content, it is Gospel; in its form and fashion, it is Law. It is first Gospel and then Law. It is the Gospel which contains and encloses the Law as the Ark of the Covenant the tables of Sinai. But it is both Gospel *and* Law. The one Word of God which is the revelation and work of His grace is also Law.<sup>18</sup>

In thinking about what this actually looks like in its application, “Barth rejects any separation of the grace of election from the divine call to human obedience.”<sup>19</sup> In McCormack’s observation, what this means for Barth is that justification and sanctification are just “two different aspects of the one saving event.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, it is impossible to speak of one of them without the other. They are conjoined into one.

## Conclusion

In looking in at this debate from the outside, it was the conclusion from the onlookers that the reason the debate continued the way it did was largely due to the fact that the debate was far more than terminological.<sup>21</sup> Instead of being a debate about law and gospel, it appears that there were other presuppositions which guided the course of discussion. One of those foundational

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<sup>17</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God, Part 2*, 557.

<sup>18</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God, Part 2*, 511.

<sup>19</sup> Timothy Scheuers, “Law and Gospel in the Theologies of Wolfhart Pannenberg and Karl Barth: A Comparative Study,” *Mid America Journal of Theology* 26, (2015): 116, accessed April 12, 2017, <https://cs1.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLAn3850364&site=eds-live>.

<sup>20</sup> See KD IV/2:569; CD IV/2:503; McCormack, *Justification in Perspective*, 179.

<sup>21</sup> Forde, *Law-Gospel Debate*, 170.

aspects which was operative to the discussion was the nature of faith. Thus, as one looks beyond Barth's view of law and gospel to why he defines them the way he does, one can get a glimpse of how his understanding parallels a certain perspective regarding the nature of faith. This view of faith is not neutral, but rather influences Barth's doctrine and serves as a necessitating force regarding his understanding of what the gospel or law really was.

In assessing Barth's affirmations of the presentation of the gospel first prior to the law, as well as his discussion about the law and gospel both serving as the united grace of God, Barth sets forth an understanding of faith as a "quality" of the believer. It is this faith as "quality" which receives both the law and the gospel as the revelation of God for the instruction of His elect. For Barth, what this means is that God's revelation does not play a binding role in the salvation of souls, rather God's sovereignty does. Furthermore, Barth's belief in a unity of "gospel" and "law" or even an inversion of gospel first and law second all cohere with a mindset that God already knows those who are His and that faith in a promise is not principally viewed as the conduit to salvation—God's sovereignty is. In other words, the presentation of the gospel comes not to elicit faith but is received by those who already "have faith."<sup>22</sup> Thus, as already saved and elect, man is in a place to receive both the law and gospel as the instruction of God rather than as an effectual or performative act. This kind of thinking is what then allows Barth to make comments like: "Faith is not mine but God's."<sup>23</sup>

### Werner Elert's Understanding of Faith as Passive Reception

In response to Barth's radical defamation of the classic Lutheran law and gospel

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<sup>22</sup> "He sees faith more as a manifestation or evidence of a salvation already completed on the cross of Calvary." Donald G. Bloesch, *Jesus Is Victor!: Karl Barth's Doctrine of Salvation* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 17.

<sup>23</sup> Barth, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 47.

distinction, Werner Elert responds to Barth in his work, *Law and Gospel*. In it, Werner asserts that the Lutheran position on the matter is both correct and unswerving. As he describes it, the law is that which comes first and terrorizes the conscience. The gospel then comes and proclaims the good news of God to the contrite. Both of these “Words of God” must be kept separated without any possible overlap.<sup>24</sup> In a similar fashion to Barth, while this perspective by Elert may appear to be trite, there is certainly more to it than first meets the eye. Instead of a simple disagreement with Barth about a distinction, the points Elert makes serve to illustrate a certain presupposition about what faith is and how it connects with the Christian life.

### **The Law Always Accuses**

The first assertion that Werner Elert makes is that the law always accuses. It does not serve to relay the grace of God. In fact, it is just the opposite. The law is the convicting verdict of a Holy God to an unholy people. It demands holiness but finds none. Therefore, when faced with God’s standard, man cannot help but stand accused.

This is not a new recognition, says Elert, but has been a core understanding of the Church going back not only to the reformation, but to the writings of the apostles and even to the beginning of time. “*Lex semper accusat*, says Melancthon in the *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*: the law always accuses. With these words he expresses in the most concise formula not only Luther’s view, but also Paul’s.”<sup>25</sup> In looking even earlier than these, Elert states: “The idea that God speaks only grace to man is a fundamental error. What God said to men at the beginning of world history as he expelled them from the garden of their origin was not grace in

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<sup>24</sup> Werner Elert, *Law and Gospel*, ed. Franklin Sherman, trans. Edward H. Schroeder (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Elert, *Law and Gospel*, 11.



the mind of the Old Testament narrator, but punishment!”<sup>26</sup> Thus, to write against the function of the law as accusatory or to assert that an accusatory function is a “misunderstood” or “corrupt” concept is foreign to Elert. To deny this function of the law is to not only take issue with the foundations of Lutheranism, but also with the inspired writings of the apostles and prophets.

Consequently, Elert states: “With the statement that God speaks only grace, the divine law is rendered impotent.”<sup>27</sup> It is stripped of its very essence. No longer is it able to function as a curb for society to live moral and good lives. No longer is it able to be a mirror which reveals to men their need for a Savior and which terrifies the conscience. Instead, the very nature of the law is done away with. It has been redefined as “grace” instead of “condemnation.” Consequently, any display of God’s holiness or moral standard present in Scripture is overlooked.

In an attempt to argue for a reconsideration of the true nature of the law, Elert closes his discussion by arguing that one need only look so far as the person and ministry of Jesus:

The law always accuses. Christ exempted no one from this verdict. Proof of this can be seen in his call, directed to everyone, for repentance from the heart (Mark 1:15 in conjunction with Luke 13:3–5). The “Our Father,” designed for all to pray, presupposes also that all are guilty (Matt. 6:12). Therefore also in the interpretation which the law receives from Christ it always exposes man’s sin. There is no situation imaginable, so long as the law reigns over us, where it would not exercise this accusatory function.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, in light of Christ’s ministry and his own presuppositions, it is evident for Elert that there is something set apart and unique from the gospel. This “word” is that which reveals God’s standard for living, condemns all people who fail to meet that standard, and puts them at odds with the Moral Law Giver. Elert calls this the “law of God.” There is nothing gracious about it. It is “bad news” for man who can never abide by its requirements.

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<sup>26</sup> Elert, *Law and Gospel*, 5–6.

<sup>27</sup> Elert, *Law and Gospel*, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Elert, *Law and Gospel*, 13.

## **The Good News of the Gospel Must Be Applied to the Terrified Heart**

In stark contrast to this understanding of the law is Elert's understanding of the gospel. Instead of a standard set forth by God which terrifies the sinner and brings condemnation, the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ to be received. Evidence of this understanding can be seen in Elert's suggested definition of the gospel in *Law and Gospel*. He writes:

One might define the gospel in Paul's sense the way Gogarten did (taking his cue from Rom. 4:25) in his proposal at the Faith and Order Conference in Lausanne in 1927; the gospel, he said, is "the message of Jesus Christ who was delivered up for our sins and raised for our justification."<sup>29</sup>

While this definition provides a true explanation of what happened as an historical event, it exists as a very general message. One is not personally forgiven or declared to be righteous in God's eyes. Instead, one is left hoping to be included in the plural "our."

If this was not expositional enough, immediately following this statement Elert attempts to describe his use of the definition, stating:

This formulation at least has the merit of properly expressing three things about the manifestation of God's will proclaimed in the gospel. First of all, like the law, it too is God speaking, it is a "word" of God; but this Word, in contrast to the law, consists in a person, namely, the person of Christ. Secondly, it is not only the speaking Christ who is the content of the gospel, but also the dying and resurrected Christ; that is, that which happened to him. And thirdly, the reason this proclamation is labeled an "evangel," i.e., something salutary, is to be found in the words "for our sins" and "for our justification."<sup>30</sup>

For Elert, this is the core of the gospel: It is a message about the person of Christ—His ministry, death and resurrection. It is a message which proclaims forgiveness "for our sins" and "for our justification." Similar to the expressed standard presented in the law, the gospel is a presentation in like kind—an expressed statement. One is bad news and the other is good news. While subtle,

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<sup>29</sup> Elert, *Law and Gospel*, 16.

<sup>30</sup> Elert, *Law and Gospel*, 16–17.

this understanding set forth by Elert is that which conceives of the “gospel” as propositional. It is not forgiveness “for you.” It is not “your justification.” Instead, it is a vague message of good news about what Jesus has done. Again, one is left simply hoping to be included in the “our.”

While some may be tempted to give Elert a free pass, he continually emphasizes the propositional nature of the gospel. He later writes: “Of course this definition is only an abbreviation, but Paul himself on occasion expressed it in even shorter formula: “the word of the cross” (1 Cor. 1:18).”<sup>31</sup> Thus, according to Elert, the gospel is that message about the cross. What Jesus did for the world—paying the price for their sin and exchanging His righteousness for the sins of all people. However, this again demonstrates a propositional understanding of the gospel. There is no personal declaration, but only a description of what Jesus did. It is a “message” and not a personal promise.

## **Conclusion**

In looking in at this debate from the outside, it was the conclusion from the onlookers that the reason the debate continued the way it did was largely due to the fact that the debate was far more than terminological.<sup>32</sup> Instead of being a debate about law and gospel, it appears that there were other presuppositions which guided the course of discussion. One of those foundational aspects which was operative to the discussion was the nature of faith. Thus, as one looks beyond Elert’s view of law and gospel to why he defines them the way he does, one can get a glimpse of how his understanding parallels a certain perspective regarding the nature of faith. This view of faith is not neutral, but rather influences Elert’s doctrine and serves as a necessitating force regarding his understanding of what the gospel or law really is.

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<sup>31</sup> Elert, *Law and Gospel*, 17.

<sup>32</sup> Forde, *Law-Gospel Debate*, 170.

In assessing the understanding of the nature of faith which coheres with this understanding of law and gospel as ‘propositional’ in nature, it seems to fit with a concept of faith as Passive Reception. Instead of there being any active nature to faith, it is that which is there to receive what God says, whether the good or the bad. Since the law is the holy will of God, man has no place to argue with it or respond in any fashion. He must just receive it as the way things are. Likewise, with the gospel understood as the message of the “gift of God,” it is again news which is to be received. Such reception is a non-work—an inactivity. Man simply accepts what God says about him.

#### Modern Debates over the Third Use of the Law

Although many years have passed from this early debate, debates over the “law and gospel distinction” still have not been resolved over the past century. As an example of this, there are many Lutherans in the current debate who would associate themselves with Werner Elert’s position, flatly denying the third use of the law (i.e. “Law-Gospel Reductionists” or “The Valparaiso Theologians”).<sup>33</sup> In their understanding,

Elert was guided by the insight that “the law always accuses” as Melancthon declared in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession. For Elert there was no way to tame this accusing voice of the law or to prevent it from speaking a verdict of guilty over us. If the law really is God’s law, God never assumes the attitude of a human legislator merely waiting to see whether or how man will fulfill it. Rather, God is always simultaneously the judge who renders a verdict and, without making any exceptions, passes sentence. No amount of thoughtful reflection can eliminate this accusatory function from the law.<sup>34</sup>

As a result of this conviction that the law “only accuses,” no allowance is made for the law to serve didactically for the believer. Consequently, Christian instruction must be inferred from a

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<sup>33</sup> Scott Murray, “The Third Use of the Law in American Lutheranism 1940 to the Present” (PhD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998), accessed April 12, 2017, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

<sup>34</sup> Murray, “Third Use of the Law,” 33.

different source other than the law, normatively assimilated into the role and function of the gospel. When this takes place, the gospel ends up becoming a “law.” Thus, in effect, the very essence of the gospel alters and changes. Instead of the gospel being conceived of as “promise” which elicits faith, it is comingled with the role and function of the law (i.e. that it functions to instruct the believer) and is conceived of as a “proposition” or an “instruction.” Ultimately, such an understanding of the gospel does not cohere with an understanding of faith as Trust but rather with one of Passive Reception or Rational Assent.

On the other side of the modern debate, there are also some, like Scott Murray, who are quick to assert that Elert’s rejection of the third use of the law is not reflective or representative of all Lutheranism. Instead, Murray’s assessment is that “Elert set up a false alternative; either the law accuses or it is only didactic.”<sup>35</sup> Murray’s train of thinking is seen to be parallel with Thielicke or Althaus, recognizing that it is possible to have a law which curbs society, a law which reveals sin, and a law which instructs believers in how to live.<sup>36</sup> This does not necessarily mean that it is always called “the law” in a proper sense, as some refer to the law of God as “commands.”<sup>37</sup> However, it is clearly differentiated from the gospel and is sometimes even put in a class of its own. Therefore, in contrast with Lutherans who would take sides with Elert, there is the need to keep the gospel from incorporating the role and function of the law or from becoming a proposition. Furthermore, this understanding is one which tries to preserve the essence of the gospel, rather than to comingle its role or function. Ultimately, this allows for the gospel to be understood purely as a promise from God to be believed, without any strings attached. This kind

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<sup>35</sup> Murray, “Third Use of the Law,” 36.

<sup>36</sup> Murray, “Third Use of the Law,” 32.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Althaus “promoted the discussion of the third use of the law by distinguishing between command and law.” Murray, “Third Use of the Law,” 37.

of conception of the gospel is what then allows faith to be conceived of as a Trust rather than Rational Assent or Passive Reception.

These two distinct positions are often realized when one is faced with the question: “How are ethics derived?” While it is generally observed that some level of morality can be seen in every person, the question of origination remains. In his dissertation, Hans Tiefel asserts that there are some, like Elert, who argue that it is the gospel itself that brings about such ethics and morality. On the other hand, there are others, like Murray, who argue that there are more ethical human beings in the world than Christians, so such behavior must be derived from the law. In evaluating this anthropological issue, Tiefel concludes:

Norms for the structures of this life, in contrast, are derived from the natural law and orders of creation as perceived by reason. Moral knowledge for life within the orders is already present before the saving gospel and is not affected normatively by salvation. The natural man knows well enough what he is to do within the world; the gospel is not meant for that.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to Tiefel’s extensive work on the topic, Joel Biermann<sup>39</sup> and Jordan Cooper<sup>40</sup> have also recently engaged at length in the modern discussion concerning the role and function of the law in order to defend an understanding of the third use of the law as it relates to ethics. This engagement primarily stems from the concern that if the law is only viewed as wrathful, then the ability to speak about holy and righteous living is near impossible, unless one derives such understanding from the gospel. Consequently, as mentioned beforehand, if one is forced to look to the gospel to have an instructive role, the result is a devaluing of one’s understanding of

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<sup>38</sup> Hans Tiefel, “The Ethics of Gospel and Law: Aspects of the Barth-Luther Debate” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1968), 246, accessed April 12, 2017, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

<sup>39</sup> Joel D. Biermann, *A Case for Character: Towards a Lutheran Virtue Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).

<sup>40</sup> Jordan Cooper, *Hands of Faith: A Historical and Theological Study of the Two Kinds of Righteousness in Lutheran Thought* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2016).

the gospel as the promise of God which brings about faith. In evaluating the current discussion surrounding the third use of the law, this is exactly Murray's conclusion:

When the third use of the law is denied, gospel is turned into law. The gospel becomes the ethical regulating principle in the life of the Christian. Robert Schultz argued that murder is sin not because it infringes on the fifth commandment, but because it contradicts the gospel. The law no longer has any power to condemn, but rather the gospel itself has taken over the condemnatory function of the law.<sup>41</sup>

#### Modern Discussion Over the Gospel As Promise

In addition to modern debates over the use and function of the law, different understandings of faith can also be seen through recent arguments over the role and function of the gospel. Recently, there has been a theological push for an understanding of the gospel as a “promise” which serves to elicit faith in the lives of those who hear it. The most relevant discussion along these lines has come through the works of Ronald Thiemann, Gerhard Forde, Jukka Kääriäinen and Oswald Bayer, as each of them conceive of the “gospel” as a promise which elicits faith.

In his work, *Theology and Revelation*, Thiemann sets the stage by setting forth the language of “promise” aside as its own category, recognizing the need for recapturing its prominence, as “a sense of revelation-weariness has settled over the discipline and most theologians have happily moved to other topics of inquiry.”<sup>42</sup> Forde further endeavors to demonstrate the importance and the distinction of “promise,” particularly in his works *Theology is for Proclamation*, *Where God Meets Man*, and *Justification by Faith*, referring to it as

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<sup>41</sup> Scott Murray, “Law and Gospel and the Doctrine of God: Missouri in the 1960s and 1970s,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (2001): 148, accessed April 12, 2017, <https://cs1.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001410123&site=eds-live>.

<sup>42</sup> Ronald F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 1.

“proclamation” and as that which systematic theology should advocate, foster, and drive towards. Forde writes,

Systematic theology, whatever else it might be for, has to be for proclamation ... I contend here that systematic theology, while not itself to be confused with proclamation, should be the kind of thinking that advocates, fosters, and drives to proper proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ; it should be a systematic reflection that promotes the speaking of the promise.<sup>43</sup>

According to Forde, understanding “proclamation” in its proper sense means understanding that it goes forth in two manifold ways: some promises are made through the speaking of the Word, and some are made through the particular enactment of that Word. In describing this dialectic, he writes,

A sacrament is an action in which the Word of God does something to us through the earthly sign. It is an action in which God gets through to us in a concrete way. In a sense, one can say that the proclamation of the divine promise through the Word is general; it is spoken to everyone in general and no one in particular. But a sacrament is particular. It has your name on it. Your body is washed with water; the hand is placed on your head; the bread is placed on your lips and the wine poured into your mouth. The sacraments are God’s ways of saying: “Here, the promise is for you.”<sup>44</sup>

Oswald Bayer follows naturally on the foundation laid by Thiemann and Forde, concluding that the gospel is an effectual promise. What this means for Bayer is that the gospel actually does something. It makes a commitment and then consequently elicits a response to that commitment. Bayer writes: “What do I do when I say: ‘I promise you...’? What happens when this is said or heard? I enter into an obligation.”<sup>45</sup> Such an obligation is not just spoken into thin air but is taken as an object by the one who it is made to, the one who responds by trusting in what has been

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<sup>43</sup> Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation*, vii.

<sup>44</sup> Gerhard O. Forde, *Where God Meets Man: Luther's Down-to-earth Approach to the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 72.

<sup>45</sup> Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, trans. Jeffrey G. Silcock and Mark C. Mattes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 127.



committed.

Evidence of Bayer's understanding is also seen in his reflection back on his Lutheran heritage: "Luther came to understand the gospel as a performative speech act, or as an "effective word," as he called it."<sup>46</sup> This language is particularly helpful in capturing the nature and essence of what the gospel is and what it does: that it does something to those who hear it, that it brings about an altered reality.

Along the same lines, Jukka Kääriäinen in his recent dissertation work, "*Missio* shaped by *Promissio*," strives to safeguard the idea of the gospel as promise.<sup>47</sup> For Kääriäinen, the reason for this effort stems from the realization that it is the very promise of God which is essential for the mission of God.<sup>48</sup> The foundation for this is the belief that in and of itself the gospel is intentional to accomplish something: the eliciting of faith. Kääriäinen writes:

Within an overarching "economy of salvation," God is on a mission to reconstitute the divine / human relation tarnished by human sin. God promises to do so through God's performative, dual Word of law and Gospel promise. This duplex *Missio Dei* unfolds as follows: while the law's theological use convicts of sin and its civil use orders and preserves creation, its' overall thrust and aim is to necessitate Christ and the Gospel promise. The Gospel promises and offers mercy and, in doing so, always aims at eliciting a response of faith. Therefore, both the Gospel itself and God's mission have a promissory core which aims at faith (trust).<sup>49</sup>

Like the other modern debates, this understanding of the gospel also infers a certain understanding of faith and how it comes about—it is elicited trust in the gospel promise. For these men, setting forth the gospel as a promise necessitates that there is something that takes hold of that promise, which is faith. Faith is that which is active and trusting in the commitment

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<sup>46</sup> Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, 129.

<sup>47</sup> Jukka Kääriäinen, "Missio Shaped by Promissio: Lutheran Missiology Confronts the Challenge of Religious Pluralism" (PhD diss., Fordham University, 2010), 310, accessed April 12, 2017, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

<sup>48</sup> Kääriäinen, "Missio Shaped by Promissio," 300.

<sup>49</sup> Kääriäinen, "Missio Shaped by Promissio," 302.

that has been made.

### Conclusionary Remarks

While extremely multi-faceted, these current debates regarding law and gospel serve to illustrate that there are multiple understandings of faith operative. Some are holding to a conception of faith as Rational Assent, a Passive Reception, a Quality, or as a Trust. Consequently, since all three of these perspectives of “faith” vary widely, people in the Church end up talking over one another in their theological discussions (e.g. such as is the case with the law and gospel distinction), because there are fundamentally different understandings concerning faith.

### **Practical Illustrations: Ministry Practices in the Church**

Just as there are different understandings of faith seen to be operative in the theological discussions of the Church, multiple understandings of faith are also seen to be evident in the *ministerial practices* of the Church as well. In fact one does not have to look far to find it, as it is apparent in the core and central practices of the Church.

### Baptism

The first and most common of these is the practice of baptism. At the outset, it might appear to most in the Lutheran Church that there is general agreement and consensus over the doctrine of baptism. After all, we all agree that we should baptize infants, right? However, one often finds that the practice of baptism serves to illustrate that there are actually grave confusions when it comes to this practice and how it relates to the nature of faith. This confusion primarily centers on what role faith has in the baptismal rite itself.

In pursuing an answer to the question regarding what role faith has in the baptismal rite,

one finds that a variety of answers are given, even from the same Lutheran books. This confusion is readily seen by asking the simple question: “How does baptism relate to faith?” While all Lutherans would agree that baptism is somehow related to “faith,” there is not a consensus as to *how* it relates. For example, in reading Luther, there are some who interpret him to mean that baptism creates faith because it bestows faith as a gift. In the LSB, the pastoral prayer states: “We pray that You would behold *name(s)* according to Your boundless mercy and bless *him/her/them* with true faith by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>50</sup> When considering the answer that baptism relates to a “blessing with true faith by the Holy Spirit,” this is often misunderstood by some as an understanding of faith brought about by “infused grace.”<sup>51</sup> Instead of explicitly stating that a promise is pronounced or declared which elicits faith (imputed grace), faith is mentioned here as being given as a blessing or that which is a gift.

In this example, for those who misunderstand Luther, this often leads to a doctrine of *gratia infusa*, in which case baptism is a work *ex opere operato*. The problem with this is that it makes baptism to be something that controls the work of God. To the contrary, God is not a puppet to be controlled by human will. Instead, AC V states that the Holy Spirit produces faith, “Where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, while baptism is a declaration of the Word and it is proper to recognize that where and when the Word of God goes forth one should expect to see the Spirit of God at work, this is not to say that the Spirit of God is bound

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<sup>50</sup> The Commission of Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2015), 269.

<sup>51</sup> Kent Burreson believes that Luther read the language of the “Flood Prayer” not as infused grace but as imputed grace and that those who read it as infused grace misinterpret him. While this would be consistent Luther, it is still worth noting that the language here is not necessarily explicit to direct the reader to that conclusion. Kent Jorgen Burreson, “The Saving Flood: The Medieval Origins, Historical Development, and Theological Import of the Sixteenth Century Lutheran Baptismal Rites.” PhD diss. University of Notre Dame, 2002, accessed May 29, 2017. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses

<sup>52</sup> AC V, 3; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 40.

by some kind of a cause-and-effect or that baptism is *ex opere operato*.<sup>53</sup>

In contrast to the above example, there are other places where Luther is much more explicit and less frequently misunderstood. In looking at the explanation to Luther's Small Catechism, the question is asked and answered: "What benefits does Baptism give? It works forgiveness of sins, recues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare."<sup>54</sup> In contrast to the language used in the LSB's pastoral prayer, one sees that the explanation to Luther's Small Catechism is clear to accredit the benefits of baptism to faith in the word and promise of God. This then serves to recapture that sentiment of "imputed grace," which is something declared and pronounced that can be responded to by faith in that promised Word. Thus, in thinking about the very nature of baptism and whether one interprets it as something which infuses grace or imputes grace, there is the potential for various understandings of faith operative in the discussion.

A confusion over baptism and its relation to the nature of faith is also seen in the distinction that is made for those baptized as adults in contrast to those who are little children. In the explanation to Luther's Small Catechism, the question is asked and answered: "What distinction is to be made in baptizing? Those who can receive instruction are to be baptized after they have been instructed in the main articles of the Christian faith."<sup>55</sup> This approach is then placed in contrast to the baptism of little children who are simply brought to the waters of baptism and receive the Word of promise. In looking at this section, some may be tempted to

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<sup>53</sup> Leopoldo Sánchez, "Pneumatology: Key to Understanding the Trinity," *Luther Academy Lecture Series*, vol. 16, *Who Is God? in the Light of the Lutheran Confessions: Papers Presented at the Congress On the Lutheran Confessions, Bloomington, Minnesota, April 22–24, 2009* (St. Louis: Luther Academy, 2012), 127.

<sup>54</sup> Martin Luther and Sara Tyson, *Luther's Small Catechism, with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 208.

<sup>55</sup> Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism*, 206.

ask: “Why is there this distinction?” “Why are some admonished to be instructed and not others?”

To be clear, baptism should be administered in a way in which it will be received as a means of grace, so that it can engender and elicit faith. Therefore, instruction and teaching prior to baptism may well be called for, because one is baptized into Christ and made a member of the Church through baptism. Without instruction, baptism might well be received either as a requirement one must endure or as a magical rite. But in actual practice, there is often little to no instruction given for children who are brought forward in baptism and a significant amount of instruction is given for those who are older. Consequently, a distinction is often implicitly created which seeks to bring children to baptism to hear and respond to the promise of God while specific instruction is set up to be given for older ones as a precursor. This contrast ends up giving the appearance that in order to hear the promises of baptism, a level of instruction is demanded for some so that they can come to a point of Rational Assent and can fully understand their baptism.<sup>56</sup>

### Evangelism

Following baptism, another illustration of multiple understandings of faith operative in the ministerial practice of the Church can be seen in the practice of evangelism. Again, with such a central and core element of the life of the Church, there are many who might balk at the idea that multiple understandings of faith are seen to be associated with evangelism. After all, evangelism is just telling people about Jesus, right? While this might sound simple, when one starts to talk about how evangelism relates to faith one finds that the practice of evangelism serves to illustrate

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<sup>56</sup> See Jessica Curiel, *Believer's Baptism: Understanding Baptism*, (Torrance, CA: Rose, 2014).

a grave confusion in Christ's Church.

For example, many in the Lutheran Church grew up hearing popular evangelists proclaim an “evangelistic message” and give a call for people to have “faith.” In these types of messages, popular evangelists would tell people the good news that God loved them and that He gave His Son to die for their sin and would call for people to get out of their chair and come down to the front of the stage and pray a “sinner’s prayer.” After this process, there would be the assurance that the individual was “saved.”<sup>57</sup>

In assessing this example, one should ask: “What understanding of faith is communicated here?” or “When is faith elicited?” On the one hand, there are Lutherans who conceive of faith as “trust in a promise” and will look at the evangelistic crusade and say that the Word of God elicited faith before the one hearing ever got up out of their chair or “prayed a sinner’s prayer.” They have heard the good news and have responded to it. Their faith was not bound by how quickly they got out of their chair, how quickly they got to the front of the stage, or by the sincerity of a prayer to be prayed. Instead, such “external factors” are viewed as a cause for potential doubt, as people are left wondering if the external factors were done “just right.”

In contrast, those in the Lutheran Church who view faith as a “personal commitment” will look at the same evangelistic crusade and say that faith was elicited when the person made the decision to stand up and publically walk down to the front of the stage. They may have heard the good news, but by standing up and walking down to the stage, they are outwardly saying, “I want this” or “This is for me.” In other words, it is not enough to just hear the Word and believe it, but “faith” becomes something added to it—an outward display of commitment.

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<sup>57</sup> An example of this is the 1971 Chicago Evangelistic Crusade by the Billy Graham Association. “Billy Graham-Who is Jesus?-Chicago 1971,” May 19, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U89zkUZPd5w>, accessed December 4, 2017.

For others in the Lutheran Church, there is the acknowledgement that there is faith in the hearts of the ones responding when they have sincerely prayed the prescribed prayer laid out for them. This understanding is one which tends to localize “faith” as “experience” and once all of the right information has been understood and the procedure is complete, then someone is truly “living by faith.”

All of these are examples of multiple understandings of faith operative and represent different understandings of evangelism and its effect to elicit faith. Each of these also puts a very different object marker for faith to grasp. In the first example, faith is localized in the response to the promise of the Word. In the second example, faith is localized in the physical act of getting up. In the third example, faith is localized in the sincerity of the prayer that was prayed and in the process of the event. The problem arises in the fact that these are radically different ways to conceive of faith, but which all generally appear in the Church.

### Sanctification

Multiple understanding of faith as operative is also illustrated in the practical application of sanctification. Although all Christians would agree that sanctified living means “good works,” there are several different understandings in the Church as to how such “good works” correspond with an understanding of faith. Some do good things in order to fulfill an obligation or to do their duty. In their minds, they are doing what they have been commanded to do. The reason why they give generously, love their neighbor, or encourage others is because the law of God tells them to do so. For others, doing good works is a matter of “transformed living” and not of the law. In this perspective, Christians have been transformed to do good works because of the miraculous resurrection God has worked in their lives. They are branches connected to the vine that bear good fruit. While it is readily apparent that these are different understandings regarding

sanctification, it is often less apparent that such differences exist in the same denominations.

This reality is not hypothetical but is reflected in tangible ways by modern Lutheran voices. On one extreme, David Yeago stands as a contemporary voice who keeps a distinct separation between one's justification and sanctification. He states: "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."<sup>58</sup> In his theological framework, Yeago centers the sanctified life very explicitly on the "necessity of commandment." Good works are done out of duty to the law. In this way of thinking, the life of faith (i.e. Justification) can often be perceived as detached from the life of good works (i.e. Sanctification). This framework is not unique to Yeago, but is also reflected in the writing of Lutheran theologian Robert Benne:

"Christians are to be involved in pursuing a course of ethical integrity, Benne tells us, 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 their ethical responsibilities is sufficient. In truth, however, following Benne's suggestion amount to an admission that there is no connection. The believer's justification has no apparent impact on the way that one then lives in the world."<sup>59</sup>

With a different emphasis is Adolf Köberle, who holds that good works are intricately connected to the life of faith, as one's justification is very closely tied to one's sanctification. In an attempt to show this unity, Köberle states: "Saving faith receives both justification and sanctification."<sup>60</sup> Therefore, not only is someone saved and made right with God, but good works come about as a result of their transformation. Therefore, even though it is man who does these works and lives this sanctified living out in his actions, it is God who is at work in man to produce such living.

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<sup>58</sup> Biermann, *A Case for Character*, 54.

<sup>59</sup> Biermann, *A Case for Character*, 57.

<sup>60</sup> Adolf Köberle, *Quest for Holiness: A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Investigation*, trans. John C. Mattes (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 90.



One realm in which these two emphases particularly reveal themselves is in regard to why we do missions. As Lesslie Newbigin points out, the “work” of missions is often done to fulfill a command or obligation. Thus, believers often “evangelize” out of a feeling of necessity.

However, in Newbigin’s opinion, this actually misses the entire point. He writes,

There has been a long tradition which sees the mission of the Church primarily as obedience to a command. It has been customary to speak of “the missionary mandate.” This way of putting the matter is certainly not without justification, and yet it seems to me that it misses the point. It tends to make mission a burden rather than a joy, to make it part of the law rather than part of the gospel. If one looks at the New Testament evidence one gets another impression, Mission begins with a kind of explosion of joy.<sup>61</sup>

For Newbigin, his whole work on “The Logic of Mission” focuses to emphasize this one thing—biblical mission is not done as an “obedience” to the law, but as a “reaction” to the gospel. It is a naturally outpouring of the “life of faith.” However, as Newbigin points out, this thinking is strange to many in the Church.

The goal with this example is not to attempt to solve our attitude towards missions, but merely to illustrate the tension that exists within the Church. As previously stated, some separate faith (justification) from sanctification and others try to unite them. These multiple approaches to sanctification serves to demonstrate that there is a grave confusion regarding the nature of faith in Christ’s Church

### Confirmation

In a similar way to the aforementioned examples, the liturgical rites of the Church also serve to reflect the beliefs of the Church and have a profound effect upon the spiritual formation of those worshipping. While some congregations in modern times have moved away from the incorporation of liturgy, one particular liturgical practice which has held deep roots in the

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<sup>61</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Geneva: Eerdmans, 1989), 116.

Lutheran Church is the practice of confirmation. Even though it is a common rite in the Lutheran Church, it is also an example of one particularly grievous instance which serves to demonstrate a varied understanding of faith. As one begins flipping through the pages of a hymnal, one first comes to the cherished “Baptismal Rite,” through which all Lutherans believe that God promises to make infants His children.<sup>62</sup> However, when one later comes to the “Confirmation Rite,” which addresses such baptized children later in life, various perspectives are given across the Lutheran Church regarding what is happening at confirmation and what really happened at baptism.<sup>63</sup>

First, in looking at the “Confirmation Rite” presented in the *Lutheran Worship* (1982), the questions to the confirmand are: “Do you desire to be a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and of this congregation?” and “Do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the divine Word, to be faithful in the use of God’s Word and Sacraments, which are his means of grace, and in faith, word, and action to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death?”<sup>64</sup> The problem with such questions is that they make it unclear whether or not the confirmand is viewed as part of the Lutheran Church and casts doubt on their current faithfulness to the Lord. However, if any confirmand had already been baptized into the faith prior to this instance, as is the Lutheran practice, it is doctrinally understood that he would already have been viewed as a part of Christ’s Church and would already know what God thinks of himself, namely

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<sup>62</sup> Ap. XI, 13; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 184.

<sup>63</sup> Arthur C. Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964). Throughout the Lutheran Church, there has been a wide array of positions regarding how confirmation is to be understood. Some have viewed confirmation as an affirmation of baptism, a finishing of the work of baptism, or as a supplanting of baptism altogether. In this dissertation, it is the goal to allude to present-day diversity through the examples of recent Lutheran liturgical rites.

<sup>64</sup> The Commission of Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Worship*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1982), 206.

that he has been chosen and adopted as a child of God.

In comparing the LW to the *Lutheran Service Book* (2006), this concern was remedied in the LSB's "Confirmation Rite," as the questions change to "Do you intend to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully?" and "Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?"<sup>65</sup> Noticeably distinct, this second set of questions focuses on the believer's intent to hear the Word and to remain steadfast in the faith that they are professing. While this may seem subtle to some, this distinction is one which ultimately shifts from addressing the confirmand as an unknown participant to one who is acknowledged as a member of Christ's community of believers.

In comparing such answers from the hymnals of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod with the *Service Book and Hymnal*, the distinction is even more notable. In it, the question from the "Confirmation Rite" asks the confirmand: "Do you promise to abide in this faith and in the covenant of your baptism, and as a member of the Church to be diligent in the use of the Means of Grace and in prayer?"<sup>66</sup> In contrast to the first two examples, the confirmand is clearly observed as a "member of the Church" and is even hearkened back to the covenant of their baptism prior to their confirmation. Thus, instead of the "Confirmation Rite" serving as an event synonymous with "conversion," it is rather a solidification for the believer to continue to walk in the ways of their upbringing.

In this simple comparison of just a handful of Lutheran hymnals, the reader is presented with several understandings of the nature of faith as presented in the Lutheran "Confirmation

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<sup>65</sup> The Commission of Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2015), 273.

<sup>66</sup> Lutheran Churches and Commission on the Liturgy and Hymnal, eds., *Service Book and Hymnal*, 7th ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1958), 246.

Rite.” This not only serves to demonstrate how there are a variety of understandings of faith which are either *implicitly* or *explicitly* operative in Lutheran ministry practice but also demonstrates the extreme diversity amongst Lutherans who all claim to hold to the same doctrinal treatises and confessions.

Therefore, in examining the confirmation rite from a few of the major Lutheran denominations in America, several different understandings of faith can be seen ranging from Rational Assent, Passive Reception, Quality, or Trust. Again, these are not “close” in their conception, but actually represent significant variations regarding the nature of faith. This is a significant problem, as these core liturgical rites of the Lutheran Church are monumental events in the life of the Church and serve as moments of great spiritual formation. In other words, these normative practices which the Church experiences year after year eventually serve to have an impact in molding the beliefs of the Church. Therefore, if three very different understandings of faith can be seen to be presented in the confirmation rite of the Lutheran Church, one should expect to at least find three different understandings of faith represented and operative across the Lutheran Church as well—if not many more.

#### Conclusionary Remarks

While this section certainly posits a variety of examples, its purpose is not to be exhaustive but rather to illustrate that there are multiple understandings of faith operative in the ministerial practices of the Church. In assessing such practices, some hold to a conception of faith as Rational Assent, a Passive Reception, a Quality, or a Trust. Consequently, since all three of these perspectives of “faith” vary widely, people in the Church end up talking over one another in their discussions about ministry practices such as baptism, evangelism, sanctification, and confirmation because of fundamentally different understandings concerning faith.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **JUSTIFICATION: THE DECLARED WORD**

#### **Introduction**

What is saving faith? Christians are confused when they answer this question and they show themselves confused about saving faith in the ways they teach and live. This much has been demonstrated by looking at relevant theological and practical topics in the Church. In assessing such topics some demonstrated an understanding of faith as a Rational Assent, a Passive Reception, a Quality, or a Trust. Each of these distinct views of faith are represented by Lutherans who all claim to be biblical and confessional. Consequently, with multiple understandings of the nature of faith, it becomes apparent that a proper conception of the nature of faith cannot be as easily ascertained as someone might think.

This reflects a genuine problem in Christ's Church. With multiple understandings of faith present, it is difficult for God's people to have unity in teaching and practice. For if some in the Church think that they should achieve to some intellectual realization in their relationship with God whereas others think that all people are passive recipients of the gifts bestowed to them, there exists two very different concepts of faith which necessitate two very different approaches to ministry. Those with an emphasis on the intellect appeal to the precursor of reason, whereas those with an emphasis on receptivity appeal to the acceptance of certain assertions. Both of these positions, amongst others, are reflected in the Church and demonstrate a grave confusion regarding this central topic.

In moving forward, I will focus on a constructive systematics to attempt to solve this

problem. My aim and goal is to set forward an understanding of faith that will address the confusion that exists for believers regarding the nature of faith. The task is not to define the term ‘faith’ but to show how to use the word properly, clearly, and consistently in all situations. And this means showing how to use the word both for various theological purposes and in various practical situations.

Therefore, in the following chapters, this dissertation will attempt to set forward a conception of the nature of faith by showing how a proper framework for faith is one which coheres with a certain theological framework. While there are several relevant aspects of Christian doctrine that could be included in this framework, three predominately rise to the top: (1) An understanding of justification as a declaration of God’s promise which makes man right with Himself, (2) a theology of the Word as an effectual promise and effectual act and (3) a pneumatology which acknowledges the Spirit’s role to create faith by killing and making alive in those who hear the gospel.

### **Justification “by Faith”**

Amongst other things, a proper understanding of faith is one which must be consistent with the conception of God justifying sinners. The Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions repeatedly emphasize the connection between the two, which is most clearly seen in the repetition of the phrase: “the righteous will live by faith” (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).<sup>1</sup> In viewing this as a banner statement, the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions both assert that whatever one believes about the nature of faith is intricately related to what one

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<sup>1</sup>SD III; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 572; Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 25: Lectures on Romans*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 25 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 209.

believes about justification and vice versa. Furthermore, this connection is not inferred from one specific example. Instead, it is straightforwardly demonstrated throughout Scripture, with examples such as: “We hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Rom. 3:28), “Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1), or “Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith” (Gal. 3:10–11). Additionally, in assessing life in Christ’s Church, one quickly discovers that the connection between justification and *faith* is seen in relationship to other doctrines and practices.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, we can learn a good deal about what “faith” means and how to speak meaningfully and consistently about “faith” by mapping out this relationship systematically: seeing how justification creates and sustains faith, and seeing how faith justifies.

Therefore, in an attempt to demonstrate how a proper understanding of faith is one which must be consistent with the conception of God justifying sinners, the goal and aim for this chapter is to conclude that justifying faith is well conceived of as trusting in the declaration of God’s promise and in God who commits Himself to that promise. The basis for this claim is twofold: First, in looking at instances in which justification by faith takes place, the justifying act is seen to be a declaration which asserts a promise. This declaration then serves to elicit a trusting response from the hearer who takes that promise as her or his object, which is faith. Secondly, the declaration of this promise is one which God commits Himself to. Consequently, when the hearer responds to the promise by faith, trusting in the committed word, one is also trusting in the one who is committing Himself to His Word: God Himself.

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<sup>2</sup> There are several doctrinal topics or ministry practices that serve to demonstrate the connection between justification and faith and purport to bestow justification to the sinner by faith, namely: preaching, absolution, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the law and gospel distinction, and soteriology.

## Confusion Regarding Justification by Faith

Even though this understanding of justification and faith may seem clear and straightforward, actual instances of theological reflection demonstrate confusion about what it means to be “justified by faith.” In fact, while it is generally observed in Christ’s Church that the doctrine of justification is very much related to one’s understanding of faith, there remains much confusion regarding *how* it is related to faith. In many ways, this is a pitiful commentary for such a core and central doctrine for the Lutheran Church.<sup>3</sup> Of all the issues that should have clarity and coherence for Lutherans, one would certainly expect it to be the doctrine of justification as it relates to faith, the “article by which the Church stands or falls.”<sup>4</sup> However, this has not been the case. Rather than unity, there is chaos. Rather than understanding, there are continuous debates. The realization of this problem is what has ultimately led Braaten to conclude: “There is a fundamental disagreement on the interpretation of justification.”<sup>5</sup>

Again, although this is certainly a significant problem for the Church at large it is also particularly troubling for Lutherans, to whom the doctrine of justification is a key and historic

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<sup>3</sup> Lutheranism is undoubtedly connected with the doctrine of justification by faith. This is the foundational core of the Reformation and the start of a historical movement. Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 36. Before Luther, one’s justification was connected to regeneration. Consequently, the forgiveness of sins was understood not as “forensic,” but as a process (i.e. “sanative”). Therefore, as Alister McGrath states, Luther introduced a theological novum into the Western church tradition ‘which marks a complete break with the tradition up to this point.’ Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2: 3.

<sup>4</sup> In looking back to the writings of Martin Luther, one quickly sees that the topic of justification was a big deal for Luther and not to be brushed over. In making his point, he states: “If this doctrine of justification is lost, the whole Christian doctrine is lost.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1–4*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 26 (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1999), 9. For Luther, justification was really the doctrine by which the Church stood or fell. Along the same lines, Luther also asserts with the same extremity: “Therefore, this doctrine can never be discussed and taught enough. If it is lost and perishes, the whole knowledge of truth, life, and salvation is lost and perishes at the same time. But if it flourishes, everything good flourishes—religion, true worship, the glory of God, and the right knowledge of all things and of all social conditions.” Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1–4*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Braaten, *Justification*, 13.



touchstone. However, even from the early beginnings of the Lutheran movement, Lutherans have not been exempt from this great confusion. Braaten mentions several of these early controversies, writing:

The relationship between faith and justification has been a murky area in Lutheran dogmatics. In fact, it was the spawning bed of the major sixteenth-century controversies leading up to the Formula of Concord, such as the antinomian, Osiandrian, Majoristic, synergistic, and predestinarian controversies ... All of them can be reduced ultimately to the question of the nature of the correlation between justification and faith.<sup>6</sup>

While it may be tempting to write each of these controversies off as “heretical offshoots,” it is important to recognize that behind each controversy stands biblical and carefully thought out reasoning regarding what justification is and how it relates with faith. For example, in the Osiandrian controversy, “Andrew Osiander ... believed that justification by grace through faith took place because the divine nature of Christ came to dwell in believers.”<sup>7</sup> For Osiander, this was not a thought out of thin air. Instead, it made sense because of Scripture passages such as Col. 2:9–10, “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him.” In Osiander’s way of thinking, if Christ is the perfect Son of God and He comes and dwells in believers, then believers are seen to be perfect and righteous in the eyes of God. However, for equally supported biblical reasons, “All of Luther’s other followers held that God justified sinners through the word of forgiveness which conveys the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection to them and elicits trust in Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

During these early years of the Reformation, another big debate regarding justification and faith took place during the time of the Leipzig Interim, which came to be known as the

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<sup>6</sup> Braaten, *Justification*, 22.

<sup>7</sup> FC Introduction; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 482.

<sup>8</sup> FC Introduction; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 482.

“Majoristic Controversy.” Again, in following what he thought was both Lutheran and biblical,

The Wittenberg professor George Major defended the document’s proposition that “good works are necessary for salvation,” and thereby aroused a storm of criticism from opponents (later called “Gnesio-Lutherans” [genuine Lutherans] by scholars; Major and other Melancthon students who remained closer to their preceptor were dubbed “Philippists”). These opponents believed that this proposition returned to a medieval reliance on works for salvation.<sup>9</sup>

For Major and those who followed him, the necessity of good works for salvation seemed to be a logical interpretation of James 2:17, “So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

In many ways, this associates *faith* with sanctification rather than justification. In response, the Gnesio-Lutherans interpreted this thinking as a shift back to Romanism and a reliance on good works to merit salvation instead of grace alone.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to these controversies, synergistic versus monergistic debates regarding justification were also predominant. Such debates called into question the human will in the connection between justification and faith, which was something argued not only during Luther’s lifetime in his debate with Erasmus,<sup>11</sup> but also continued well into later Lutheranism.<sup>12</sup> At the heart of these arguments, the synergists contended against the monergists

that the human being has not completely died to the good in spiritual matters but rather is seriously wounded and half-dead. Therefore, although the free will is too weak to initiate conversion and on the basis of its own powers to convert itself to God and to be obedient to God’s law with all its heart, nevertheless, when the Holy Spirit has taken the initiative and has called us through the gospel and has offered his grace, forgiveness of sins, and eternal salvation, then on the basis of its own natural powers

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<sup>9</sup> FC Introduction; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 482.

<sup>10</sup> Eph. 2:8–9.

<sup>11</sup> See Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 33 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> In his *Loci* (1535), Melancthon discusses three different causes for conversion: God’s Word, the Holy Spirit, and man’s will not resisting God. This understanding came to be part of the Leipzig Interim and arose a synergistic controversy in the Lutheran churches between Pfeffinger, Stolz, Amsdorf, Flacius, and others regarding the role of the human will in salvation. James W. Richard, *The Confessional History of the Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1909), 351–68.

the free will can meet God. It can contribute something, however insignificant and weak, and assist and cooperate in disposing itself toward God's grace and applying and grasping this grace and believing the gospel. Using its own power, it can also cooperate with the Holy Spirit in maintaining and preserving this work.<sup>13</sup>

Against this position, the monergistic Lutherans contended that man is unable to do anything good, but rather that he is spiritually dead and bound in all spiritual matters. Thus, the ability to seek God or come to Him by *faith* is impossible for man, but must be initiated by God alone.

While these aforementioned controversies are by no means an exhaustive account of the Lutheran debates surrounding justification and *faith*, they serve to demonstrate the wide range of positions that enveloped within the Lutheran Church regarding the relationship between justification and *faith*.<sup>14</sup> As already alluded to, the situation has not gotten better in over 400 years. Lutherans are still in disagreement over the doctrine of justification. In fact, some might say it is worse. Braaten writes:

When Lutherans from around the world met in Helsinki, Finland, in 1963, for the Fourth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, they adopted justification as the central theme of their deliberations. It was believed possible to reassert the central importance of justification, in light of modern biblical studies, Luther research, the existential crisis of meaning, depth psychology, and the need to critique the modern attempts at self-justification and self-salvation through scientific humanism, utopian socialism, and totalitarian ideology. The assembly tried but did not succeed in producing a resounding statement appropriate to the present age. It got bogged down in 1000 qualifications. Careful reading of the proceedings will clearly have revealed that Lutherans do not enjoy a consensus on the doctrine of justification.<sup>15</sup>

The sad reality is that many of the historical debates regarding justification are still alive and well today. Some today still want to emphasize man's initiative (Synergism / Majoristic

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<sup>13</sup> SD II, 77; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 559.

<sup>14</sup> Within Lutheranism alone, a multitude of positions have arisen regarding how someone is made right with God. From synergism to monergism, from good works to a forensic declaration, from a sanative or indwelling understanding an effective justification, there have been multiple understandings set forth.

<sup>15</sup> Braaten, *Justification*, 12.

Justificaiton),<sup>16</sup> while others want to point to a total dependency on God (Monergism).<sup>17</sup> Some today want to advocate for justification as a process (Osiandrian / Sanative Justification),<sup>18</sup> while others want to advocate for justification as a declared verdict which kills and makes alive (Forensic Justification).<sup>19</sup> Each position not only claims to be right, but also to be biblical and Lutheran. This only goes to show that the historical confusion that existed in Luther's day is still present in theological circles today as well.

This is not only the observation of Braaten, but also the assessment of 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian Franz Pieper, who opens up his section on "Saving Faith" with this admission:

Things have come to such a pass within external Christendom that the confession: 'I believe in Christ,' means very little, since different meanings are attached to these words. Some hold that faith, as far as it saves, has as its object the entire Word of God, including the Law, while others teach, with Scripture, that the sole object of faith, as far as it justifies, is the Gospel and that willing obedience to the Law is not the cause, but the effect of justification. Some describe faith as a mere intellectual knowledge of Christ, which also the wicked, the adulterers, and thieves and other gross sinners may have, or as even a blind trust in what the Church believes without knowing what this belief is (*fides carbonaria*); while others maintain the Scriptural teaching that faith is a knowledge of Christ coupled with trust (*fiducia cordis*) in the forgiveness of sins merited by Christ and that this faith is never found in secure hearts, but only in such hearts as are terrified because of their sins. Some forbid the

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<sup>16</sup> "The Pietist wing of Lutheranism generally saw Luther interpreters as deficient in their understanding of the importance of good works in the Christian life. Thus, for instance, Spener says, 'When Luther speaks at various times of faith and works, he appears to raise up the one only and entirely reject the other. Nevertheless, where all his writings are considered together at one time, it is clear that what he is really opposing is the delusion of their working together with faith for salvation ... the dear man, however, also in many places ... earnestly stressed godly living as much as one can do: but not from the law and only as a duty to which we must be driven, but much more in the sense that it is a never-absent fruit of true faith.'" Kent Yinger. "Reformation Redivivus: Synergism and the New Perspective" *Journal of Theological Interpretation* (2009): 98–99, accessed September 26, 2017. <https://csl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001822162&site=eds-live>.

<sup>17</sup> See Braaten, *Justification*..

<sup>18</sup> "The Osiandrian controversy shows itself recently in groups like the Finnish School where justification is confused with sanctification. Instead of justification being something that is imputed to us, justification is something that results from Christ dwelling in man. As Küster writes: "As result, there is also no sense that the divine declaration has anything whatsoever to do with "acquittal." In its place, we find more than a hint of the Eastern doctrine of theosis – or, more accurately, the Finish school's version of Luther - in accordance with which the being of Jesus Christ is present in and to the believer "in faith." Volker Kuster, ed., *Reshaping Protestantism in a Global Context* (Berlin Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009), 192.

<sup>19</sup> See Gerhard O. Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life*. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2012).

sinner to apply the forgiveness of sins to himself, describing such faith as presumption (*praesumptio*), while others teach that according to God's will justifying faith is always personal faith, *fides specialis*. Some imagine that it is "Christ in us," the new life which He creates in us through the Holy Ghost, which gives to faith its justifying quality, while others teach that the object of justifying faith is "Christ outside us," or the promise of the Gospel, and that faith therefore always actually lays hold of Christ (*fides actualis*), craving and desiring His grace, the forgiveness of sins (*velle gratiam, velle accipere gratiam, desiderium gratiae*). Some describe justifying faith as a virtuous act, moral conduct, correct behavior (self-determination, self-decision, etc.), while others teach that faith does not come into consideration as a good quality or virtue or compliance with the Law, but that it justifies solely as an instrument, or organ. Some describe faith as the conscious acceptance of the grace of God, while others teach that a man may have faith without being conscious of it. Some hold that a person may apply the forgiveness of sins to himself only when he has ascertained that he has faith, while others teach that justifying faith does not rely on faith itself, but directly on Christ, or the forgiveness of sins offered in the Gospel. Some insist that faith is produced by "historical impressions" rather than by the Word of the Gospel, while others teach that all that we need to know for our salvation is fully set forth in Scripture and that it is sinful "enthusiasm" which directs faith to look beyond God's Word and promise.<sup>20</sup>

If there is anything that this statement from Pieper serves to illustrate, it is this: there are many different understandings regarding "justification" and its relation to "faith," even in the recent history of the Church. In this excerpt alone, there seems to be five different understandings of faith: (1) faith as a propositional transmission, (2) a rational assent, (3) presumption, (4) the sanative work of Christ "in us," or (5) as a merit based reward. Consequently, it is obvious that Christians are confused. While all Christians believe *that* justification relates to faith somehow, they are not in agreement as to *how*.

### **Consensus for Lutherans over Justification**

With such confusion regarding *how* the doctrine of justification relates to *faith*, it certainly seems fair to ask: "Is it even possible to have any basis for consensus?" In the sixteenth century, the Lutheran reformers wondered the same thing. Their answer: The Formula of Concord. The

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<sup>20</sup> Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), 2: 422–23.

Formula of Concord does not just assert to be another opinion which addresses the controversies within Lutheranism. It does not claim to a “possible perspective.” Instead, it claims to be the unanimous document which determines what it means to be Lutheran and was recognized in that way by the Lutheran reformers. Therefore, in seeking to identify a consensus for Lutherans regarding the doctrine of justification, it is essential to look to the Formula of Concord itself as it proclaims to be and is acknowledged as the consensus position for Lutherans.

First and foremost, it is observed in the Formula of Concord that justification by *faith* takes place when God makes a statement.<sup>21</sup> It is a decree of God to man. At times, it comes in the form of God making a declaration about choosing someone as His own, electing them by His grace to be His people. Other times, it comes in the form of God making a declaration about forgiving someone of their sin. Both events involve God speaking and making a decree about His relationship with man. The Formula states this plainly:

Regarding the righteousness of faith before God, we unanimously believe, teach, and confess on the basis of the general summary of our Christian faith and confession expressed above that poor sinful people are justified before God, that is, absolved—pronounced free of all sins and of the judgment of the damnation that they deserved and accepted as children and heirs of eternal life—without the least bit of our own “merit or worthiness”, apart from all preceding, present, or subsequent works.<sup>22</sup>

Just shortly thereafter, in wanting to further solidify their point, the confessors write: “The word “justify” here means to pronounce righteous and free from sins.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, in recognizing the consensus of the confessors, justification is talked about as a pronouncement, a word event. It is

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<sup>21</sup> This is a clarification regarding justification from what is seen earlier in AC IV. For the earlier Lutheran confessors, justifying faith was seen more generally, with the statement being: “We receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ’s sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suffered for us.” Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 38–40. Here in the Formula of Concord, the Lutheran Confessors define more completely what they mean by justifying faith.

<sup>22</sup> SD III, 9; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 563.

<sup>23</sup> SD III, 17; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 564.

in this pronouncement that God declares that man is right in the eyes of God and free from sin. It is this pronouncement that is taken *by faith*.

However, this recognition of justification is not merely a confessional observation but it is the very clear testimony of Scripture. As Ap. XII states:

These are the two chief works of God in human beings, to terrify and to justify the terrified or make them alive. The entire Scripture is divided into these two works. One part is the law, which reveals, denounces, and condemns sin. The second part is the gospel, that is, the promise of grace given in Christ. This promise is constantly repeated throughout the entire Scripture: first it was given to Adam, later to the patriarchs, then illuminated by the prophets, and finally proclaimed and offered by Christ among the Jews, and spread throughout the entire world by the apostles. For all the saints have been justified by faith in this promise and not on account of their own attrition or contrition.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, while an understanding of justification as a pronouncement of righteousness is the firm consensus of the Formula of Concord, this understanding of justification is biblical. It is how God justifies people in Scripture. God regularly declares that people are righteous before Him, either by a statement of election or absolution.

Throughout God's Word, there are various examples of this: (1) Direct statements by God himself, (2) narrative examples, (3) teachings, and (4) confessions. By looking at a variety of biblical examples that all demonstrate this notion of justification, it becomes clear that the FC is not drawing this deduction from one particular citation, but is attempting to reflect the whole of Scripture.

First, the reality that God declares certain people to be righteous in his sight by means of *direct statements* can be seen as early as Abraham the patriarch. Moses writes:

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will

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<sup>24</sup> Ap. XII, 53–54; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 195.

bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Gen. 12:1–3)

In the story of Abraham, Abraham did not do anything to be chosen by God. Nevertheless, God called out to Abraham and chose him. He was elected by God to receive His blessing and to be the object of God's promises. This is an example of being justified by God. A righteous standing in the sight of God based on His speaking. There was nothing that Abraham could do other than trust in the justifying promise of God or choose to reject that promise. It was a spoken word to be received *by faith*.

This same reality is seen later in the covenant that God makes with His people Israel. He declares to them:

Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul. (Jer. 32:37–41)

Again, God is seen making a declaration about His sovereign and gracious choice. He is taking the people of Israel to be His own and promising to be their God. Just like with Abraham, this is justification, a right standing in the sight of God based on His speaking. This is a promise that God is making, something that He is committing Himself to, which is to be trusted in and received by faith.

This same kind of justifying proclamation is seen as well multiple times throughout Jesus' ministry as Jesus makes declaratory promises about people's standings before God. One of those examples is in Jesus' declaration of forgiveness for the paralytic. Mark recounts:

And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and



when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” (Mark 2:3–5)

Again, this is justification. A man who was formerly not right in the eyes of God now was declared to be right in God’s sight. It was declared to be so by God himself.<sup>25</sup> It was a word pronouncement. This man had been coming to Jesus to be healed physically and instead Jesus makes a statement about being spiritually restored in the sight of God by this declaration. Furthermore, this statement (“your sins are forgiven”) is not one which can be ignored. It is either true or it is not. It is either rejected or is received *by faith*. Ultimately, it is a declaration about someone’s standing before God and a promise about what that reality looks like presently.

Throughout the Scriptures, there are also *narrative examples* of God’s justifying declaration about someone in pronouncing forgiveness for their sin. An example of this can be seen through the address of the prophet Nathan to King David following his grievous sin. David had not only robbed away a man’s wife to commit adultery with her but also proceeded to cover it up in a scandal. This ultimately culminated in David murdering the woman’s husband so that his sin would not be revealed. However, God made a justifying pronouncement through His prophet Nathan: “And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die” (2 Sam. 12:13). This is justification. God is making a pronouncement through His servant, promising that David is restored and forgiven in His sight.<sup>26</sup> The only hope for a thieving, adulterous, murderer like David is to wholeheartedly cling to such a promise and trust in it *by faith*.

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<sup>25</sup> Jesus speaks on behalf of God’s authority and representation (e.g. John 12:49).

<sup>26</sup> The speaking on behalf of God, as Nathan does to David, is a form of “deputized discourse,” which is a practice of one person commissioning another to speak on their behalf with full authority and representation. This concept will be further discussed later in this chapter.

This concept of justification is also seen in the *teachings* of Scripture. Paul writes in Rom 4:2–8,

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

In this situation as with David, a promise was given to be believed by faith. For Abraham, he was called to have faith in God’s promise that he was chosen of God and would be blessed (Election). For David, he was called to have faith in God’s promise that his sins were forgiven (Absolution). Both had received justifying declarations from God which could only be received by faith.

The connection between justification and faith is also seen in the prayers and confessions of Scripture—the Psalms. There, David writes: I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Ps. 32:5). Again, God is the one who gets to decide about someone being made right in His eyes and who determines when sin is or is not forgiven. When this pronouncement is made, it is that which is then received by faith.

In assessing these Scriptural examples of justification and its coherence with faith, there are two foundational principles which are revealed. First, there are two kinds of justifying word events which are received by faith: (1) God makes a statement of election, a declarative promise of God choosing someone to be in a right relationship with Him and (2) God makes a declarative promise of forgiveness to someone which puts them in a right relationship with Himself.

Secondly, such pronouncements intricately cohere with God’s position of authority as “Creator”

and “Moral Law Giver” to make such declarations, as He is the only one who is in the position to both elect and forgive. On the one hand, God as Creator has the right to say anything He wants to about His creation. He made it. It’s His stuff. If He wants to say that part of it is a prized possession, He can do that. That’s election. On the other hand, God as Moral Law Giver also has the right to demand that all things that have been created live under a certain standard or face the consequences for their actions. However, if His law is transgressed, He also has the right to declare forgiveness to those who have wronged Him. That’s absolution. These declarations can either be received by faith or despised, each bearing eternal consequences.

Not only are these realities of God as Creator and Law Giver the recognition of the Lutheran believer,<sup>27</sup> but they are the fundamental premises of the Christian faith. However, these truths are not only apparent to those who have faith, but they have been imprinted on the hearts and minds of all people, causing all people to seek to be justified by faith and made right with God the Almighty Creator and Law Giver. However, despite this reality, these understandings of who God is and what he does should not be taken for granted, as there are some today who actively work to fight against such assertions. Thus, this dissertation will seek to briefly demonstrate that God as the Creator and Moral Law Giver has the right to make justifying

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<sup>27</sup> The Lutheran Confessions articulate God’s role in making declarative promises both of election and of absolution. Regarding election, the Lutheran Confessions state: “God’s eternal election not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect but is also a cause of our salvation and whatever pertains to it, on the basis of the gracious will and good pleasure of God in Christ Jesus. As this cause, it creates, effects, aids, and promotes our salvation.” SD XI, 8; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 642. Therefore, “If a person wishes to think or speak about the election and *praedestinatio* (or preordination) of God’s children to eternal life correctly and profitably, one should as a matter of course refrain from speculation over the naked, secret, hidden, inscrutable foreknowledge of God. On the contrary, one should focus on how God’s counsel, intention, and preordination in Jesus Christ is revealed to us through the Word.” SD XI, 13; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 643. Regarding absolution, the same kind of language is also seen: “What has been given us is the promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification on account of Christ, who was given for us in order to make satisfaction for the sins of the world, and who has been appointed as the mediator and propitiator. This promise is not conditional upon our merits; it freely offers the forgiveness of sins and justification.” Ap. IV, 42; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 126–27

pronouncements which are to be received by faith.

### **Justification by Faith in Light of God as Creator**

In considering the role of God as Creator, God by default has the authority to make declarative statements about this world and every living thing in it. Everything is part of His creation. Since God is the all-powerful One who brought everything into existence, He is the controlling force in relation to His creation. Therefore, God is able to say anything He wants about it or do anything He deems best. This is a classic illustration of “might makes right.”<sup>28</sup> This reality of God as Creator puts all creatures in a position where they are dependent upon what God says about things and serves to reinforce the idea that justification by faith is by grace alone, since the entire universe and every person’s life are matters of grace—they come about *ex nihilo*.

Accompanying God’s position as Creator, there is an innate desire in the heart of every person to be “justified.” Apart from revelation, there are questions to be asked and answers to be sought after. There is a whole universe that man finds himself in and it is a terrifying reality to think of one’s place in creation, the meaning of life, or what happens after death. Consequently, there is an innate desire for man to seek to “be right” with his place in the world. For some, they recognize that there is a divine Creator who has brought all things to be and to whom they are accountable. Therefore, there is the desire to be justified in the sight of that Divine Being. For if there is a Creator God, the necessary implication is that He has a right to say or do anything He wants to with His creation. Nevertheless, in modern times, this understanding should not be taken for granted. Particularly with the rise of the “New Atheists” there is a modern desire to

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<sup>28</sup> “Might makes right” is a common English idiom and demonstrates the ability for the person in power to make the rules or declare what is good and right. Thus, in the case of God, as all powerful Creator, He is able to dictate rules and how things are to be.

push back against any notion of a “god.”<sup>29</sup> Instead of trying to find justification by faith, some people try to justify themselves according to reason.<sup>30</sup> In essence, the goal is the same, but the approach to meet that goal is distinct. Jerry Coyne picks up on this, writing: “Religion and science compete in many ways to describe reality—they both make “existence claims” about what is real—but use different tools to meet this goal.”<sup>31</sup> This is why there are some who persist in justifying themselves by reason and others who seek to justify themselves by faith.

However, in asserting that justification is *by faith* in the declaration of God’s promise, it is essential to establish the recognition of God’s role as Creator and His position to make such declarations. While there are certainly many ways to make this argument, I will do so through a theological, philosophical, and sociological lens.

### Theological Acknowledgement

In thinking of the ability for God to make a justifying declaration, one must first begin with a theological acknowledgement of God as Creator. Most famously noted, St. Augustine of Hippo concludes that man has an innate restlessness and recognition that there is something more than the creation itself. Augustine writes: “For thou hast created us for thyself, and our heart cannot be quieted till it may find repose in thee.”<sup>32</sup> For Augustine, this is what it means to be human. God has implanted in man the innate need to be justified in His sight. St. Bonaventure, a pure

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<sup>29</sup> See Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, (Boston: Mariner Books, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> Some talk about how philosophy is an attempt at salvation, but not in popular understanding. Instead of it being a salvation with a dependency upon someone else, it is by our own reason. See Luc Ferry, *A Brief History of Thought: A Philosophical Guide to Living*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> Jerry A. Coyne, *Faith Versus Fact: Why Science and Religion Are Incompatible*, (London: Penguin Books, 2016), xi–xii.

<sup>32</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *St. Augustine’s Confessions, Vol. 1*, ed. T. E. Page and W. H. D. Rouse, trans. William Watts, The Loeb Classical Library (London: Macmillan, 1912), 3.

Augustinian, follows closely after his mentor, concurring: “The soul naturally tends towards the one in whose image it has been made.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, from a theological standpoint, there is an imprinted realization that what God thinks about us matters. This recognition does not come from an intellectual attainment or one’s maturation but is simply the result of how people have been created—as creatures dependent on their Creator. In *Together with All Creatures*, Dr. Charles Arand also points to St. Basil the Great to support this way of thinking. Arand summarizes: “St. Basil in his *Hexaemeron* described our unique position within creation by saying that God created us vertically with our feet on the ground and our head looking up toward God.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, while being a human creature means that one is a finite and limited being that interacts with fellow creatures, there is something unique to being human that causes men to look outside of themselves for what God thinks of them.

The foundation for this thinking is rooted in Scripture itself. In looking to the New Testament, Paul writes about this idea of an innate imprint in the heart of man. He states: “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). Therefore, when man looks around at creation, it testifies to God’s presence—to a Creator. This means that when people simply look at a world around them, they have no choice but to stand in wonder of a god who brought such into being.

In thinking about this innate wonder, Jan Aertsen makes the assertion that this is an expression that is fundamentally unique to man. She states: “Wonder cannot be ascribed to God,

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<sup>33</sup> William R. O’Connor, *Natural Desire for God*, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1948), 25.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Arand, *Together with All Creatures: Caring for God’s Living Earth*, (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2010), 39.

because wonder entails ignorance, and that must be denied of God. Neither is wonder ascribable to animals, since a sensitive nature does not concern itself about the knowledge of causes. Wonder at that which appears is a characteristic proper to man alone.”<sup>35</sup> While some may casually skip past this, Aertsen asserts that there must be some level of importance with this feeling of wonder, since it is unique to man. Aertsen further writes: “Man by nature, even from the youngest age is filled with wonder, looking into the unknown, pondering the meaning of life, looking for God. This is true even from the youngest of infants, looking in wonder at the things/agents around them.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, for Aertsen, wonder is not only something that is innate in man, but something that has been created in man with a purpose—that from youngest to oldest, one may look for God. While some try to fill this innate need by looking to be justified by reason, man by nature has been created to be justified *by faith* in the sight of God. In his very nature, there is a recognition within man that there is a “god” who exists who is in a position of authority and control over man. Consequently, this notion of “god” drives a curiosity in the heart of man to know what this divine being thinks of him—to be justified in its sight.

### Philosophical Acknowledgment

As an example of this, even the earliest Greek philosophers prove this assertion. As William Lane Craig points out: “Plato (428–348 BCE), Aristotle (384–322 BCE), and their successors in ancient and medieval philosophy developed substantial arguments for the existence of God without relying on revelation.”<sup>37</sup> Instead, the Greek philosophers were filled with wonder

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<sup>35</sup> Jan Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas’s Way of Thought*, (New York: Brill, 1988), 9.

<sup>36</sup> Aertsen. *Nature and Creature*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> William Lane Craig and James Porter Moreland, eds., *Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 1.

and curiosity about the spiritual realm and then began to theorize about it. Thus, Fuller concludes: “Wonder, it would seem, is one of the principal sources of humanity’s spiritual impulse.”<sup>38</sup>

Philosophically, Descartes further picks up on the idea of “wonder” and claims that it is innate in human beings; in fact, he called it one’s most fundamental emotion.<sup>39</sup> In communion with Decartes, the pioneering environmentalist Rachel Carson also posits an inborn sense of wonder, one especially prevalent in children.<sup>40</sup> At first glance, one might look at such philosophical conclusions and think, “So what?” “Why does it matter?” In response, Robert Fuller theorizes that the reason why it is important to recognize the place of wonder even from a secular perspective, is because “The emotion of wonder elicits belief in the existence of a more-than-physical reality.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, in the acknowledgement of wonder, although some try to deal with this by justifying themselves by reason, the very nature of wonder serves to elicit an awareness of the supernatural. Therefore, philosophically, man by nature is seen to have been created with a curiosity and wonder of what God thinks of him. Conceptually, there is a recognition that there is a “god” who exists who is in a position of authority and control over man. This then creates a curiosity in the heart of man to know what this divine being thinks of him—to be justified in its sight.

### Sociological Acknowledgement

However, this innate desire to wonder what “god” thinks of himself is not only

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<sup>38</sup> Robert C. Fuller, *Wonder: From Emotion to Spirituality* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 15.

<sup>39</sup> Jesse Prinz, “How Wonder Works,” *Aeon*, (2013), accessed September 20, 2016. <http://aeon.co/magazine/psychology/why-wonder-is-the-most-human-of-all-emotions/>.

<sup>40</sup> Prinz. “How Wonder Works.”

<sup>41</sup> Fuller, *Wonder*, 1.



acknowledged theologically and philosophically, but it's also seen to be a sociological acknowledgment. Fortunately, over the past century particularly, there have been such studies that have been undertaken proving that core to the heart of man is the desire to somehow "justify" himself with a "creator god." In recounting the extensive social experiment of Wilhelm Schmidt, Don Richardson reports:

It was Wilhelm Schmidt himself who threw himself into one of the most extensive research projects ever undertaken by one man. Schmidt began documenting and compiling evidence for "native monotheism," evidence which was now beginning to flow in like a tide from all parts of the world. In 1912, Schmidt published his mammoth *Ursprung Der Gottesidee* (The Origin of the Concept of God). Still more data kept pouring in, so he published another volume, and another, and another until, by 1955, he had accumulated more than 4,000 pages of evidence in a total of 12 large volumes! The entire thirteenth chapter of Schmidt's *The Origin and Growth of Religion* is devoted to quotations from dozens of anthropologists, showing that acceptance of Schmidt's research was virtually universal.<sup>42</sup>

What quickly became evident from Schmidt's report was the reality that across the world there was an innate awareness of some type of governing "Divine Being" that man stands in relation to, as well as the desire to pursue a "justifying" relationship with it. It was noted in this regard that as mankind considered the world, it was impossible to look at all without a wonder or a curiosity as to what Divine Being brought such creation to existence. Such curiosity and wonder bred a desire to adopt some kind of spiritual relationship with that greater being. While there have been some who have recently tried to debate Schmidt's claims of a universal religiosity, particularly from the modern atheist movement, it appears that even if there is not a "god" figure in such case studies, there are relationships with some kinds of spirits or else the earth is considered a "god" in a naturalistic sense.

Therefore, even sociologically, man by nature is seen to have been created with a curiosity

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<sup>42</sup> Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, rev. ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984), 140–41.

and wonder of what God thinks of him. This then creates a curiosity in the heart of man to know what this divine being thinks of him—to be justified in its sight. Man is therefore left waiting *by faith* to hear or know what this divine being thinks of him.

### Application

As Charles Arand asserts: “By confessing God is a creator, we confess that we are creatures.”<sup>43</sup> As creatures, we are dependent beings. This is not only a dependence for life and breath, but also a dependency about what God says about our life and our very soul.<sup>44</sup> With this kind of awareness of God and realization that one’s life stands in relationship to Him in a Creator/creature relationship, one is therefore left with questions like: What does God say about me? Does He proclaim to love me or does He hate me? How do I become pleasing to Him? All such questions are subject to God’s revealed Word, what He has to say. Such questions cannot be answered by man himself. Instead, one has to wait for God’s declaration. One has to live *by faith*. Man’s intentions or works cannot decide for God or know His mind. To use Forde’s language, there is no way in and of ourselves to “get God off our backs.”<sup>45</sup> One is left waiting for God’s justifying word.

According to Oswald Bayer, a recognition of God’s role as Creator also paints a picture of justification by faith as God’s benevolent ability to bring about that which was not previously present, a *creatio ex nihilo* – creation out of nothing. As Bayer states: “Creation out of nothing” means that everything that is made comes out of pure goodness—not because of any obligation: “and all that purely because of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy without any of my merit and

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<sup>43</sup> Arand, *Together with All Creature*, 30.

<sup>44</sup> Acts 17:28.

<sup>45</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 22.

worthiness.”<sup>46</sup> This understanding corresponds to the question Paul poses in Rom. 11:35 (Job 41:3): “Who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?”<sup>47</sup> The rhetorical answer: “No one.” God has not been given or granted something so that He must make a favorable declaration. In fact, to do so would be wrong, it would be bribery. Instead, such a declaration to be received by faith is made of God’s own accord, made in His own timing, and as a result of His love and mercy.

### **Justification by Faith in Light of God as Moral Law Giver**

God’s authority to make a justifying declaration regarding man is also illuminated in considering His role as “Moral Law Giver.” As Moral Law Giver, God is in the position to dictate how people are to live and what standard is enforced, as well as what happens when such standards are broken. In setting forth His standard, God has chosen to dictate that man be holy as He is holy.<sup>48</sup> If man does not meet this standard God has chosen that the consequence is death.<sup>49</sup> While some may not like this reality or feel that this paints an uncomfortable picture of God, such opinions are irrelevant. God is either the One who makes the rules or He is not. If He is not, then man need not worry or care about Him at all. If He is, then everyone who has trespassed His law is subjugated to what He says are the consequences.

However, such hypotheticals are unnecessary, since Paul gives the Church the answer: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”<sup>50</sup> God’s standard and law have not been kept.

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<sup>46</sup> Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 96.

<sup>47</sup> Rom. 11:35.

<sup>48</sup> 1 Pet. 1:16.

<sup>49</sup> Rom. 6:23.

<sup>50</sup> Rom. 3:23. While Romans 3 is very clear about the universality of sin, there are also other Bible passages that assert the same reality (e.g. Ps. 14:3, Ecc. 7:20, Rom. 3:10).

Thus, man stands in the wrong before God. Divine consequences are deserved. There is no way to buy one's way out of it or earn God's favor from one's own works. In fact, such attempts are futile as God declares that even one's best works are like filthy rags in His sight.<sup>51</sup> Instead, one is left waiting by faith for what God Himself is going to say regarding his or her trespass. Will God condemn? Will He forgive? One is left hanging on the word of God.

While this may seem straightforward, this position should not be taken for granted as there are even some "Christians" who are not in accord on this matter. Instead, popular "Christian Leaders," such as Rob Bell and other noteworthy universalists have publicly stated that man should not fear his trespass of God's holy standard.<sup>52</sup> In their minds, no one ultimately stands condemned before God for their actions—at least not permanently. Furthermore, it is generally observed there are many "Christians" who posit that man need not worry about a judgement from God, so long as one does enough good works to outweigh the bad that he may have done.<sup>53</sup> Thus, it is essential to demonstrate the innate recognition of God's role as Moral Law Giver and the verdict which God is able to make regarding those who trespass as law.

### The Innate Recognition of Divine Law

In day-to-day living, the pronouncements of laws are common occurrences, as are judgements and the desire for justification. For example, a newly married wife tells her husband to stay away from the china cabinet and not to lean against it. There is a very expensive set of collector plates inside and putting pressure against the cabinet would cause the plates to fall and

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<sup>51</sup> Is. 64:6.

<sup>52</sup> Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*, Rep. ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2012).

<sup>53</sup> This dissertation uses the term Christian loosely to describe the above-mentioned groups, since to hold to such positions stands in direct conflict with clear Scriptural testimony and the tradition of the Church.

break. Her standard has been known. However, the disregarding husband still willfully leans against his wife's china cabinet and the set of collector plates falls and shatters. The husband had gone against the standard imposed to him. He is guilty. There is nothing that the husband can do buy happiness for his wife. She is angry and upset that her standard has been undermined. New plates will not satisfy her, extra chores around the house will not appease the frustration. She is mad. The only chance the husband has is that his wife tells him that she has chosen to forgive him and therefore releases him from her condemnation. Receiving this *by faith* is his only hope.

The foundational aspects of this scenario detail the same sequence every time a known standard is broken. If a law has been broken, someone cannot buy or compensate their way out of it. Instead, the only one who can do anything to change their judgment is the one who imposed the standard. They can either choose to forgive and release, or they can choose to render a judgement. There is a necessary dependency that is always created, so that the offender is left waiting by faith on the verdict that is issued.

This same kind of situation is also one that man finds himself in with the Almighty God. All people—young, old, male and female—have an innate knowledge of the law of God. This standard is not a secret, as if man was somehow “off the hook” or unaware. Instead, as the Moral Law Giver, God has made it very clear how He wants people to act or not act, even putting an innate recognition in the heart of man regarding His law. In writing to the Church of Rome, Paul writes: “When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts.”<sup>54</sup> In other words, God has placed an innate moral code on the heart of man which dictates an understanding of right and wrong.

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<sup>54</sup> Rom. 2:14–15.

However, this moral law of God is often transgressed. In fact, all have transgressed this holy law of God. The biblical testimony is quite clear: “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins”<sup>55</sup> and “None is righteous, no, not one.”<sup>56</sup> Therefore, when faced with God’s commands, what God says about how His creation should behave, act, and live, man finds himself in a predicament—he is not justified before God. Thus, in man’s relation to God, man stands as one who has transgressed God’s law and needs to be made right. He cannot get out of what he has done. He cannot pay God off, work his way to a better conscience, etc. He is left waiting *by faith* on a word of God.

#### The Verdict of the Moral Law Giver

So, what will God say? He has a verdict to give—a declarative statement which has an immediate and necessary effect upon the one who has broken His Law. It is not “hemmed and hawed” at. Instead, it is the unquestioned verdict for the one who has gone against the imposed standard of God. As revealed by God Himself, this declared consequence for the one who has gone against His standard is certain death.<sup>57</sup> This is the deserved and fair punishment according to God. It does not matter if one does not like it or believes it to be unfair, it is the reality. In being the One who sets the rules, God is the One who determines the consequences.

The only hope for people is that God chooses to show mercy and justify them. This is not the merited response of God by any means nor is it deserved. He could choose to deliver the consequences to people for their actions. However, God chooses to do something that people

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<sup>55</sup> Ecc. 7:20.

<sup>56</sup> Rom. 3:10.

<sup>57</sup> Rom. 6:23.

would not necessarily do. He chooses to forgive.<sup>58</sup> He declares to those who have gone against His law that they are righteous in His sight by faith.

One who has gone to great lengths to discuss justification by faith has been Gerhard Forde. For Forde, there are two ways to conceptualize God's declaration of justification, both of which have biblical roots. First, Forde paints a picture of God in a court room scene, where someone is either declared righteous and innocent (e.g. Zech. 3). Next, he paints a picture of God declaring life from total death (e.g. Eph. 2). While both pictures are accurate biblical images of the justifying declaration of God, Forde's thesis is the notion of a forensic declaration must be seen in light of the death to life imagery.<sup>59</sup> When these two concepts are brought together, one comes to realize that this justifying declaration of God is not just a word spoken, but an effective word event or speech action which accompanies the pronouncement to elicit faith. In other words, when God declares someone to be righteous, He does something. He declares that one's position before Him has changed. Consequently, through faith in that declaration, one is brought from a state of spiritual death to a state of spiritual life.

Apart from this justifying act, nothing can be done by man. Man is dead spiritually. Spiritually dead men cannot do anything to become alive. They are in need of something miraculous to take place. They are in need of resurrection. Therefore, in considering justification by faith, it is the word event of God, by which there is a transformation from death to life through the pronounced word.

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<sup>58</sup> "Perhaps the most common expression in Luther for the justifying act is the forgiveness of sins." Braaten, *Justification*, 23.

<sup>59</sup> He writes: "The doctrine (of justification by faith) can be both radicalized and found more satisfying and universal in structure if it is complemented by the biblical and Reformation understanding of death and life." Forde, *Justification by Faith*, vii–viii.

Oswald Bayer also writes about the effectual nature of this pronouncement by God, specifically addressing the reality that it is the Word of God which “does something.” Bayer writes: “It actually constitutes a reality; it does not affirm something as if it exists already, but presents it for the first time.”<sup>60</sup> Expounding upon the nature of this word, he further states:

A speech act actually constitutes a reality, first initiating and creating a relationship—between the one in whose name something is spoken and the one who is addressed and who believes that promise. Luther calls this type of speech act *Verbum efficax*, that which establishes communication, which frees one and gives one confidence: an effective, accomplishing Word.<sup>61</sup>

However, until God chooses to make this known, to speak this declarative word, one is left in the dark about what God thinks of him. This leaves one with an innate dependency on what God says. One has to wait, one has to live *by faith*, because man cannot make a decision for God.

### **Justification by Faith as Deputized Discourse**

In thinking about waiting to hear a “justifying word” of God, some could argue that it is going to be a long wait if one is going to be hearing an “audible word” from God Himself to be justified by faith. Even Christians do not generally claim to make the assertion that they hear God speaking to them audibly. Thus, some might rightly wonder if man is to be damned forever. This would be a logical deduction if one is unable to hear a word of forgiveness or election from God the Father. In assessing this dilemma, Nicholas Wolterstorff writes:

When we think of someone promising, asking, or asserting something, the image which comes most naturally to mind is that of someone using her mouth and tongue and vocal cords to make the sounds of some language, or using her hands to inscribe the characters of some language. So much are we in the grip of this as the paradigm for discourse that, as noted in our first chapter, a good many theologians, upon hearing talk of God speaking, have concluded immediately that this is metaphor if not

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<sup>60</sup> Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 51.

<sup>61</sup> Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 53.



nonsense, on the ground that God has neither mouth nor tongue, vocal cords nor hands.<sup>62</sup>

While some may get caught up in this problematic scenario, Wolterstorff asserts that this need not be the problem that theologians often make it out to be. He states:

Let us dispense quickly with the most obvious point here: the *media* we use for saying things extend far beyond words. The authors of field guides to flora and fauna use drawings and photographs to assert that the fringed gentian looks like this and the ruby-throated flycatcher like that. Once upon a time Morse Code was used for saying things at a distance, and semaphores, for communicating between ships. And we all know of the sign language used by and for those who are deaf. Actually all of us use conventional gestures of various sorts to say things: winks, nudges, shrugs, nods, and so forth. The media of divine discourse are even more diverse, or so at least the biblical writers claim. Words, yes; but beyond that, happenings of all sorts: dreams, visions, apparitions, burning bushes, illnesses, national calamities, national deliverances, droughts – on and on. When reflecting on discourse, be it human or divine, it's important to keep in mind this diversity of media.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, when it comes to receiving the declarative verdict of God, Wolterstorff's thesis is that while this is not often spoken by God Himself, the same pronouncement is made through means—what Wolterstorff calls “Deputized Discourse.”

In explaining the notion of deputation, Wolterstorff gives the example of a secretary and her executive. Regularly, executives have secretaries in order to save them time and energy, often deputizing them to write letters on their behalf and even sign for them if need be. In this analogy, Wolterstorff makes the point that when the secretary's letter goes forth with the signature of the executive on it that it has the full force and weight of the executive himself. The executive may not have written the letter, signed it, or even seen it, but nevertheless it represents him fully. Why? Because the secretary has been deputized to act in His full authority on His

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<sup>62</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* by Nicholas Wolterstorff (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 37.

<sup>63</sup> Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 38.

behalf. Wolterstorff writes: “When the executive both instructs her secretary to compose a letter and also deputizes the secretary to sign the letter “for” her, then the secretary, to all intents and purposes, is saying things in the name of the executive.”<sup>64</sup>

Therefore, when someone wonders how they can find freedom from their transgression and be justified by faith in the Word of God, the answer lies in the notion of deputized discourse.<sup>65</sup> For if it is able to be demonstrated that God has chosen to deputize His Word through means (e.g. the mission of Christ and the mission of God’s people), then one should expect to hear and have faith in the electing and forgiving Word of God spoken through means on God’s behalf.

### The Mission of Christ

The chief example of deputized discourse is seen through the mission of Jesus Christ. In his incarnation, the Son of God humbly came and dwelt among men as the man Jesus. Nevertheless, he regularly reminded his disciples that He was deputized by God and fully represented God to them, saying things like: “The one who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16), or “I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak” (Luke 12:49). Thus, when Jesus spoke and acted, He acted in the full representation of God the Father. Others also said this about Him and acknowledged this reality. For example, John states: “For he whom God has sent utters the words of God” (John 3:34). Consequently, when Jesus would speak a word of forgiveness, it was with the full power, authority, and representation of God the Father Himself. Through Christ, God’s declarative verdict was enacted. When Jesus pronounced a word of absolution, whether to the paralytic man (Mark 2:1–12) or to the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1–11), those

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<sup>64</sup> Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 42–43.

<sup>65</sup> Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 42–43.

individuals were declared to be made right in the eyes of God. The consequences for their actions were declared to be forgiven. Similarly, when Jesus pronounced a word of election, telling his disciples “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16), His disciples were declared to be the chosen people of God. Ultimately, this is the mission of Christ: To come as the mouthpiece of God, to make declarations on His behalf, that men might receive them by faith.

### The Mission of God’s People

In looking to the Scriptures, Wolterstorff’s notion of deputized discourse is one which can also be seen in the mission of God’s people, both in the Old Testament and in the New. One of the examples that Wolterstorff gives is the prophet. “Hosea is *commissioned* to communicate a message from God to Israel, and *deputized* so that, by communicating that message, God is then and there once again saying that very same thing, this time in public.”<sup>66</sup> In analyzing the nature of this speaking, Wolterstorff writes:

To be a prophet requires being deputized to speak in God’s name. In addition, God will tell the prophet what he is to say, putting words in his mouth; the prophet does not devise the words by himself. The prophet is commissioned to communicate a message from God, and God will give that message to the prophet.<sup>67</sup>

This notion of deputized discourse is also seen as the mission of God’s people in the New Testament, as Christ commissions His Church to speak on His behalf. This is not just a one-time pronouncement by Christ, but this principle is demonstrated in several passages in the gospels. Jesus states: “The one who hears you hears me” (Luke 10:16), “For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Matt. 10:20), and “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me” (Matt. 10:40). What this

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<sup>66</sup> Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 46

<sup>67</sup> Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 48.

means is that Christ has authorized His Church to make pronouncements in His name. They are commissioned to speak for Him with all authority, representation, and power. The apostle Paul also picks up on this conception of deputation in his letter to the church in Corinth. He writes: “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20).

As a result of this representation, when a justifying declaration about forgiveness or election is made, it is as though Christ were making the declaration Himself. In explaining this process to his disciples, Jesus says as much: “Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:19; Matt. 18:18). “And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld” (John 20:22–23).

The application of this for the mission of God’s people is profound. When someone hears the Word of God spoken through His people—it is the very pronouncement of God. Thus, when a pastor speaks God’s justifying Word of election through baptism or God’s justifying Word of absolution to those receiving the Lord’s Supper, it is a justifying verdict of God. When a believer uses the office of keys to declare absolution to the repentant, the justification of God is declared. The speaker is speaking for God Himself.

### A Core Lutheran Teaching

In assessing this notion of deputized discourse, this should not come across as a new way of thinking, but rather as something that is core to Lutheran teaching.<sup>68</sup> In his sermon on the

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<sup>68</sup> For Luther, a big development in his thinking regarding the understanding of deputized discourse came about in his study of penance. When he heard the phrase, “I absolve you of your sins” it was the priest’s verification

gospel of John, Luther states: “Likewise, when a lowly pastor comforts me, then I must be discerning enough to say: “It is not you who is speaking to me. The voice is yours indeed, but it is really God who is speaking through you”<sup>69</sup> and “The word that you hear is not that of a pastor; it is God’s Word. And since it is God’s Word, you should be excited and happy over it.”<sup>70</sup>

However, this does not only show itself in Luther’s sermon on John, but Althaus also cites Luther on the matter from a number of sources: “It is a wonderful thing that the mouth of every pastor is the mouth of Christ. WA 37, 381.”<sup>71</sup> “Therefore you ought to listen to the pastor not as a man but as God. WA 49, 140.”<sup>72</sup>

In reviewing Luther’s thoughts on the effect of this word, David Lotz concludes: “In Luther’s thought, to be sure, the preached Word as gospel is intrinsically efficacious— it effects what it declares, i.e., it saves—because it has Christ himself as its acting subject.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, the reason the preached Word has a justifying effect is because it is really Christ Himself speaking and not just a man. It is God Himself who is actually making the declaration.

The recognition of this as a fundamental Lutheran understanding can be seen to culminate

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of the personal repentance and justification that had already taken place in the sinner’s heart. In such cases, the words were signs that referred to something else, but did not equate to it. However, for Luther, he realized that such a sign did something and served to give certainty. It is the matter itself—it is the forgiveness of sins. Bayer recounts: “That the signum itself is already the res, that the linguistic sign is already the matter itself—that was Luther’s great hermeneutical discovery.” Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 52. “Since the sign is itself already the thing it declares, this means, with reference to absolution, that the statement “I absolve you of your sins!” is not a judgement, which merely establishes that something is true already...instead, in this instance, a speech act actually constitutes a reality.” Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 52–53.

<sup>69</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 22: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1–4*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 22 (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1999), 508.

<sup>70</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 22: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1–4*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 22 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 508–9.

<sup>71</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 326.

<sup>72</sup> Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 326.

<sup>73</sup> David Lotz, “The Proclamation of the Word in Luther’s Thought,” *Word and World: Theology for Christian Ministry* 3, no. 4 (1983): 353.

in AC V, as the key Lutheran Confession holds that Almighty God has instituted the Office of Holy Ministry for this purpose: that His servants, as means, may articulate the declarations of God's unconditional promises to His people. AC V states: "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel."<sup>74</sup>

### **Justification by Faith as a Word Event**

In light of the previous discussion, an overarching consensus is clearly seen regarding justification by faith: it is a word event—a speech action. It takes place when God Himself, in the position of authority as Creator and Moral Law Giver, makes a declarative promise about someone, either of election or of absolution. When this takes place, God effects something. He does not talk about doing something, explaining something, or preparing, He effects something. When He declares to elect, He elects. When He declares to absolve, He absolves. These statements then are either to be received by faith or be despised.

While some have tried to give certain language to this (e.g. a "performative"<sup>75</sup>), this dissertation will instead follow John Searle's understanding of the role of "declarations" set forth in his work, *Consciousness and Language*. In writing about the nature of a declaration, Searle says: "Declarations, by definition, make their propositional content true. That's what a successful

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<sup>74</sup> AC V, 3; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 40.

<sup>75</sup> According to Austin's work, *How to Do Things with Words*, he calls this a special illocutionary act: a performative. It is to perform something by one's mere utterance. Austin writes: "To utter the sentence is not to describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it." Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 6. However, not every illocutionary verb can be performative, but only those in the "first person singular present indicative active." Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 5. For instance: "I promise," "I choose," "I adopt," or "I forgive." In Austin's mind, all such utterances are not just to say something, they are to do something.

declaration is. It is an utterance that changes the world in such a way as to bring about the truth of its propositional content.”<sup>76</sup> For example, when someone says, “The meeting is adjourned” or “War is hereby declared,” these are declarations with a very clear intent and effect. Such statements are spoken to change the world in such a way that the propositional content matches the world because the world has been changed to match the propositional content.<sup>77</sup> They change the world to bring about the propositional content. Moreover, declarations bring about new facts that include other speech acts such as promises, statements, or orders.<sup>78</sup>

When it comes to the event of justification, a declaration is exactly what takes place between God and man. He is creating a new fact of life which corresponds to His own proposition. In other words, His declarations serve to make their propositional content true. In the case of justification, when God declares that people are made right in His sight, it is instantaneously a new reality. Thus, justification is a word-event or speech-action of a declarative kind. Furthermore, these are not declarations made from just anyone, but from the Creator and Moral Law Giver—the One who is able to say what He desires about those subordinate to Himself.

How does this justifying declaration corresponds to faith? In representing the Lutheran position on the matter, Chemnitz writes that “justification is objectively prior to faith” and that

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<sup>76</sup> Searle, *Consciousness and Language*, 174.

<sup>77</sup> “Declarations, just to remind you, are speech acts such as, for example, “The meeting is adjourned” or “War is hereby declared” where the illocutionary point of the speech act is to change the world in such a way that the propositional content matches the world, because the world has been changed to match the propositional content.” Searle, *Consciousness and Language*, 162.

<sup>78</sup> “A declaration is a speech act whose point is to create a new fact corresponding to the propositional content. Sometimes those new facts are themselves speech acts such as promises, statements, orders, etcetera.” Searle, *Consciousness and Language*, 170.

“faith is subjectively the result of the creative impact upon the center of God’s acceptance.”<sup>79</sup>

Therefore, in seeking to understand faith in light of justification, one must recognize faith as an active response to the declaration, a reaction to the justifying word which has been spoken.

Therefore, faith is that which stands in relation to the word which is declared and the promise which is made, “trusting” that it is true.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, because the one who is making the promise is committing himself to the promise, faith is also trusting in the one who is committing himself to his word. In the case of God’s Word of promise going forth, faith then sets itself in relation to the promise of God, but also to God Himself. Lastly, it can only and ever be faith which sets itself in a positive relation to the declarative promise of God, rather than “knowledge” or “self-righteousness.” The Lutheran Confessions themselves acknowledge as much, stating:

“That only faith receives absolution can be proved from Paul, who teaches in Romans 4 that only faith is able to accept a promise. Now absolution is the promise of the forgiveness of sins.

Therefore it necessarily requires faith.”<sup>81</sup> This faith is not a Rational Assent or a Passive

Reception of the justifying word, but a Trust in the word that is declared and in the One who is making the promise.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Braaten, *Justification*, 26.

<sup>80</sup> This reality is illustrated from modern philosophy of language. In writing about the role of the “self” to respond to speech acts or word pronouncements, John Searle theorizes that with a proper understanding of intentional states, the hearer is directed to the one speaking and that what is said is taken as one’s object. In describing the nature of this intentional state, he writes: “Intentionality is that property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about or of object and states of affairs in the world.” Searle, *Intentionality*, 1. It is this intentionality, Searle writes, which necessarily is that which responds to word pronouncements particularly. He asserts: “The performance of the speech act is eo ipso an expression of the corresponding Intentional state; and, consequently, it is logically odd, though not self-contradictory, to perform the speech act and deny the presence of the corresponding Intentional state.” Searle, *Intentionality*, 9. In relating this theory to the reality of God’s declarative promise, it is therefore faith which serves as the intentional state and takes the justifying promise of God as its object. In other words, faith is that which aligns itself to justification as a word event.

<sup>81</sup> Ap. XII, 61–62; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 197.

<sup>82</sup> “The promise freely offers to us, who are oppressed by sin and death, reconciliation on account of Christ, which is received not by works, but by faith alone. This faith does not bring to God trust in our own merits, but only trust in the promise or the mercy promised in Christ.” Ap. IV, 44; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 127.



Therefore, in conclusion, insofar as justification is the declared promise of election and absolution, derivative of God's authority as both Creator and Judge, which He deputizes through the means that He has chosen, this dissertation sets forth that justifying faith is well conceived of as a trust in the declared promise of God and in God Himself as the One promising. In other words, when a justifying word is spoken, it is the promise of God by which He Himself is entering into an obligation. Thus, when a pastor says that God elects, He elects. When a pastor says that God absolves, He absolves. This declared promise, in turn, serves to elicit faith, as the hearer responds by trusting in the declared promise. This faith is not a propositional transmission, a rational assent, a presumption, a sanative work, or a merit based reward. Rather, it is an active response of trust in the declaration of God, which is something wholly outside of us and devoid of any of our own merit or work.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE NATURE AND EFFECT OF GOD’S WORD**

#### **Introduction**

What is saving faith? Christians are confused when they answer this question and they show themselves confused about saving faith in the ways they teach and live. To address this, I have begun a constructive systematic account to set forth a solution. My task is not to define the term ‘faith’ but to show how to use the word properly, clearly, and consistently in all situations. In doing so, my goal is to set forth a conception of faith which coheres with a certain theological framework. While there are several relevant aspects of Christian doctrine that could be included in this framework, these three predominately rise to the top: (1) An understanding of justification as a declaration of God’s promise which makes man right with Himself, (2) a theology of the Word as an effectual promise and effectual act and (3) a pneumatology which acknowledges the Spirit’s role to create faith by killing and making alive in those who hear the gospel.

I argued in the previous chapter that justification is God’s declaration which makes someone right with Himself. He does this through a word or sign which is both forensic and effectual. Therefore, when God declares “I forgive your sins” or “I choose you,” God has committed Himself to what has been said. Something has happened. The saying of the deed is the doing of the deed. Thus, justification can be conceived of as a word event—a speech action. It is a declaration in which God enacts a promise. When this takes place, faith is elicited as a trust in this declaration and in the God who commits Himself to what is said.

To build upon this understanding, this chapter will seek to demonstrate how a proper

framework for conceiving of faith is one which stands in relation to a theology of the Word: “Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). While all Lutherans claim to hold to this as a banner statement, they do not agree about *why* or *how*. This is a significant problem because if there is confusion as to *why* or *how* faith comes by hearing, then there will be confusion about faith itself.

Therefore, this chapter will seek to evaluate the scriptural and confessional principles behind a proper understanding of a theology of the Word—that faith comes by hearing—to clearly set forth a connection between a theology of the Word and a proper understanding of the nature of faith. Again, instead of pointing only to discrete scriptural or confessional texts, this chapter will take a holistic approach to solve this problem. I will argue that the notion that “faith comes by hearing” is one which recognizes the function of the Word as law and gospel, accounts for the objective nature of God’s promise in His Word of declaration, and considers the subjective appropriation of that promise through invitation. I will also argue that the intent of the Word is that God’s promise would be trusted and that it would effect a new reality: faith. God’s Word of promise is powerful to do this because it is something God Himself has committed. Furthermore, this Word of God is not to be understood as a word that only reports about the state of affairs, but one which actually enacts a new state of affairs. In conclusion, this chapter will argue that faith can come by no other means than by hearing this Word, that by its very nature, faith is that which must be elicited by hearing of the Word of God.

### **Current Confusion**

Many Lutherans will say that “faith comes by hearing,” but what they mean is that faith comes by Rational Assent. They say this because this reflects what hearing the preaching in the Church today calls for. When one looks at preaching in the Church today, it is seldom a message

which actually purports to do something (i.e. to declare forgiveness of sins or invite to salvation), but rather a message which explains something (i.e. truths about God to be understood).

In his work, *Theology is for Proclamation*, Gerhard Forde calls this kind of preaching “explanation” or “talk about God.”<sup>1</sup> Instead of enacting the Word of God as a personal promise, explanation is a statement or proposition talking about God, such as: “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son.” While statements of explanation are certainly true statements, they are only explanations about God or about what has happened. They do not purport to do anything or enact anything about someone’s position or status before God. They do not declare people to be forgiven or invite them to follow Jesus. Explanation is not a personalized promise—it is only a proposition.<sup>2</sup>

A clear analogy that Forde uses to describe this way of speaking is an example of a lover asking her husband, “Do you love me?” Instead of answering the question, the spouse tells his wife all the things that he does for her. He brings home the paycheck, he mows the lawn, helps with the kids, and budgets money for her to spend on clothes. He then takes a diversionary tack and talks about his love for all people in the whole world and how he is such a nice guy, which no one ever notices. All the while, his wife is left hanging. Her husband has talked about how he

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<sup>1</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 2.

<sup>2</sup> This is also evidenced in those who advocate for a “propositional revelation,” which holds “that a theological or dogmatic faith was necessary, that is to say a faith understood as the firm acceptance of truths which are divinely revealed and which are defended and promulgated by the Church. Given this understanding of faith, knowledge of religious truths is necessitated, not mere belief that some teaching is true. This distinction between knowledge and belief is reflected in our ordinary speech as in observing, “I believe that I will win the race, but I do not know that I will.” To know  $\chi$  is not only to believe  $x$ , but also to have “good reasons” for believing  $x$ . Hence this view of faith requires, as a minimum, knowledge that God exists while the “good reasons” which undergird this knowledge could be, in this tradition, either the claim of revelation or the reasoning of natural theology or both. This developed position posits a clear commitment to propositional revelation.” Wayne G. Johnson, “Issues in the Propositional Revelation Debate: Faith Without Words Is Dead?” *Perkins Journal* 33, no. 3 (1980): 24, accessed April 12, 2017, <https://cs1.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0000776241&site=eds-live>.

does things for her and how he loves everybody but he has not told her, “I love you.”

This emphasis on explanation is frequently found in the Church today. People are told all about God and what He has done. They are even told “Your sins are forgiven.” However, that information rarely does anything for those listening. As much as someone may try to talk about something or give good reasons and examples, it often fails to personally effect a change for the one listening.<sup>3</sup> Those listening simply take in the information that is presented and they hope it is true for them personally. However, too seldom are they hearing someone saying to them, “I forgive you your sins,” “I choose you as a child of God,” or “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Therefore, the sad reality is that the declarations of election and absolution, as well as the invitation to follow Christ, are all too often getting substituted for words of explanation.

For example, many preachers get up on a Sunday and talk about all of the wonderful things God has done and about His love. God is a God who heals, who forgives, who cleanses, and who adopts people as His children. In fact, this God so loved the world that He gave His Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. After stating these facts, many preachers conclude that since they have talked about God to those listening and since the ones listening claim to receive the message—that faith comes by hearing.<sup>4</sup> However, in evaluating such messages, one must step back and ask: “What has been heard?” and “What has been received?” When one does this, one will find that what has been heard has been some facts about

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<sup>3</sup> This dissertation acknowledges that sometimes when people do hear words of explanation, they are able to have faith in the promises that stand behind the words of explanation. However, they must decipher those promises for themselves and self-appropriate them.

<sup>4</sup> This is not a hypothetical illustration, but as David Lotz articulates, this is often the trend for whole denominations. “The traditional Missouri Synod view of theology's function has been limited almost wholly, in the name of sola Scriptura, to the descriptive task. The Biblical theologian is to determine what Scripture says and then reproduce it.” David Lotz, “The Sense of Church History In Representative Missouri Synod Theology” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 42, no. 9 (1971): 615, <https://cs1.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0000732074&site=eds-live>.

who God is and what He has done. The message consists of some propositions and explanations about God. Therefore, what has been received is “talk about God” instead of a proclaimed truth of God’s promise “to you” (*pro te*). For when the speaker says that Christ died for sins, those listening are left in a position where they know the right information but their sins have not been forgiven. Therefore, this understanding that “faith comes by hearing” is one which is associated with an understanding of faith as “knowledge” which comes by hearing “truths about God.”

Worse yet, Christians do not think there is a problem. They think these pastors are doing well. They believe that they are giving good sermons and that people are coming to “faith by hearing.” Unfortunately, these sermons are sermons full of “explanation” and are considered good because the hearers agree with it. This is not to say that what such pastors are saying is wrong in and of itself, or that God cannot use it in the lives of those listening. Instead, it seems that they are not actually bringing about what they think they are. Rather than eliciting faith, the preachers are eliciting knowledge. Consequently, they are often making a Church full of “experts of the law” and “Pharisees” that look good on the outside, but are really dead on the inside. Again, the reason for this is that too seldom are believers hearing someone say to them, “I forgive you your sins” or “I choose you as a child of God.” Instead, “one ends then by delivering some species of lecture about God and things rather than speaking the Word from God.”<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the gospel proclamation is often usurped by words of explanation.

Furthermore, these occurrences are not rare but have become normal in the Church. Pastors often go the whole sermon or even their whole ministry regularly giving “explanation” type messages. There are a number of reasons for this. Sometimes talking “for God” makes people feel uncomfortable. Sometimes declaring the gospel “for God” may seem to be “too good to be

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<sup>5</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 4.

true.” Sometimes talking “for God” may seem too personal. Whatever the reason, it is the case that Christians often result in giving words of explanation, talking about God, rather than words of proclamation, talking for God.

While some may think that this is just splitting hairs and is not something to be too concerned over, this confusion is an important problem. For if “the righteous will live by faith,” then they must be given something to put their trust in. As I will explain, there is a certain kind of speaking that allows for this, a particular form of the Word: promises, declarations, and invitations. Such speaking is primary discourse of a certain sort, discourse from one person to another. But instead of primary discourse much preaching consists of secondary discourse, that is, discourse about things in general and to no one in particular. The result has been, as Gerhard Forde said, “The secondary discourse—the words about God, the history, the infallible facts of the Bible, the old news—properly attested ecclesiastically tends willy-nilly to become the object of faith in place of the promise, the proclamation.”<sup>6</sup> Consequently, while those in the Church may have a lot of knowledge about God, that knowledge is not saving them. Again, this is no surprise, as it is a regular theme throughout Scripture: One can know all of the right information and be as far away from being righteous before God as the demons who also “believe” and know the truths about God.<sup>7</sup>

When information becomes the object of faith, faith becomes nothing more than Rational Assent and forces salvation to revolve around knowing all of the right things about God. One problem with this is that it localizes salvation in man’s intuition and intellectual ability. At the end of the day, one is left hoping that man knows enough. Hopefully he hears all the right things

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<sup>6</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Jam. 2:19.

and believes that they are true. Not only is this impossible for a sinfully depraved man, who cannot be saved in his own abilities, but this way of thinking serves to deprive the gospel of being the promise of God and turns it into a “historical report.” It also implies that justification comes by way of what the human creature does—give assent—and not by grace.

### **The Function of the Word to Elicit Faith**

Although it is generally observed that most believers understand that faith comes by hearing the Word, those in Christ’s Church are often confused about *why* or *how* this takes place. This ultimately evidences a confusion about the nature of faith, which is a significant problem. For if there is confusion about the nature of faith, it is appropriate to ask if there is even faith present at all. How is someone to know if they truly have faith? Some who are confused about this may believe that if they simply hear the spoken pronouncement, they will have faith. Others may believe that they need to completely understand what is said to be able to have faith. These two views represent two completely different understandings as well as two completely different practices. With such a significant and important issue in the Church as “faith,” this confusion naturally spills over into other relevant Christian doctrine and practice.

For Lutherans, in addressing “why” faith comes by hearing, the normative way to describe the effect of the Word of God—to elicit faith—is to talk in terms of the two chief categories of the Word and their function: Law and Gospel.<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, the Word as law comes to kill and terrify the conscience. On the other hand, the Word as gospel comes to bring an invitation and declare the promise of God, which in turn brings about a spiritual resurrection and makes

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<sup>8</sup> “Luther knew right well that there is not only a difference but an actual hostility between the two: the law kills, whereas the gospel makes alive.” Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 269.



alive.<sup>9</sup> For Lutherans specifically, all of God’s Word is interpreted and understood as filtered through this distinction with a recognition of the distinctions and functions of each.<sup>10</sup> However, this matters not only for Lutherans, but for all believers, since faith is to be understood as properly elicited when both functions of God’s Word have been heard by the hearer. For the Gospel brings the declaration and invitation to be trusted but the hearer recognizes no need for it apart from the work of the Law.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, both of these functions of God’s Word are necessary to elicit faith.

In first considering the assertion that the Word functions to kill by the law, when God’s Word goes forth proclaiming His moral law, it goes forth in judgment and condemnation against those who live in conflict to it. The Scriptural witness is quite clear that this includes everyone, since there are none righteous and all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:10; 3:23). Furthermore, as God’s holy moral law goes forth, it goes forth as a threat. It states that there is a coming condemnation for all men, women, and children who have

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<sup>9</sup> “The Lutheran tradition has had a lot to say about what to do with words. Indeed, one could say that theology itself in this tradition is largely instruction on what to do with words in preaching, how to make them come out right, do what they are supposed to do. The much maligned, caricatured, and misunderstood art of distinguishing between law and gospel is simply a matter of learning what to do with words. That distinction is the outcome of centuries of wrestling with the problem going back all the way to the New Testament, signaled especially by St. Pauls’ struggles with the matter and his insistence in 2 Cor. 3,6 that the letter, the written code, kills, but the Spirit gives life. The claim that the letter kills but the Spirit gives life is an assertion in unmistakable terms about what words can actually do. They can kill and make alive, they put to death the old and call the new to life in Christ. The art of distinguishing between law and gospel is simply the attempt to reclaim in the living present this active, sacramental functioning of the words for the preaching of the Church. The letter kills but the Spirit gives life, translates into the law kills, but the gospel gives life.” Gerhard Forde, “Preaching the Sacraments” *Bulletin* 64, no. 4 (1984): 5.

<sup>10</sup> “The doctrinal contents of the entire Holy Scriptures, both of the Old and the New Testament, are made up of two doctrines differing fundamentally from each other, viz., the Law and the Gospel.” Walther, *Law and Gospel*, 6. “The true points of difference between the Law and the Gospel are the following: 1. These two doctrines differ as regards the *manner of their being revealed* to man; 2. As regards their *contents*; 3. As regards the *promises* held out by either doctrine; 3. As regards their *threatnings*; 5. As regards the *function* and the *effect* of either doctrine; 6. As regards to the *persons* to whom either the one or the other doctrine must be preached.” Walther, *Law and Gospel*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> ““The law is a disciplinarian, toward Christ, so that we might be justified through faith” (Gal. 3[:24]) and therefore the law does not point and lead us “away from Christ” but “toward Christ,” who is the “end of the law” (Rom. 10[:4]).” SD V, 24; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 586.

trespassed God's will and that there is a consequence for that: eternal death. This threat functions to spiritually "kill" and "put to death" as people hear the declaration of God's holy standard.<sup>12</sup> For example, if there was anything in man that thought that he could get to God on the basis of his own works or efforts, this ideology is killed by God's Law. It leaves no hope for man except certain damnation. Because of their sinful nature, every person is a child of wrath and stands in active rebellion to God's will. Thus, when God's Word threatens condemnation for those opposed to His will, man is found guilty. Consequently, the accusing law of God serves to condemn man to spiritual and eternal death.

An illustration of this taking place is in the sermon of Peter. Peter is addressing the crowd and says to them in Acts 2: 22–23, 37:

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men ... Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart.

As this Word of God was heard, those who believed this threatening Word were cut to the heart. They understood and believed that they were being personally accused of wrongdoing—of committing murder—of regicide. They had killed the one who was their king. Hearing this Word brought condemnation and conviction and there was no escaping the truth other than to reject Peter's message entirely.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I have advocated that the conception of "trust" most closely adheres to a proper understanding of saving faith. With that being the case, this dissertation also acknowledges that threats require a level of "trust" in order to believe what is asserted and not all expressions of trust are saving faith. The kind of trust that responds to saving faith is a trust elicited by a gracious promise, whereas a trust that responds to a threat is that which fearfully believes that the threat is real.

<sup>13</sup> While the objective pronouncement always purports to do something (e.g. in this instance, it stood to condemn), it is subjectively appropriated in a variety of ways. In the example of Peter's sermon, there were a number of people who believed God's Word as Law and repented. However, there were also many who heard the Word and did not repent and who rejected the proclaimed Word.

A similar example of the Word of God going forth as law to condemn is in the Old Testament account of God's judgement on the people of Israel for their disobedience to enter the Promised Land. Moses recounts the words of the Lord:

Say to them, 'As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me ... When Moses told these words to all the people of Israel, the people mourned greatly. (Num. 14:28–29, 39)

Again, when God's Word of Law had gone forward, it asserted to do something: condemn. Consequently, by nature it served to elicit a response. For some, they hardened their hearts and rejected the message. However, for those who trusted the Word, the Word served to kill and break their hearts. They realized that they stood condemned by the holy God and there was no escape, causing them to "mourn greatly."

While this may seem "harsh" or "cruel" of God, this effect of the Word as "Law" is necessary to elicit faith. Without it, one is left wondering how God's good news even matters at all or why it is needed. In other words, the function of God's Word as gospel presupposes that the Word as law has had its effect and proclaimed to people their depravity. The Word of law sets the foundation for why the gospel is needed, desired, or hoped for. Therefore, it is the Word of law which allows the good news to make sense and to set the context for the Word of God as promise to be appropriate.

Thus, in sharp contrast to the Word of law stands this Word of promise. As Oswald Bayer writes, it is this Word of promise in which God gives Himself. He enters into an obligation. He commits to the hearer that what He says He will do. For Bayer, this is just the very essence and nature of what it means to promise. He writes: "What do I do when I say: 'I promise you...?'"

What happens when this is said or heard? I enter into an obligation.”<sup>14</sup>

There is nothing that man has done to force God to make such a declaration or to convince Him that this would be a good decision. This is not something that man could earn of God as a result of his good deeds or something that man could somehow buy from God. This promise of God’s Word is something that is simply the result of God’s choosing. God wanted to make a promise and He did. Furthermore, this Word of promise is not just some nicely spoken utterance—it is effectual. God does something through it. This is why “Luther came to understand the gospel as a performative, or as an “effective word.”<sup>15</sup>

Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, there are many times when God’s Word is seen in this way. God speaks and makes a commitment. He enters into an obligation. One of the clearest examples of this is in the promise that God makes to Abraham, where God makes a commitment to Abraham in the form of a promise.

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Gen 12:1–3)

In this one example with Abram, there are several promises made: (1) I will show you, (2) I will make you a great nation, (3) I will bless you, (4) I will make your name great, (5) you will be a blessing, (6) I will bless those who bless you, (7) I will curse him who dishonors you, and (8) in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Eight promises of God that He is committing Himself to adhere to!

This same commitment of God is seen later in the promise that God makes with His people

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<sup>14</sup> Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, 127.

<sup>15</sup> Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, 129.

Israel. He declares:

Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul. (Jer. 32:37–41)

Again, God is making several promises about what He has committed and obligated Himself to do. He would gather His people to Himself. He would make with them an everlasting covenant. God is not making hypothetical statements—He is making promises.

In coming into the New Testament, the promissory nature of God’s Word ultimately climaxes in the words of Christ. On many accounts, He would say things to His disciples like: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19), or “I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:4), or “Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19). Furthermore, these were good news promises that Jesus was making to His disciples in the name of God.

In connection with this, for those who live by faith, there is a recognition that God is in the position of authority to say such words and that He is trustworthy to fulfill what He says. This is the conviction of believers not only because they have seen God’s faithfulness in the past but because God also regularly reminded His people of this reality, such as: “I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips” (Ps. 89:34). Moreover, this was also the testimony of those who had a relationship with God. For examples, as the author of Hebrews writes, since “It is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us” (Heb. 6:18). Likewise, the apostle Paul writes: “In hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began”

(Titus 1:2).

For those who respond by trusting in God’s Word of promise, this is “faith by hearing.” This is the effectual result of God’s Word of promise – it has elicited a faith in the heart of the hearer that what God has said is His commitment. It is trusting that one’s sins are forgiven, that one is chosen, that one is invited into fellowship with God, and that one is righteous in the sight of God because He says so. Thus, faith is the taking of the promise of God as an object and staking one’s life on those promises.

### **An Effectual Word**

While the function of law and gospel serves to address *why* faith is elicited in the hearing of the Word, it is also essential for Lutherans to articulate *how* faith comes by hearing the Word. In considering “how” the theology of the Word correlates with faith, this understanding recognizes that the work of the Word is not just a saying, but an action.<sup>16</sup> What this means is that the promises of God’s Word do not merely inform people that their sins are forgiven. They actually forgive sin. They do not simply inform people that they are chosen. They choose them. This reality of the effectual nature of the word is sometimes alluded to as a *performative word*, meaning that the word spoken serves to perform an act—to bring something about.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, when promises are heard directly and not just explained, something can be

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<sup>16</sup> “The preacher of the gospel, according to Forde, not only explains the word of God, he *does* the word of God by the authority Christ gave his church. ‘The proclaimer must so announce the forgiveness to those gathered here and now as to amaze them by the audacity of it all. Perhaps they will even glorify God once again. The proclaimer must, on the authority of Jesus, have the guts to do it again in the living present always done once upon a time... To do the deed authorized, not merely explain the deeds of the past... The deed is to be done.’” Andréa D. Snavely, *Life in the Spirit: A Post-Constantinian and Trinitarian Account of the Christian Life* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2015), 133; Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 157.

<sup>17</sup> This is reflected in Oswald Bayer’s reflection on his Lutheran heritage: “Luther came to understand the gospel as a performative speech act, or as an “effective word,” as he called it.” Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, 129.

elicited—faith. The Word forgives sin, makes righteous, adopts, and ultimately elicits faith.<sup>18</sup>

The reason faith comes by hearing is that the Word has done a work to elicit a work in the lives of those who hear it.

The claim that the declaration of God’s Word actually “effects something” is substantiated by the clear testimony and principles of the Lutheran Confessions and of the Word of God. A key example of this is in the Word of God through the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. God declares:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Is. 55:10–11)

In taking God at His Word, one is forced to acknowledge that God’s Word does not return without some kind of effect. It is powerful to accomplish the purpose and will of God. Therefore, it is impossible for God’s Word not to elicit some kind of response when it is heard.<sup>19</sup>

Consequently, it is inconceivable that someone could merely sit under the proclamation of the Word of God without some effect taking place. Some kind of response is naturally required. One will either trust in God’s Word or will willfully reject it.<sup>20</sup>

A key illustration of this is Jesus’ parable of the sower. Jesus tells his disciples:

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<sup>18</sup> This dissertation acknowledges that there are times when someone can come to faith through hearing about what God has done. They can hear, “Your sins are forgiven” or “You are chosen by God,” but this is a transfer of information instead of an enactment. Thus, the hearer is left having to decipher the promises that stand behind the explanation.

<sup>19</sup> This dissertation would argue that the Word is spoken with the intent of being heard. Thus, in the instance of a private incantation or pronouncement, if not heard, does not have an object for that Word to go forth to.

<sup>20</sup> “Proclamation as primary discourse demands an answer in like discourse be it positive or negative: “I repent, I believe” or “I don’t, I won’t, I can’t.” In other words, when the proclamation announces, “I declare unto you the forgiveness of all your sins,” the appropriate response is not, “Well, that’s your opinion!” Perhaps the only thing the absolver could say to such irrelevancy would be, “No, that’s not my opinion. If I were to give my opinion about you it would likely be something else! We are not dealing with human opinion here, but with the Word of God!” Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 2.

A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. (Matt. 13:3–8)

In explaining the meaning of the parable to his disciples, Jesus took time to demonstrate that each of the different recipients of the seed (Which Jesus explains is the Word) had some kind of response to it:

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty. (Matt. 13:19–23)

Some did not understand it, some received it joyfully, some were apathetic toward it, and others heard it and understood it. However, in each instance, something happened when the Word was heard—there was a reaction. In this case, there were four completely different illustrations given by Jesus regarding the effect of the word upon those who heard it. It was not just a *saying*, but an *effectual act*.

This correlation of God’s Word being spoken but also “effecting something” should be no surprise, as it is a common theme throughout Scripture. In fact, on a number of occasions, God tells us that He works in conjunction with His Word. In the Old Testament, the testimony of this is heard in God’s dialogue with the prophet Jeremiah: “You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it” (Jer. 1:12). This theme is also repeated in the words of the prophet Ezekiel, as God states: “I am the Lord. I have spoken; it shall come to pass; I will do it” (Ezek.



24:14). In both examples, not only is the Word of God talked about as being a saying but God is working in conjunction with what is spoken to do something.

Therefore, one will see that there are several examples of God “effecting something” through His Word in both the Old and New Testament. In fact, in the very first verses of the Bible God is seen speaking and things are being done. Moses recounts: “And God said, “Let there be light, and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). The Word of God was not just a saying but an effectual act—God spoke and something took place. This working of God’s Word can also be seen in the New Testament in the incarnate Son of God who says things like: “Peace! Be still!” or “Lazarus, come forth!” In each case, what Jesus says is done. The wind ceased, and there was a great calm (Mark 4:39). Lazarus raises from the dead and comes forth out of the tomb (John 11:43–44).

Two particularly explicit examples of the Word of God “effecting something” can be seen in the instances of Jesus healing the centurion’s servant and the daughter of the Canaanite woman. In the story of the centurion’s servant, Matthew recounts:

When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.” And he said to him, “I will come and heal him.” But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed at that very moment. (Matt. 8:5–13)

In this example, the word of Jesus which was “said” also “did something”—it brought about an effectual healing. Jesus was not even present with the person who was sick. Instead, He only spoke the word and the servant was healed. This did not take minutes, hours, days, weeks, or

months. Instead, the healing was done “at that very moment” in which Jesus spoke the Word. A similar example can be seen in the story about Jesus healing the daughter of the Canaanite woman. Matthew states:

And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” And he answered, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly. (Matt. 15:21–28)

Again, the apostle records a miraculous healing that took place. Notably, Jesus was not even present with the daughter who was sick. Instead, he only spoke the word and it did something—the daughter was healed. In a similar fashion as the example with the centurion’s servant, the healing happened “instantly” when Jesus spoke the word.

Consequently, we see that when God’s Word declares to do something, it happens. When it declares forgiveness of sin, it is forgiven. When God’s Word declares election, someone is chosen. When God’s Word declares justification, someone is made right in the sight of God. These are all objective pronouncements of God’s Word. However, while that Word always “does something,” it is not always subjectively appropriated in the same manner. Not all people are deputized to proclaim words of healing. Not all people are commissioned to fulfill the office of holy ministry. Furthermore, while the Word always has an effect, it is not always the same effect. In a similar way to the parable of the sower, this word can be received in a number of different ways. Sometimes it is heard but misunderstood. Sometimes it is heard but avoided. Sometimes it is received, but is only trusted until trouble comes. Sometimes the declaration is rejected. Sometimes it elicits faith in the declaration.

In many ways, it is not a revolutionary idea that words do things when they are spoken. They cause a reaction. They elicit a response of some kind. They change the situation. Even in everyday speech we see this take place. When a husband promises his wife that he is going to take her out for a nice date when he comes home, such words cause a reaction and elicit a response. For the wife, she has heard a promise declared to her and it has filled the course of her day with excitement and hope. As another example, when a professor tells his student that she has failed an assignment and is unjustified in his sight, such words have an immediate consequence for the life of that student. A verdict has been given and the student breaks down crying. Therefore, one who hears a word is required in some way, shape, or form to have a response. They either have to accept the word spoken, reject it, or ignore it. However, when a word is heard, there is always something done and a response elicited.<sup>21</sup>

### **Declaration and Invitation**

In relationship with faith, this effectual nature of the Word can be recognized in two ways: (1) By hearing God's declaration and (2) by hearing God's invitation. First, in considering the correlation between faith and God's declaration, there is pronouncement of good news that comforts a heart distressed by sin. The comfort arises from an objective declaration that promises God's commitment to save and to forgive sins, such as: "I forgive you your sins" or "I choose you as a child of God." In describing the nature of these promises, Forde introduces the concept

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<sup>21</sup> From the acknowledgement of the work done in the philosophy of language, J. L. Austin writes: "When we issue any utterance whatsoever, are we not 'doing something'?" Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 92. John Searle picks up on this same thing in following Austin, writing, "Any utterance will consist in performing one or more illocutionary acts." Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, 18. "The primary evolutionary role of the mind is to relate us in certain ways to the environment, and especially to other people. My subjective states relate me to the rest of the world, and the general name of that relationship is 'intentionality.'" These subjective states include beliefs and desires, intentions and perceptions, as well as loves and hates, fears and hopes." Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 85.

of “proclamation,” defining it as the “Explicit declaration of the good news, the gospel, the kerygma.”<sup>22</sup> While this concept of proclamation is included in preaching, it is not synonymous with preaching as generally understood, as preaching can include a host of other things, such as teaching, edifying, and explaining.<sup>23</sup> Instead, proclamation is that which takes place any time there is a declaration of promise by God enacted to the believer. Consequently, while preaching can be a conduit of proclamation, it does not necessitate proclamation. Instead, proclamation is a certain mode of discourse of the declarative kind.

In an attempt to describe this, Forde writes: “Proclamation is present tense: I here and now give the gift to you, Christ himself, the body and blood of the Savior. I do it in both Word and sacrament. This is God’s present move, the current “mighty act” of the living God.”<sup>24</sup> This is the gospel proclaimed in both an *oral message* and through a *visible Word* in the sacraments. Without this Word of promise, man is left in the dark regarding what God thinks of him. His only hope is to be forgiven. According to Forde, this is exactly what the Word of promise does. It tells mankind: “I forgive you,” “I love you,” and “I choose you.” But, this Word of promise does not inform hearers about forgiveness, love, and election; it does it to them.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the Word of promise is not to be thought as a statement of man about God, or of God about man, but as an effectual promise of God which enacts a reality.<sup>26</sup>

In a spiritual context, man is hopeless without this word of promise. Having been slain by

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<sup>22</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 1–2.

<sup>24</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 2.

<sup>26</sup> “This ‘doing of the deed’ changes proclamation for merely the preacher’s own words into the words of God in the Spirit.” Snavely, *Life in the Spirit*, 133.

the Word of the law, man is spiritually dead. Furthermore, his will is so corrupt and bound to sin that he will not seek God or come to Him on his own merits.<sup>27</sup> Instead, he is left dead in his sins and the condemnation from the Word of law assures certain death. Without a word of promise from the Creator and Lord of all, man has only the prospect of being left damned for all eternity. The only thing that man can do is wait in expectation on a word from God which would bring life. Man is in need of God's unconditional forgiveness. His only hope is to wait on God's initiative—on a personal pardon and word of forgiveness from the Word from God which effects spiritual resurrection and makes alive. This recognition that the gospel promise of God brings spiritual life is the very core of the Lutheran Confessions and should come as no surprise.<sup>28</sup> In fact, the principle of the life-giving nature of the gospel is often identified as the very heart of the Reformation. This reality is also the continued witness of Scripture, that through the ministry of the gospel, God brings life and resurrection to those who are spiritually dead (Rom. 1:16–17, Eph. 2:4–5, Rom. 6:4).

When received, this declaration is unique in that it is not something that someone can remain neutral to or accept as a proposition. Instead, it “Demands an answer in like discourse be it positive or negative: “I repent, I believe” or “I don't, I won't, I can't.”<sup>29</sup> For when God addresses someone personally, declaring a promise, a response is required. It is impossible to ignore a pronouncement. One either trusts that it is true or rejects it. The reason for this

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<sup>27</sup> See Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 33 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999).

<sup>28</sup> “For everything that provides comfort—everything that offers the favor and grace of God to those who have transgressed the law—is and is called the gospel in the strict sense. It is good news, joyous news, that God does not want to punish sin but to forgive it for Christ's sake.” SD V, 21; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 585. “This gospel proclaims that through Christ God forgives all the sins of those who believe the gospel, accepts them for Christ's sake as his children out of sheer grace without any merit of their own, and makes them righteous and saves them.” SD V, 25; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 586.

<sup>29</sup> See Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 2.

requirement is that the declaration of God is spoken with the intent to effect something in the life of the hearer. It is spoken to change the present reality and to bring about a new fact of life. One is therefore forced into life in those terms or to reject it. Therefore, when the declaration is made: “I forgive you your sins” or “I choose you as a child of God” a promise has been given which elicits an immediate response. For some, this personal promise serves to elicit faith—faith in the commitment made and in the One who is making the commitment. For others, this promise is despised and rejected.

In addition to the work and function of God’s Word of declaration, another type of word which can serve to elicit faith is God’s Word of invitation. While it is not a word which justifies, it is a word which subjectively appropriates the declarations of God to an individual. As an example of this, Edward Engelbrecht comments on the invitation of Christ to “Follow me” in the footnotes for the Lutheran Study Bible, stating: “*Follow Me*. Christ’s powerful call makes Philip His follower and an apostle.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore, in this example, not only is Christ’s statement serving as an invitation but it is also a performative word.

Invitations function in this way, similarly to God’s Word of declaration, because invitations are seen to have a promissory character and call for a trust in that promise. From the speaker’s perspective, they are committing themselves to *something*. From the perspective of the listener, they are being invited to *something*. Thus, in an invitation, there is always a form of commitment which is either explicitly or implicitly connected to the invitation itself. As an example of a promise explicitly attached to an invitation, Paul says: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). In this instance, the invitation is to “believe” and the promise attached is “you will be saved.” In like manner, Jesus invites his own disciples, saying: “Follow me, and I

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<sup>30</sup> Edward A. Engelbrecht ed., *Lutheran Study Bible*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009), 1779.

will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). For the disciples, the invitation was “Follow me” and the explicit promise was “I will make you fishers of men.” In these examples, the promise that relates to the invitation is unmistakably given.

However, there are other times when a promise is not stated so explicitly, but is understood implicitly. This often takes place because of an understanding of who the one is who is giving the invitation or because of what has been explicitly said elsewhere regarding that invitation.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, while the invitation at times may seem disconnected from any “promise,” there still remains an implicit promise which can be trusted by the one receiving the invitation. Consequently, one sees that even in the times when Jesus invites his disciples only saying, “Follow me,” the disciple still leaves everything and trusts in the one calling them.<sup>32</sup>

It is for this reason that when we see invitations given in the Bible, faith can be seen to be elicited. People receive the promises of God and they trust in them. The disciples follow Jesus. The Philippian jailer and his household believe. This is not such a revolutionary idea, as we witness this on a regular basis. For example, when people are invited to come over to someone’s house, they trust in the implicit promise that there is a place for them to go where they are welcome. Or, there are often explicit promises attached to invitations, such as: “Come, we’ll get some ice cream.”

While this may seem straightforward, there is confusion regarding the nature of an

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<sup>31</sup> At times, the promise is given implicitly through the invitation because of what has been said in context to that invitation. Jesus talks about what it means to follow Him, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” Jn. 8:12. In analyzing this passage, Luther concludes that this refers to nothing less than being in a right relationship with the Lord. He writes: “For whatever heart Christ enlightens with His brightness, that man is righteous before God for the sake of the Sun, and as long as he remains under the wings of this Sun he is saved” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 12: Selected Psalms I*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 12 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 122.

<sup>32</sup> “As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he rose and followed him” (Matt. 9:9).

invitation and its relationship with faith. Some believe that the invitation of God is really a “law” or a “demand.” After all, they are presented in the imperative mood, such as “follow me” or “believe.” People who make such objections even view themselves as trying to be faithful Lutherans. Some even point to Walther’s *Law and Gospel*, where he states: “In the ninth place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when one makes an appeal to believe in a manner as if a person could make himself believe or at least help towards that end, instead of preaching faith into a person’s heart by laying the Gospel promises before him.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, any invitation is often perceived as synergistic or contradictory to the gospel promises. It appears to be a statement of law, not gospel.

However, for those who continue in their reading of Walther, they will find that he states:

This thesis does not score as an error the demand on the part of the pastor, be it ever so urgent, that his hearers believe the Gospel. That demand has been made by all the prophets, all the apostles, i.e. by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. When demanding faith, we do not lay down a demand of the Law, but issue the sweetest invitation, practically saying to our hearers: “Come; for all things are now ready.” Luke 14,17.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, as Walther concludes, “The demand to believe is to be understood not as an order of the Law, but as an invitation of the Gospel.”<sup>35</sup> Although it presents itself in a form of a demand, it is what is instead often referred to as a “gospel imperative.”<sup>36</sup> It is a call to receive the good news.

Therefore, it is these words of invitation which also function to elicit faith in those who hear them. While they are not words which justify, they are words which subjectively appropriate the declarations of God to an individual. Consequently, such invitations actually

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<sup>33</sup> Walther, *Law and Gospel*, 260.

<sup>34</sup> Walther, *Law and Gospel*, 260.

<sup>35</sup> Walther, *Law and Gospel*, 260.

<sup>36</sup> Sol Jacob, “Responding to the Gospel Imperative,” *International Review of Mission* 69, no. 276–77 (1980–1981): 451–66, accessed October 6, 2017, <https://cs1.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0000781108&site=eds-live>.



function to do something—to elicit faith—as they extend the promises of God in a personal and tangible manner.

### The Means of the Word Going Forth

So, how are these words of promise conveyed? How are they “done to people?” In making a promise, God always does so in a very specific manner: through means of the proclaimed Word, either “oral” or “visible.” In writing about this, Bayer states:

God promises and gives himself “in the external word” with Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, as well as with every baptismal and Eucharistic sermon. In this encounter, in which we received the promise of the forgiveness of sins, we sinners are created anew and have our permanent identity outside ourselves, in another, who is alien to us and who has taken our place in a wonderful exchange, where human sin is exchanged for divine righteousness.”<sup>37</sup>

Whether it be through the sacraments or the preaching, the promise of God’s Word goes forth either way. Therefore, such promises of God were not only enacted thousands of years ago but they are still enacted today—on a weekly basis. So, for those who wonder if God still works or speaks today, one need not look further than the local congregation which faithfully proclaims God’s Word and administers the sacraments. Therefore, as a parish pastor gives his message week after week, as believers proclaim the good news of the gospel to one another, as baptisms take place, as absolution is given, and as the Lord’s Supper is administered, God’s Word of promise is enacted.<sup>38</sup> Through the proclamation of absolution, God is proclaiming forgiveness to sinners. Through the administration of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, God is adopting children and bringing men and women into fellowship with Himself. This principally centers on the

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<sup>37</sup> Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, 103.

<sup>38</sup> “We now want to return to the gospel, which gives guidance and help against sin in more than one way, because God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word, in which the forgiveness of sins is preached to the whole world (which is the proper function of the gospel); second, through baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters.” SC III, 4; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 319.

invitation and declaration of God's Word, as it is in its declaration that God is making promises and in its invitation that people are called to fellowship with Him. This ultimately works to elicit faith in the lives of those who hear God's Word.

This awareness need not come as such a surprise, as this is the very straightforward observation of the Lutheran Confessions and biblical witness, as AC V states: "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments."<sup>39</sup> In other words, God has specifically chosen how to effect faith in the lives of people: (1) Through oral proclamation in preaching and absolution and (2) through the "visible Word" bestowed in the sacraments. The goal for both is one and the same: that faith would come by hearing.

Unfortunately, so often in the Church there is an overt focus on the nuances involved in the process of the Word going forth that it distracts from the focus of hearing the promise. "Is the baptismal mount filled with cold or lukewarm water?" "Are the congregants kneeling or standing?" "Are we using an individual or a common cup?" "Has the communicant been through two years of confirmation or three?" While some may feel that these ritual aspects of the Word going forth are important to discuss, it is essential that the purpose of the Word going forth is not overlooked. The function of God's Word going forth through oral or "visible" proclamation is that faith would be elicited.

### **The Oral Word in Preaching and Absolution**

First and foremost, the promise of God's Word is proclaimed orally through means of the proclamation of His Word and in the words of absolution. In these acts, the promises of God are declared and enacted with the deputized authority of God Himself.<sup>40</sup> At first this might shock

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<sup>39</sup> AC V, 1; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 40.

<sup>40</sup> See Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 38.

some Christians, as the pastor and congregants are just people. Nevertheless, they are individuals who have been commissioned by God to speak on His behalf as an ambassador of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20). Consequently, they enact promises in the place of God and with His authority.<sup>41</sup> They forgive and make declarations of grace, promising to people that they are righteous in the eyes of God and pronouncing that their sins have been forgiven.

This observation is a core Lutheran understanding. In looking to the Book of Concord, Smalkald III, Article VIII, states: “In these matters, which concern the spoken, external Word, it must be firmly maintained that God gives no one his Spirit or grace apart from the external Word which goes before.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, in the mind of the Lutheran reformers, it is the spoken Word of God which is God’s exclusive means by which He gives His grace. This respect and reverence for the spoken Word of God is in recognition the One who is speaking. It is not man, but God Himself making a declaration.<sup>43</sup>

This is not to diminish the authority or value of the written Word in any way. The written Word is that which is the source of all preaching and admonishing. It is the accurate testimony of the life of Christ and what He said and did. In addressing this distinction between the spoken and written word, Uraas Saarnivaara states: “Luther did not see any conflict between his conviction

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<sup>41</sup> Preaching the text is doing the text to the hearers. Doing the text, not merely explaining it (though that will be involved), not merely exegeting the text (though that is presupposed and indispensable), not merely describing or prescribing what Christians are supposed to do (though that will no doubt result.) Preaching in a sacramental fashion is doing to the hearers what the text authorizes you to do to them.” Gerhard Forde, “Preaching the Sacraments” *Bulletin* 64, no. 4 (1984): 5.

<sup>42</sup> SA III, art. VIII, 3; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 322.

<sup>43</sup> In his sermon on the gospel of John, Luther explicitly makes mention of this, stating: “When a lowly pastor comforts me, then I must be discerning enough to say: “It is not you who is speaking to me. The voice is yours indeed, but it is really God who is speaking through you.” The word that you hear is not that of a pastor; it is God’s Word. And since it is God’s Word, you should be excited and happy over it.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 22: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1–4*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 22 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 508–9.

that Scripture is the normative word of God, and that God bestows His grace and forgives sins by means of the spoken word and sacraments. All preaching and administration of sacraments have their source in the written word of God and must take place according to it.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, the authority and basis for all doctrine and ministry is found in the Scriptures. It is the source of all proclamation and is the content of the proclamation. It is this written Word which the Christian is therefore called to proclaim, effecting the message of good news of Jesus and applying the promises of God to the hearer.

As an example of this oral proclamation, Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts chapter 8 is illuminating. In this encounter, the eunuch is reading through the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. However, he does not understand what he is reading. When the Lord directs Philip to him, “Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:30–31) What was Philip’s response to the eunuch’s inability to understand? Did Philip just encourage the eunuch to just keep reading more and tell him it would all make sense? No. Instead, “Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35). He then applied the promises of God to this man through baptism (Acts 8:38). Thus, while the written Word is authoritative, inspired and inerrant, the Word of promise is one which needs to be told, pronounced, declared, and applied. It is in this declaration and pronouncement, when the gospel is applied, that faith is elicited in the life of the one hearing.

### **The “Visible Word” in the Sacraments**

In addition to the oral declaration of the Word as promise, God’s Word as promise is also

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<sup>44</sup> Uuraas Saarnivaara, “Written and Spoken Word,” *The Lutheran Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1950): 169.

presented visibly in the administration of the sacraments. Although it may seem as if the congregation is only being led in a ceremony, a declaration and invitation is being made to God's people—declaring them to be adopted children and inviting them to “Take and eat” and “Drink of it all of you.” It is a call for faith.

At this point, it is certainly fair to ask how God makes such promises through these acts. No promise appears to be explicitly spoken or appropriated. Therefore, how is God promising that people are righteous before Him, forgiven, and adopted as His children through these ritual acts? This understanding, while at first confusing, comes through the reconceptualization of the nature of the sacraments. Instead of viewing the sacraments only as a ritualistic act, the sacraments should instead be thought of as a “visible Word.” While this is not a foreign concept to the Lutheran Church by any means, it has certainly been one in which there has been much confusion. In our rationalistic era, it certainly seems quite absurd to think of a spoken declaration being made without words. Furthermore, with the infiltration of Baptist or Reformed dogma into the Lutheran Church, the sacraments are often misunderstood as simple initiation rites into the Church. However, that is not how the Lutheran Confessions speak about the sacraments. Instead, regarding the reality of the sacraments serving as a “Visible Word,” Ap. XIII states:

And God moves our hearts through the word and the rite at the same time so that they believe and receive faith just as Paul says, “So faith comes from what is heard.” For just as the Word enters through the ear in order to strike the heart, so also the rite enters through the eye in order to move the heart. The word and the rite have the same effect. Augustine put it well when he said that the sacrament is a “visible word,” because the rite is received by the eyes and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore both have the same effect.<sup>45</sup>

In other words, the sacraments of God operate as a picture of the declared Word of God. They

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<sup>45</sup> See Augustine, *Tractates on John* LXXX, 3 (on John 15:3; MPL 35:1840, *NPNF*, ser. 1, 7:344); Ap. XIII, 5; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 219–20.

are a sign for what is being spoken and declared in that instance regarding the participant. For example, Paul says that in baptism the sacramental ritual of an individual being immersed with water in the name of the Triune God serves as a visible picture of the declared promise that the baptized is united in burial with Christ and rises again in Him.<sup>46</sup> In addition, Paul also mentions that in baptism, there is the visible picture of the declared promise that the baptized is being clothed with Christ.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, in baptism, a visible Word is proclaimed: “You are the righteous child of God.” As another example, in the Lord’s Supper, a visible picture of the promise is given as the believer is invited to receive the body and blood of Christ.<sup>48</sup> In this, the promise is made: “You are invited to be part of the body of Christ.” This promise is always personal, effectual, and *pro te*.<sup>49</sup>

Man does not do something to “make these sacraments something” nor do the sacraments do something *ex opere operato*. Instead, they are God’s promise—His “visible” Word to be trusted in. The importance of this realization is that it serves to localize very concretely the nature of the Word of God and a moment in time when that Word is trusted. For in the sacraments it is not only an act or a sign but it is God’s Word of promise to the believer to

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<sup>46</sup> “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rom. 6:3–5).

<sup>47</sup> “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” Gal. 3:27.

<sup>48</sup> Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:26–28).

<sup>49</sup> A sacrament is an action in which the Word of God does something to us through the earthly sign. It is an action in which God gets through to us in a concrete way. In a sense, one can say that the proclamation of the divine promise through the Word is general; it is spoken to everyone in general and no one in particular. But a sacrament is particular. It has your name on it. Your body is washed with water; the hand is placed on your head; the bread is placed on your lips and the wine poured into your mouth. The sacraments are God’s ways of saying: “Here, the promise is for you.” Gerhard Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 72.

declare righteous and invite into fellowship with God. In these acts, God's hidden will is revealed. In his promises He makes a commitment and enters into an obligation. These concrete events which enact God's promise consequently serve to elicit faith in the life of the one who hears that Word at that instant. Thus, when someone is doubting their salvation or is confused about what God thinks about them, they can look back at a concrete event. In baptism, God has promised that He has elected them. In the Lord's Supper, God has promised His invitation to perfect fellowship with Him and to the forgiveness of their sins.

### **Understanding Faith in Light of a Theology of the Word**

So, what kind of understanding of faith is coherent with the nature and presentation of the Word of God? In light of the previous discussion, this dissertation asserts that faith is the active response to the promise of the Word of God presented by means of invitation or declaration. Whether this be as a result of the oral declaration of that promise made through preaching and absolution or through the visible invitation of that promise made through the administration of the sacraments, faith is elicited by the promise of the Word of God. However, although faith is elicited by God's work and His initiative, it is not to be thought of as being completely unengaged. Instead, faith is still an active response to God's declaration and invitation.<sup>50</sup> Words are heard and believed and hearing and believing is something that people do.

Nevertheless, as straightforward as this may sound, there are still many within the Lutheran Church who are confused about the nature of faith. As was mentioned before, Pieper outlines several other ways that faith is regularly conceived of in the Lutheran Church. This serves to

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<sup>50</sup> Lutheran dogmaticians have given this formulation: Faith may be called a work if the word is not used in the specific sense, signifying a work commanded by the Law, but in a general or wider sense, signifying a movement, an activity, in the intellect and will of man. It is not the Holy Ghost, but man who believes through the operation of the Holy Ghost." Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2: 422.

illustrate that there are in fact many different understandings regarding “justification” and its relation to “faith.” Instead of faith being understood as that which is both elicited by the promise of God and is the active response of man, some view faith as (1) the propositional transmission of information, (2) an intellectual assent, (3) presumption, (4) the sanative work of Christ “in us,” or (5) as a merit based reward.<sup>51</sup> These are all very different understandings of faith and are each reflective within Lutheranism in one shape or form. In each of these perspectives, Lutherans place an emphasis on either the passive or active nature of faith to the exclusion of the other. However, such views do not accurately reflect a proper understanding of the nature of faith.

In considering day-to-day living, this assertion becomes readily apparent. A husband tells his wife that he is going to be home at 6:00 p.m. to meet her for dinner. In making this declaration, he is making a promise to his spouse. It is clear and concrete. He is committing and obligating himself to be home at a certain time and meet her for dinner. This kind of

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<sup>51</sup>Things have come to such a pass within external Christendom that the confession: ‘I believe in Christ,’ means very little, since different meanings are attached to these words. Some hold that faith, as far as it saves, has as its object the entire Word of God, including the Law, while others teach, with Scripture, that the sole object of faith, as far as it justifies, is the Gospel and that willing obedience to the Law is not the cause, but the effect of justification. Some describe faith as a mere intellectual knowledge of Christ, which also the wicked, the adulterers, and thieves and other gross sinners may have, or as even a blind trust in what the Church believes without knowing what this belief is (*fides carbonaria*); while others maintain the Scriptural teaching that faith is a knowledge of Christ coupled with trust (*fiducia cordis*) in the forgiveness of sins merited by Christ and that this faith is never found in secure hearts, but only in such hearts as are terrified because of their sins. Some forbid the sinner to apply the forgiveness of sins to himself, describing such faith as presumption (*praesumptio*), while others teach that according to Gods’ will justifying faith is always personal faith, *fides specialis*. Some imagine that it is “Christ in us,” the new life which He creates in us through the Holy Ghost, which gives to faith its justifying quality, while others teach that the object of justifying faith is “Christ outside us,” or the promise of the Gospel, and that faith therefore always actually lays hold of Christ (*fides actualis*), craving and desiring His grace, the forgiveness of sins (*velle gratiam, velle accipere gratiam, desiderium gratiae*). Some describe justifying faith as a virtuous act, moral conduct, correct behavior (self-determination, self-decision, etc.), while others teach that faith does not come into consideration as a good quality or virtue or compliance with the Law, but that it justifies solely as an instrument, or organ. Some describe faith as the conscious acceptance of the grace of God, while others teach that a man may have faith without being conscious of it. Some hold that a person may apply the forgiveness of sins to himself only when he has ascertained that he has faith, while others teach that justifying faith does not rely on faith itself, but directly on Christ, or the forgiveness of sins offered in the Gospel. Some insist that faith is produced by “historical impressions” rather than by the Word of the Gospel, while others teach that all that we need to know for our salvation is fully set forth in Scripture and that it is sinful “enthusiasm” which directs faith to look beyond God’s Word and promise. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2: 422–23.



pronouncement necessarily calls for an elicited reaction on the part of the wife: *faith*. It calls for her to trust in what her husband is promising and to plan to meet with him accordingly.

Consequently, it is foolish to think that she has no response whatsoever. Instead, she is forced to consider life in terms of what has been promised to her—to either believe her husband by faith or to reject his commitment to her. She cannot remain passive to this promise or have “no response.” Instead, choosing to have “no response” is to truly have a response: Apathy or rejection of the commitment. Additionally, the promise of the husband is that which by nature calls for a reaction on the part of the spouse. He cannot force her to meet him for dinner or come to dinner for her. However, it is the intent and purpose of his commitment that it would elicit this active response in her: faith.

Therefore, in an attempt to have a proper understanding of faith, it is important to realize its passive and active components. On the one hand, faith is a response. Something has to be given or spoken in order for faith to reach out and lay hold of it. Thus, in the sense that there has to be some form of initiation, faith is passive in nature. Something from the outside is taking place which elicits this response. However, at the same time, faith takes an object. A promise or commitment given does not receive itself. Instead, it demands someone to believe it. In this sense, faith is active in nature.

As we consider how the Scriptures themselves speak about faith, we see both of these components represented. In letting the Scriptures speak for themselves, there is the understanding that faith is elicited by the promise of God which comes at His initiation and that faith is still an active response and subjective appropriation of this promise. One sees a key example of this in the life of Abraham. Abraham receives the promise of God that He is going to become the father of many nations and is going to be blessed by God (Gen. 12:1–3). What did

Abraham do to deserve this promise of God? Nothing. Abraham was no one special. In fact, Abraham sins and makes bad decisions on a number of occasions. However, God continues to come to Abraham of God's own initiative and make this promise to him. Consequently, any faith that Abraham has is passive. It is God's work which has brought this about. At the same time, God does not do the believing for Abraham or on his behalf. Instead, faith is elicited in the life of Abraham and he trusts in what God had declared (Rom. 4:13–22). This is the active faith of Abraham.

This kind of active response of faith or subjective appropriation of God's promise is also seen in the encounter of Paul and Silas with the Philippian jailer. The jailer asks them: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30) Interesting, Paul does not stop him there and rebuke him. Paul does not say, "Well actually, you can do nothing" or "Your faith is to be a complete inactivity." Instead, Paul says: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). This is a call for an active response on the part of the jailer. Another key example of this is the example of Christ with Martha in John 11. In proclaiming the good news to her of who he was, he then asks the very pointed question: "Do you believe this?" (John 11:26) Is this a call to inactivity? Is Jesus a synergist? Certainly not. This is a call for a recognized response to God's Word of promise and a subjective appropriation of that promise.

This dualistic nature of faith, that faith is both passive and active, which acknowledges both the initiative of God, as well as the subjective appropriation of the promise, should come as no surprise to the Lutheran reader. Although some may be concerned and wonder if one can really be a Lutheran and believe in the active and passive nature of faith, Francis Pieper stands as a clear Lutheran voice on the matter and strives to set forth this balanced recognition. He writes:

The question here arises whether faith is to be regarded as an active or a passive apprehension. We may say in reply that faith is an active apprehension in so far as it apprehends its object, Christ, or the forgiveness offered in the Gospel. It may be called a passive apprehension...in so far as this apprehending is not effected through human co-operation, but solely through God's operation. It would be wrong to place active and passive apprehension in opposition to each other, for faith is both active and passive, in the sense indicated. One who denies the "active apprehending," ... denies the very thing which unites faith with its justifying object, the object lying outside man, namely, the Gospel promise. He finds the justifying factor in faith itself, as a quality in man, or even in faith in so far as it receives the operations of grace. He has crossed over into Roman territory. He who denies the "passive" apprehension, when the *causa efficiens* of the apprehending comes into question, teaches synergism.<sup>52</sup>

As Pieper articulates well, to say that faith is active is to say that faith takes an object. It responds to something. It "does" something. However, it is also passive as this reaction is not brought about by human efforts or merits. It is only by God's grace alone and by His working that faith is elicited.

Although Pieper is clear in emphasizing this dualistic nature of faith, it is not surprising that many Lutherans are afraid to think about faith as having both an active and passive nature. For many, holding to both of these propositions seems like a contradiction and too incongruent to comprehend. For those who are able to recognize that this is indeed a realistic tension, they are exactly right. However, this, like many other theological truths from Scripture,<sup>53</sup> is one of the great paradoxes of Christianity. Faith has both an active and passive component. While some often attempt to emphasize one aspect over another, they are *both* dynamics of saving faith.

This reality of faith working to actively take something as an object is also illustrated from modern philosophy of language. In writing about the role of the "self" to respond to speech acts

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<sup>52</sup> Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2: 437.

<sup>53</sup> Other common theological paradoxes are the Trinity (God as Three, yet One), Christology (Christ as fully man and fully God—two natures in one person), and the nature of a Christian (Simultaneously saint and sinner).

or word pronouncements, John Searle theorizes that with a proper understanding of intentional mental states, the hearer is directed to the one speaking and that what is said is taken as one's object.<sup>54</sup> It is this intentionality, Searle writes, which necessarily responds to word pronouncements particularly. In other words, whenever there is a speech act or word event, one should expect to see people intentionally put themselves in relation to it.<sup>55</sup>

In relating this theory to the reality of God's declarative promise, it is therefore faith which serves as an intentional state and takes the justifying promise of God as its object. Thus, when God's promise is enacted, either through the oral proclamation or through the "visible Word" of the sacraments, it is received intentionally, "by faith." Such promises cannot be ignored or avoided. Instead, there has to be a reaction to them, either positively or negatively. For those who reject the promises, there is unbelief and condemnation. However, for those who have faith in the promise, there is life and salvation.

Therefore, this chapter sets forward the understanding that faith is indeed the active response to the "hearing" of the promises of God. This proclaimed Word comes to man either orally or "visibly" and he intentionally responds to such promises. While there is a healthy caution in setting forth such a formal understanding of faith,<sup>56</sup> this inductive analysis has strived to set forth a certain way of thinking about faith which stands in congruence with a proper understanding of the theology of the Word as promise.

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<sup>54</sup> Searle, *Intentionality*, 1.

<sup>55</sup> "The primary evolutionary role of the mind is to relate us in certain ways to the environment, and especially to other people. My subjective states relate me to the rest of the world, and the general name of that relationship is "intentionality." These subjective states include beliefs and desires, intentions and perceptions, as well as loves and hates, fears and hopes." Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 85.

<sup>56</sup> "It is always dangerous to attempt to describe faith or the life of faith too directly or extensively, for at least a couple of reasons. First, it usually turns out to be too much like locker-room bragging about sexual prowess and like exploits. It does little good other than to make the hearers envious or despairing ... Second, it leads to the persistent temptation on the part of the preacher to preach a description." Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 137.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PNEMATOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

#### Introduction

What is saving faith? I have been tracing out a systematic answer to this question, aiming not only to give and insist upon a particular definition, but primarily to show how to use the word properly, clearly, and consistently in all situations. The reason is, as I have already discussed, that Christians are confused when they answer this question about faith, and they show themselves confused about saving faith in the ways they teach and live.

This means showing how to use the word both for various theological purposes and in various practical situations. To do this, I have been trying to show how the concept of faith as “trust” coheres with a larger theological framework. The first topic was justification, because justification by faith is a pivotal claim both for the body of doctrine and for practice in the ministry. I started with the understanding that justification is God’s declaration which makes someone right with Himself. He does this through a word or sign which is both forensic and effectual. Therefore, when God declares “I forgive your sins” or “I choose you,” God has committed Himself to what has been said. It is a declaration in which God enacts a promise. When this takes place, faith is elicited as a trust in this declaration and in the God who commits Himself to what is said. The second topic followed logically from this: the Word of God. I argued that a proper framework for understanding faith is one which stands in relation to a theology of the Word: “Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). I asserted the notion that “faith comes by hearing” is one which recognizes the

function of the Word to condemn and promise new life, which accounts for the objective nature of God's promise in His Word of declaration and considers the subjective appropriation of that promise through invitation. In light of this understanding, the intent of the Word is that it would be trusted and would affect a new reality: *faith*. It is powerful to do this because it is something God has committed Himself to—His Word of promise.

In this chapter, I look at the role of the Holy Spirit's work in connection to faith. When we come to the role of the Holy Spirit, this is not a different aspect of faith being discussed but a deepening of what has already been discussed regarding faith. As has been previously mentioned, justification is a word event and faith is elicited by God's Word of declaration and invitation. In this chapter the aim is to express how the Holy Spirit as the agent uses this Word as His means of grace to elicit faith in the lives of those justified.

For Lutherans, this recognition of the Spirit's work to elicit faith is encapsulated by Luther's answer to the meaning of the Third Article of the Creed, "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my LORD or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel."<sup>1</sup> In this statement, saving faith is seen to be elicited by means of the Word and through the agency of the Spirit. The Word is not working independently of the Spirit and the Spirit is not working independently of the Word. Instead, both are working in harmony in order to elicit faith in the life of the believer.

The recognition of this harmony is what keeps Christian ministry from an over-emphasis of

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<sup>1</sup> "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers. On the Last Day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true." SC, II, 6; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 355–56.

one perspective at the expense of the other. On the one hand, this unity of the Spirit's use of the Word keeps ministry from being merely incantatory, whereby faith would be necessarily elicited every time the Word is spoken. This harmony also keeps Christian ministry from becoming overly "enthusiastic," whereby the Spirit would be able to do a work of salvation without the means of the Word. Instead, both the Word and the work of the Spirit are held together and both viewed as necessary for the creation of faith.

While this may seem like a simple balance, it is often upset in the life of the Church. This is often done without malicious intent, but occurs when either the means of the Word or the agency of the Spirit are overemphasized. For those who stress the Spirit's ability, this often results in a devaluation of the use of the Word. For those who focus on the use of the Word, the Spirit can be seemingly viewed as a mere instrument of the Word which is bound by the will of man and operates at calculated times and events. In light of this reality, this chapter will seek to show that this harmony between the role of the Spirit and the Word must persist in order to have a proper understanding of saving faith. This chapter will also show that when the promise from God's Word goes out as the chief means of grace to those justified, it is only received or trusted (that is, fulfilled) when and where the Spirit wills.<sup>2</sup> Lastly, in assessing the connection between the Spirit and "faith," this chapter will show that the Spirit works through the ministry of His Church to declare His Word with the intent to condemn and bring spiritual resurrection. This takes place through the deputized discourse of believers who declare the moral law of God followed by His promises.

Thus, in the preaching of the minister, the administration of the sacraments, or in the evangelism of the parishioners the Holy Spirit is at work to use God's Word through "means" to

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<sup>2</sup> See Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator, Luther's Concept of the Holy Spirit*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1953).

convict people of sin and proclaim to them the gospel. When this Word goes forth, it makes declarations and commitments. Such declarations actually serve to enact certain realities and obligate God to a certain response. It is not just a *saying*, it is an *effectual act*. It is this declaratory Word which then elicits faith in the heart of man.

### Current Confusion

While this understanding of how the Holy Spirit works through the Word might seem clear and straightforward, there remains confusion in the Church regarding the role and working of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> Although it is generally observed that there are Lutherans who will say “I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my LORD or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel...” this is just a common platitude.<sup>4</sup> For even though the right words are often spoken by believers in the Lutheran Church, there are often different presuppositions or understandings behind the words which are said.<sup>5</sup>

One such understanding falls under the category of what Sánchez refers to as “Spirit Void” theology. He writes:

We buy into a practical atheism of the Third Person, for instance, when we begin to see the Divine Service through the eyes of reason more than through the eyes of faith. This happens when pastors and laity begin to see the Divine Service mainly in terms of a formal or routine exercise or work where one sort of “goes through the motions and rites,” and if everything is properly done, almost as cause and effect, then one might possibly or even necessarily expect to get from God something out of the

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<sup>3</sup> “As the charismatic movement continues to grow, questions are arising regarding the validity of experiences being reported within the church today such as miracles of healing, speaking in tongues, exorcism, and prophecy.” *“The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement: Guidelines for Congregations and Pastors,”* A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), 3.

<sup>4</sup> SC II, 6; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 355–56.

<sup>5</sup> See Martha E. Stortz, “Let the Spirit Come: Lutheran Interpretation of the Holy Spirit,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 31, no. 3–4 (1986), accessed September 7, 2017, <https://csl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0000971717&site=eds-live>



service. We begin to think and act as if we were in the driver's seat so that things necessarily have to happen for us. As a result, we take the Holy Spirit out of the driver's seat and forget that it is the Spirit of the Father and the Son who alone comes down to us freely and out of love, and never because He is bound by some necessity or cause-and-effect logical arrangement.<sup>6</sup>

Andréa Snavelly asserts that this attitude is characteristic of much of Western theology which purports a “Distorted view of the Spirit in which a Christian remains in control of their own life.”<sup>7</sup>

Still others in the Church fall into the trap of thinking that the Holy Spirit Himself is able to do a work outside of the means of the Word and call people to believe.<sup>8</sup> In writing about this phenomenon, Sánchez refers to this movement as the “Spirit only” perspective. He writes:

In short, a “Spirit only” theology is one that disconnects the Spirit from Christ and the Father—in other words, a nontrinitarian approach to pneumatology—easily will lead to serious theological and pastoral problems. It will drive the person to seek God and be more spiritual apart from God's external Word, His commandment and absolution. Such moves will lead us to seek the Spirit inwardly in our own works rather than outwardly in the Father's commandments, the Son's forgiveness, and service to our neighbor through ordinary tasks.<sup>9</sup>

Historically, this has been reflective in the “enthusiast” movements within Lutheranism as some have advocated that the Holy Spirit works through dreams, visions or His prevenient grace to bring salvation *extra Verbum*, outside of the Word.<sup>10</sup> In this understanding, the means of the

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<sup>6</sup> Sánchez, “Pneumatology,” 127.

<sup>7</sup> Andréa D. Snavelly, *Life in the Spirit: A Post-Constantinian and Trinitarian Account of the Christian Life* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2015), 2.

<sup>8</sup> “In our day and age, we find people who want to be “spiritual” without being religious or going to church, which typically means being spiritual without being begotten and shaped by God's Word, being spiritual without being convicted of one's sins and without receiving the forgiveness of one's sins. But Christians too can fall into the idea that they should seek to be more spiritual by having a more intense personal experience of God's grace or power, or by making a greater commitment to move beyond ordinary life tasks to greater works. Apart from the Word, however, such moves will lead to an unhealthy search for individual holiness to justify one's value before God or to self-designed works that undermine doing what God has already given us to do for our neighbors in the context of our everyday callings.” Sánchez, “Pneumatology,” 126.

<sup>9</sup> Sánchez, “Pneumatology,” 127.

<sup>10</sup> “Likewise, we also reject and condemn the error of the Enthusiasts, who contrive the idea that God draws

Word of God is often “valued,” but is just not seen as absolutely necessary or may be even considered inferior to the direct work of the Spirit.

Both “Spirit Void” and “Spirit Only” positions result in problematic understandings of saving faith. For those who would emphasize the human reception, pastors and Church leaders often appeal to the reason of man and emphasize a Rational Assent. Instead of good news being proclaimed and faith called for, a position is advanced and rational acceptance is expected. Sometimes, one’s own intellect even becomes synonymous with faith itself. This understanding does well in creating Pharisees who know the “right answers,” but whose hearts are far from God. On the other hand, for those in the Lutheran Church who emphasize the agency of the Holy Spirit and promote an “experience of salvation,” this often results in people in the pews looking to qualify their salvation inwardly instead of in the statement of promise that God makes to them. Consequently, faith is often associated with a “feeling” or “emotion.” This then often leads these “believers” to rededicate their lives 1,000 times over or keep looking for assurance in an experience.

Therefore, when one steps back and asks: “Do these ways of thinking align themselves with the principles of Scripture and of the Lutheran Confessions?” one finds that this is not the case. Instead, such current confusion cannot stand in coherence with the clear Lutheran and Scriptural principles regarding the role of the Holy Spirit and His use of means to create faith. Such principles would instead serve to remind the Church that the will of man is bound to sin (Eph. 2:1–9)<sup>11</sup> and that God is always working by His Spirit and through the Word (1 Cor. 12:3;

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people to himself, enlightens them, makes them righteous, and saves them without means, without the hearing of God’s Word, even without the use of the holy sacraments.” EP II, 13; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 493.

<sup>11</sup> See Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 33 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999).

Rom. 10:17).<sup>12</sup> Therefore, when the Church holds to the belief that the measurement for salvation is either on the basis of looking at one's own "experience" or "knowledge," the people of God are gravely confused.

It is important to realize just how much is at stake. In doing so, it becomes clear that a proper understanding of the connection between the agency of the Spirit and the means of the Word serves to address a big problem for Christ's Church regarding the nature of faith. For if faith comes as a result of the Holy Spirit calling someone through the gospel, but there are those who discount either the agency of the Spirit Himself or His use of means, there exists a very misconstrued and incorrect understanding of faith—namely—a view of faith as an "experience" or as a mere "knowledge" of right information. Consequently, these "believers" may not even have faith at all, as neither a "knowledge" about God nor a personal "experience" are how the Bible or the Lutheran Confessions describe faith. Furthermore, even though "believers" can claim to have had an experience of the Holy Spirit or to know all of the right answers, there are many unbelievers or even demons who have had "experiences" or "knowledge" of God and yet were far away from true faith in God (Acts 8:9–24; James 2:19).

### **"I Cannot Believe..."**

Clarity and consistency about saving faith lies in part with the proper recognition of the work of the agency of the Holy Spirit through the means of the Word—that "I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my LORD or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the

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<sup>12</sup> "Before the conversion of the human being there are only two efficient causes, the Holy Spirit and God's Word as the instrument of the Holy Spirit, through which he effects conversion; the human creature must hear this Word, but cannot believe and accept it on the basis of its own powers but only through the grace and action of God the Holy Spirit." EP II, 19; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 494.

gospel.”<sup>13</sup> According to the Lutheran Confessions, this role of the Holy Spirit is not just an “add on” or an “afterthought,” but His role is essential to the work of salvation—as this is the role of God Himself.

When Luther states in the SC, “I cannot believe...” he means that faith is an impossibility apart from the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup> “Cannot believe” does not mean one will “Partially believe” or “Eventually believe.” It means that they “Will not.” This is the position that man is in without the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word. This should not be surprising, as the Lutheran Confessions and Holy Scriptures do not hide this truth. Instead, the picture presented is that people are spiritually dead in their sin and are in active rebellion to God.<sup>15</sup> Effectually, to be dead spiritually means that one is unable to seek God, reach for Him, or call out to Him. He is dead. Furthermore, to be in active rebellion to God means that from birth man inherits an inborn evil way of doing things that willfully goes astray from the Lord.<sup>16</sup> This active rebellion is demonstrated in a number of ways, but is chiefly demonstrated as man actively rebels by seeking his own self-designed forms of spirituality.<sup>17</sup> Instead of worshiping God, man

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<sup>13</sup> “I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers. On the Last Day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.” SC, II, 6; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 355–56.

<sup>14</sup> SC, II, 6; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 355–56.

<sup>15</sup> “You were dead in the trespasses and sins.” Eph. 2:1; “Were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” Eph 2:3; “Ever since the fall, the human being inherits an inborn evil way of doing things, an internal impurity of the heart, and an evil desire and inclination, so that we all by nature inherit such a heart, mind, and way of thinking from Adam. Following its highest powers and in light of reason, this fallen heart is by nature diametrically opposed to God and his highest commandments. Indeed, it is hostile to God, particularly in regard to divine, spiritual matters.” FC I, 11; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 534.

<sup>16</sup> “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth.” Ps. 58:3.

<sup>17</sup> “Idolatry does not consist merely of erecting an image and praying to it, but it is primarily a matter of the heart, which fixes its gaze upon other things and seeks help and consolation from creatures, saints, or devils. It neither cares for God nor expects good things from him sufficiently to trust that he wants to help, nor does it believe

worships that which his own hands have made or makes himself to be a “god” in his own eyes. This is the sinful condition and desire of man without the work of God’s Spirit.

These statements should not come as a surprise but reflect the testimony of the Scriptures as a foundational tenet of faith and also serve as a central position of the Lutheran Church. In fact, Luther himself said that if any of his writings were to be preserved, he hoped his work on the bondage of the will was one which would remain.<sup>18</sup> For Luther, this idea of man’s depravity was essential to his understanding of justification, anthropology, and the doctrine of God. Consequently, he viewed his work on the bondage of the will as essential to the theological framework of the Church. This focus is especially reflected by the Lutheran Church throughout their Confessions and writings.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, when Luther says in the SC, ““I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my LORD or come to him,”<sup>20</sup> he was simply putting into words what he believed to be the central orthodox understanding of the Church for centuries.

### **“But the Holy Spirit Has Called Me by the Gospel”**

If there is going to be any work of salvation it must come *extra nos*—outside of us. God works outside of us through Jesus Christ, our redeemer. God works outside of us in the preaching

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that whatever good it encounters comes from God.” LC I, 21; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 388.

<sup>18</sup> "Regarding [the plan] to collect my writings in volumes, I am quite cool and not at all eager about it because, roused by a Saturnian hunger, I would rather see them all devoured. For I acknowledge none of them to be really a book of mine, except perhaps the one *On the Bound Will* and the Catechism." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 50: Letters III*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 50 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999), 172–73

<sup>19</sup> “Furthermore, it is taught among us that since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God.” Ap. II, 2; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 112. “First of all, it is true that not only should Christians regard and recognize as sin the actual violation of God’s commandments in their deeds, but they should also perceive and recognize that the horrible, dreadful, inherited disease corrupting their entire nature is above all actual sin and indeed is the “chief sin.” SD I, 5; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 533.

<sup>20</sup> SC, II, 6; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 355–56.

of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. God also works outside of in the sense that someone must take hold of man, dead in his sins, who stands in active rebellion to God, and bring about the miracle of saving faith: a spiritual resurrection. While this dissertation acknowledges that there is nothing unusual about people having “faith,” since everyone believes in something, saving faith is something completely different. First, saving faith has a unique object: the one true God known through Jesus Christ. Second, saving faith, because of its unique object, means something unique to each human subject. This subjective condition is sin, understood as not knowing, loving, and fearing God.<sup>21</sup> These two related facts means that saving faith is something which can only be elicited by the work and initiative of God and is not a universal condition. According to the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions, this miraculous work of eliciting saving faith is exactly what God does and is only that which He can bring about (*monergism*).<sup>22</sup> In this understanding, people are saved because of God’s work and His initiative. This monergistic understanding of salvation has been the core of the Orthodox Church throughout the ages, explicitly supported by theological bulwarks from Augustine to Luther and into the present day.<sup>23</sup>

This recognition primarily capitalizes on the understanding that in light of man’s depravity, he has no hope for salvation. He is dead in his sin and stands in active rebellion to God’s holy will. However, God is gracious and desires for all men to be saved. In order to bring about this

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<sup>21</sup> Ap. II, 23; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 115. “Thus, when the traditional definition says that sin is the absence of righteousness, it excludes not only the obedience of the lower human powers but also the knowledge of God, trust in God, fear and love of God, or certainly the power needed to produce those things.”

<sup>22</sup> “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Eph 2:8–9.

<sup>23</sup> “Augustine describes sin as a condition which involves the entire man; it is not just isolated acts.” Bengt Hägglund, *History of Theology*, 4th rev. ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2007), 137. “For Luther, any talk of “merit” in the matter of justification was blasphemous and heretical.” Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Scribner, 1985), 424.

salvation, He sends His Spirit to do a work through the preaching of His Word.<sup>24</sup> It is the preaching of this Word which Lutherans acknowledge as the effective means used by the Holy Spirit to enact the promises of God and bring salvation. It is not just the Word acting independently, but the Spirit working with the Word to convict of sin and apply the forgiveness of sins to the life of the sinner.<sup>25</sup> This should come as no surprise, but is the clear recognition of the apostle Paul, as he writes: “No one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). Therefore, anything that one would choose to say about faith must cohere with the agency of the Holy Spirit through the means of the Word.

Spiritually speaking, this activity by the Spirit is a work of both “killing” and “making alive,” as the Word of God threatens man with eternal damnation and speaks to him the life giving promise of the gospel. This work of the Spirit together with the Word cannot be usurped or supplanted. Instead, both the agency of the Spirit and the use of the Word as means are necessary for saving faith to be elicited in the lives of those who are justified.

On the one hand, the Spirit uses the Word as gospel to make alive and raise men, women and children from spiritual death to spiritual life. This is how people come to the point where they say: “Jesus is Lord.” However, this effect cannot take place unless the law has been first proclaimed. In other words, in order to receive a spiritual resurrection, one must first be in need of being resurrected. One must be spiritually “put to death.”

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<sup>24</sup> This is not necessarily preaching in the strict sense of the word, meaning the preaching which takes place from the pastor during divine worship, although it can be included there. Instead, this refers to the “proclamation” of the word which Forde refers to, which is the “Explicit declaration of the good news, the gospel, the kerygma.” Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 1. Thus, any believer is able to “preach the Word” in a general sense by proclaiming the good news of God (i.e. The Gospel).

<sup>25</sup> “Faithful preaching depends on the Spirit to transform its hearers into faithful disciples of Jesus Christ by it intruding into people’s lives; working repentance and new life through “cross” and “resurrection” in baptism.” Andréa D. Snively, *Life in the Spirit: A Post-Constantinian and Trinitarian Account of the Christian Life* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2015), 110.

Therefore, in considering the assertion that the Word functions to “kill,” this dissertation purports that when God’s Word goes forth proclaiming His holy will, it goes forth in judgment and condemnation against those who live in conflict to it. The Scriptural witness is quite clear that everyone is found to be living in conflict to God’s will since “None are righteous” and “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:10; 3:23). Furthermore, as God’s holy will is pronounced, it goes forth as a threat to those who stand in opposition to it. It states that there is a coming condemnation for all men, women and children who have trespassed God’s will and that the consequence for that is eternal death. For those who trust in this accusing word, this threat functions to spiritually “kill” and “put to death” as people hear the declaration of God’s holy standard.<sup>26</sup> As a result, if there was anything in man that thought that he could get to God on the basis of his own works or efforts, this ideology is murdered by the threat of God’s wrath. It leaves no hope for man except certain damnation. By nature, every person is a child of wrath and one who stands in active rebellion to God’s will. Thus, when and where God’s Word threatens condemnation for those opposed to His will, man is found guilty and is condemned to spiritual and eternal death.

An illustration of this taking place is in the sermon of Peter. Peter is addressing the crowd and says to them:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men...Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart. (Acts 2:22–23, 37)

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<sup>26</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I have advocated that the conception of “trust” most closely adheres to a proper understanding of saving faith. With that being the case, this dissertation also acknowledges that threats require a level of “trust” in order to believe what is asserted and not all expressions of trust are saving faith. The kind of trust that responds to saving faith is a trust elicited by a gracious promise, whereas a trust that responds to a threat is that which fearfully believes that the threat is real.



As this Word of God was heard, those who trusted in this threatening Word were cut to the heart. They trusted that they were being personally accused of wrongdoing—of committing murder—of regicide. They had killed the one who was their king. Hearing this Word served to condemn and convict them and there was no escaping the truth other than to reject Peter’s message entirely.<sup>27</sup>

A similar example of the Word of God going forth to condemn is in the Old Testament account of God’s judgment on the people of Israel for their disobedience to enter the Promised Land. Moses recounts the words of the Lord:

Say to them, ‘As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me... When Moses told these words to all the people of Israel, the people mourned greatly. (Num. 14:28–29, 39)

When God’s Word had gone forward, it does something: condemn. Since it condemns, we can say that “by nature” it served to elicit a response. For some, they hardened their hearts and rejected the message. However, for those who trusted the Word, the Word served to kill and break their hearts. They realized that they stood condemned by the holy God and there was no escape, causing them to “mourn greatly.”

While this may seem “harsh” or “cruel” of God, this effect of the Word as “Law” is the work of the Spirit of God to elicit faith. For in this preparatory work of the law, the Holy Spirit’s presentation of the law of God places man in a position where he knows he has transgressed God’s moral law, where he sees the guilt of his sin, but has no idea what God thinks of him.<sup>28</sup> He

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<sup>27</sup> While the objective pronouncement always purports to do something (e.g. in this instance, it stood to condemn), it is subjectively appropriated in a variety of ways. In the example of Peter’s sermon, there were a number of people who believed God’s Word as Law and repented. However, there were also many who heard the Word and did not repent and who rejected the proclaimed Word.

<sup>28</sup> “The cause of inner conflict is guilt. Unpardonable guilt lays hold of the conscience in inner conflict so that

is not able to work his way out of this guilt or cover it up in any way. Instead, man finds himself in a setting of “inner conflict.” He does not know how to “get God off his back.”<sup>29</sup> It is this point where man is convicted of his sin and left with nowhere to turn. Prenter picks up on this and writes: “It is in the inner conflict and only there that the Spirit’s work is understood...in these inner conflicts the sinner experiences the wrath of God in his conscience, so that God as the gracious one and Christ as the revelation of the grace of God completely hides himself, while death and hell and all creation assail man.”<sup>30</sup>

This is ultimately the result of the Spirit’s work of applying the condemnation of God to man, making man realize that he is not accepted by God.<sup>31</sup> It is that which the Spirit applies to the heart of man to put him in a place where he recognizes that he cannot by his own reason or strength believe in God or come to him. Apart from this work of the Spirit, there would be no recognition of one’s spiritual hopelessness. Instead, man would be blind to the fact that he is lost. After all, all men have some kind of “faith” in something. However, it is the Word of God’s wrath which serves to condemn sin and guilt (Rom. 7:7). It is this pronouncement of God’s holy will, therefore, which the Holy Spirit utilizes to convict of sin and terrorize the conscience (John 16:8). It is then this recognition of guilt and sin which drives man to the point where there is nowhere else to turn. The Spirit intentionally works to bring man to this point of “inner conflict”

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man knows he is under the eternal and irrevocable condemnation of God, stricken from the book of life forever. No one and nothing can help in this case. All good works and all merit disappear. No man is able to help. Agreeing with the angry God, the whole creation is against me. All other are righteous and I alone am guilty. The merciful God himself turns his face from me. It is futile to call upon him, for he does not hear me. Then man stands alone face to face with the angry and irreconcilable God, without any mediator.” Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, 15.

<sup>29</sup> See Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation*.

<sup>30</sup> Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, 14.

<sup>31</sup> In chapter seven, entitled “You Are Not Accepted,” Hauwerwas makes the point that sin and grace are to be taken seriously. One is accepted not by their doing, but by God’s grace alone. Without that key component, one is not welcome to the presence of God. Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America*, 1st ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

so that man reaches a point of desperation and is hopeless without God's intervention.<sup>32</sup>

The fact that the Spirit of God does this work should not come as a surprise to any Christian believer, as Jesus clearly makes this pronouncement concerning the work of the Spirit in John 16, saying: "And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). Thus, while the Holy Spirit indeed calls by the gospel, this should always be seen in concert with His work to first put to death by the law. For, as the Lutheran Confessions remind us, it is when this preparatory function has taken place that the Holy Spirit is then able to use the good news of the gospel to raise to life.<sup>33</sup> This should not be surprising, as without the work of the law one would be left wondering why God's good news even matters at all. In other words, the function of God's Word as gospel presupposes that the Word as law has had its effect to "spiritually kill." Consequently, the Word of law sets the foundation for why the gospel is needed or desired. Therefore, it is the Word of law which allows the good news to make sense and to set the context for the Word of God as promise to be appropriate.

This idea of the preparatory function of the law is not just hypothetical, but the good news is that the work of God's Spirit does not leave man under the burden of the law. Instead the Spirit speaks into the darkness, proclaiming the Word of promise into one's situation in order to bring

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<sup>32</sup> "God pursues his own aim in the conflict. God is not really angry, and he does not desire that man's sin should be unpardonable. But through the cross of inner conflict God wants to teach us to hope only in his pure mercy. Like every other cross and all other work of wrath in the believer, the inner conflicts are God's *opus alienum*, which prepares the way for his *opus proprium*." Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, 16.

<sup>33</sup> "Therefore, the Spirit of Christ must not only comfort but through the function of the law must also "convict the world of sin" [John 16:8]. Thus, in the New Testament the Holy Spirit must perform (as the prophet says [Isa. 28:21]) an *opus alienum*, ut faciat *opus proprium* (that is, he must perform an alien work—which is to convict—until he comes to his proper work—which is to comfort and to proclaim grace). For this reason Christ obtained the Spirit for us and sent him to us. That is why he is called the Comforter [John 14:26; 16:7], as Dr. Luther explained in the interpretation of the Gospel lesson for the fifth Sunday after Trinity." SD V, 11; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 583.

new life. This is not just one option among many but is man's only hope, as nothing else is truly able to bring deliverance besides God Himself.<sup>34</sup> God is the one who is able to work and bring salvation for the one who has trespassed His holy law. Therefore, at the time when man is under the killing conviction of the law, the Holy Spirit comes to proclaim the promise of God and bring spiritual resurrection. It is the presentation of good news which then declares certain things to be true: "And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him" (Col. 1:21–22).

As Oswald Bayer writes, it is this Word of promise in which God enters into an obligation. He commits to the hearer that what He says He will do. He writes: "What do I do when I say: 'I promise you...'? What happens when this is said or heard? I enter into an obligation."<sup>35</sup> There is nothing that man has done to force God to make such a declaration or to convince Him that this would be a good decision. This is not something that man could earn of God as a result of his good deeds or something that man could somehow buy from God. This promise of God's Word is something that is simply the result of God's choosing. God wanted to make a promise and He did. Furthermore, this Word of promise is not just some nicely spoken utterances, it is effectual. God does something through them. This is why "Luther came to understand the gospel as a performative, or as an "effective word."<sup>36</sup> Principally, when it comes to the effect of this

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<sup>34</sup> The Holy Spirit is instead proclaimed as the real presence of God. God himself as the Spirit is really present in the groanings of the anxious and tempted soul held in the grip of death and hell. Luther sternly and firmly contends that everything outside of God himself in the inner conflict allies itself with wrath against the sinner. No form of divine power other than that of God's own presence is available for the sinner in his conflict. No infused grace can groan for man with unutterable groanings. No one but God himself is able to do that." Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, 18–19.

<sup>35</sup> Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, 127.

<sup>36</sup> Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, 129.

proclaimed promise, the Bible tells us that it brings life.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, when the Word of God goes forth, it is the expectation of the believer that this is how faith is produced. This is where the Holy Spirit is working. As men and women, boys and girls, sit underneath the Word of God and hear its truth, something happens. The Spirit of God uses that Word in an effectual way to bring about saving faith. Through the use of the means of the Word, God's Spirit places people under condemnation. He places them in a position where they have no hope. It is in that place where the Spirit of God then brings hope, comfort and peace. He proclaims to them the promises of God's Word and what God has obligated Himself to: the salvation of their souls.

### **Pneumatological Paradox**

Now, someone might rightfully ask: "If this is the work of the Spirit through the means of the Word, how is it that someone can hear the good news of the gospel and not be saved?" In fact, many times it seems that those who hear the promises of God are not even phased by them. Even atheists can be "experts" on what the Bible says and can recite the promises of God. However, just knowing the words on the page or hearing a message does not mean that the Holy Spirit has illuminated one's eyes to the message of good news. Consequently, what is needed is not a continual repetition of the words, but the Holy Spirit's taking of the good news and applying it personally and subjectively to the hearts of men. As Prenter concludes: "If God does not speak into the heart while the ear listens to the outward Word, the outward Word remains the word of man and law... If God does not infuse his Spirit the hearer of the Word is not different

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<sup>37</sup> "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ." Eph. 2:4-5.

from the deaf man. No one can rightly understand the Word of God unless he receives it directly from the Holy Spirit.”<sup>38</sup>

While this may seem clear and straightforward at first, there exists a great confusion in the Church regarding this working of the Spirit. Some believe that if the Holy Spirit does indeed work through the means of God’s Word, then the only thing that needs to take place is the simple declaration of the Word of God so that people are saved. In other words, if the Word of God is rightly proclaimed then salvation should occur. After all, as the Confessions state, the “Holy Spirit works faith...in those who hear the gospel.”<sup>39</sup> Others in the Lutheran Church argue that the Holy Spirit as God cannot be controlled or manipulated in this way. He is sovereign and is not the servant of the will or incantation of man. Therefore, salvation only occurs at the choosing of God and not just at the random proclamation of the Word. This understanding also serves to reflect the statement of the Confessions themselves, that the Spirit works “where and when He wills.”<sup>40</sup>

At first glance, these two positions may seem to be completely contradictory. In fact, it does not take much for a tension to quickly arise which pits the unbound divinity of the Spirit against the use of the bound and tangible Word. On the one hand, it may seem that the Spirit determines apart from the Word what He will accomplish, that the use of the Word is unnecessary and that man’s reaction is irrelevant. On the other hand, the Spirit can be seemingly viewed as a mere instrument of the Word, bound by the will of man. This causes the Spirit to be viewed as one who operates at calculated times and events. In his work, *Spiritus Creator*, Regin

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<sup>38</sup> Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, 102. “Only the Holy Spirit can make the message about Christ into the gospel. Without the experience which the Spirit alone can give, the message about Christ remains law.” Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, 58.

<sup>39</sup> AC V, 2; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 40.

<sup>40</sup> AC V, 2; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 40.

Prenter highlights this same tension:

On the one side there is such a strong emphasis on the sovereignty of the Spirit that the outward Word seems to be reduced to a comparatively insignificant accompanying phenomenon of the free work of the Spirit. On the other side there is so strong an emphasis on the connection of the Spirit to the outward Word, on its being a necessary consequence of the Word, that the Spirit seems to become a mere attribute to the Word.<sup>41</sup>

While this may put some in a place of despair, the reality is that these positions are not incompatible. Instead, like many other things in Lutheranism, this is a paradox. Both the function of the Word and the agency of the Spirit must be acknowledged and cannot be divorced from the other. The reality of this is best summarized by AC V, which states: “He gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel.”<sup>42</sup> In this paradox, the promise goes out or is spoken but it is only received or trusted (that is, fulfilled) when and where the Spirit wills. One is not able to operate independent of the other but both are needed to accomplish the intended result. Oswald Bayer also picks up on this tension and states that these seemingly contradictory truths cohere in that (1) the “Spirit works faith in the human being inwardly” through His divine sovereignty, yet at the same time (2) the Spirit’s work is “never apart from means, never without the external ‘physical Word.’”<sup>43</sup> In other words, both are necessary to the work of God to elicit faith.

Recognizing this pneumatological paradox is essential to understanding the agency of the Spirit through the means of the Word. To acknowledge the Spirit’s sovereignty is not to downplay a “theology of the Word” but rather to make the case that the work of God cannot be controlled or manipulated. At the same time God does not work through any other means than

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<sup>41</sup> Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, 104.

<sup>42</sup> AC V, 2; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 40.

<sup>43</sup> Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 242.

through His Word. It is his spoken promise which is trusted and believed. Therefore, Prenter concludes that an emphasis on either one exclusively is wrong:

The idea of the sovereignty of the Spirit and the insufficiency of the outward Word, if consistently carried through, will lead to a predestinarian concept of God. The idea of the dependence of the Spirit on the outward Word will, if carried through with the same consistency, lead to the view that the responsibility for the insufficient effect of the Word must be placed on the man who hears it...neither of these two points of view belongs to Luther. His view is found only where both ideas are united in the mutual tension.<sup>44</sup>

In this place of tension, a conjoining of the work of the Word and the Spirit does something wonderful: it elicits faith. On their own, each accomplishes nothing to create faith.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, while it is possible to talk about the work of each in the abstract and recognize the role and function of the Spirit and the Word, their work must be seen as conjoined rather than separated in creating and sustaining faith. When the Word is proclaimed, there should be an expectation of “faith” that the Holy Spirit is present and at work to bring salvation. Likewise, when there is a witness that the Holy Spirit is at work, there should be an expectation of faith—trust in the Spirit’s agency through the Word—so that such experiences are not devoid of the presence of the Word being proclaimed to hearers. This is essential to remember, lest we fall into either an enthusiast or a cause-and-effect understanding (i.e. Spirit-Void or Spirit Only Perspectives).<sup>46</sup>

### **The Means of the Spirit’s Agency**

While some may wonder how the Holy Spirit does this work, since He is neither seen nor heard audibly, this question circles back to the earlier work of this project regarding how the

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<sup>44</sup> Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, 106.

<sup>45</sup> “The Word may be without the Spirit, but not as the Word of God; and the Spirit may be without the Word, but not as the revealing Spirit.” Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, 124.

<sup>46</sup> Leopoldo Sánchez, “Pneumatology,” 126–27.



Spirit works principally through means. This means is chiefly the Word of God proclaimed through the mouthpieces of His Church. For Lutherans, this is the clear attestation of the confessions and Holy Scriptures.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, anywhere the Word of God is being proclaimed through the ministry of the Church, the means of the Holy Spirit's work are going forth.

In writing about the nature of the Word going forth, Bayer writes:

God promises and gives himself “in the external word” with Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as well as with every baptismal and Eucharistic sermon. In this encounter, in which we received the promise of the forgiveness of sins, we sinners are created anew and have our permanent identity outside ourselves, in another, who is alien to us and who has taken our place in a wonderful exchange, where human sin is exchanged for divine righteousness.”<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, whether it be through an oral or “visible” Word,<sup>49</sup> the promise of God's Word goes forth as the means of God's grace. For those searching for the activity of the Holy Spirit one need not look further than the local congregation which faithfully proclaims God's Word and administers the sacraments. As a parish pastor gives his message week after week, as believers proclaim the good news of the gospel to one another, as baptisms take place, as absolution is given, as the Lord's Supper is administered, God's Word goes forth as the means of the Spirit's activity.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> “For the presence, effectiveness, and gift of the Holy Spirit should not and cannot always be assessed *ex sensu*, as a person feels it in the heart. Instead, because the Holy Spirit's activity is often hidden under the cover of great weakness, we should be certain, on the basis of and according to the promise, that the Word of God, when preached and heard, is a function and work of the Holy Spirit, through which he is certainly present in our hearts and exercises his power there. (2 Corinthians 2 [1 Cor. 2:11ff. or 2 Cor. 3:5–6])” SD II, 56; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 554.

<sup>48</sup> Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, 103.

<sup>49</sup> “And God moves our hearts through the word and the rite at the same time so that they believe and receive faith just as Paul says, “So faith comes from what is heard.” For just as the Word enters through the ear in order to strike the heart, so also the rite enters through the eye in order to move the heart. The word and the rite have the same effect. Augustine put it well when he said that the sacrament is a “visible word,” because the rite is received by the eyes and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore both have the same effect.” See Augustine, *Tractates on John LXXX*, 3 (on John 15:3; MPL 35:1840, *NPNF*, ser. 1, 7:344); Ap. XIII, 5; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 219–20.

<sup>50</sup> “We now want to return to the gospel, which gives guidance and help against sin in more than one way,

This awareness need not come as such a surprise, as the reality that the Spirit works through “means” in this way is grounded in the ministerial work of Christ Himself, who speaks the Word of God by the power of the Spirit. Everything that Christ does, He does by the Spirit or in the power of the Spirit. “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness” (Luke 4:1). “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee” (Luke 4:14). In his preaching, Jesus tells his disciples: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (Luke 4:18). In the workings of His miracles, Jesus acknowledges before the crowd that “It is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons” (Matt. 12:28). Even in his death and resurrection, the Scriptures testify that Jesus did this by the Spirit (Rom. 8:11). In like manner, Jesus sends out His Church into the world with the instruction to do the same. Consequently, one could argue that the entire ministerial function of Christ’s Church is to serve as the means of the Spirit’s agency by proclaiming the Word of God. Leopoldo Sánchez, in his work, *Pneumatology*, captures this sentiment, writing:

The Holy Spirit anoints the church to proclaim and teach the Word. As the Father sends the Son and gives Him the Spirit to speak words that are “Spirit and life,” so also does the Son breathe the Spirit on His disciples so that they might speak words that absolve people of their sins (Jn 3:34; 6:63–69; 20:21–23). Like Jesus, the church is led by the Spirit into the world to call sinners to repentance and forgive their sins (Lk 3:3; 5:31–32; 24:46–49; Acts 2:38). Through the spoken word, the Spirit convicts and comforts, kills and makes alive, preaches law and gospel, leads the sinner to die to self in order to be raised anew. That the Holy Spirit works through the Word is not a Lutheran invention but a teaching deeply rooted in the Spirit’s inseparable union to Christ and the words He speaks to lead people to eternal life in Him.<sup>51</sup>

If one wants to see how the Holy Spirit is working in the Church today one only has to look at how the Church models Christ’s own mission in the Spirit, which centers on the proclamation

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because God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word, in which the forgiveness of sins is preached to the whole world (which is the proper function of the gospel); second, through baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters.” SC III, 4; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 319.

<sup>51</sup> Sánchez, “Pneumatology,” 140.

of the Word that brings to faith in Him. Since Christ has poured out His Spirit on the Church, pastors are preaching the Word, believers are proclaiming the gospel to their neighbors and the forgiveness of sins is being granted from one Christian to another. These are examples of the Spirit of God working through His means (the Word) in the proclamation of God's people. As Sánchez states, this way of describing the work of the Spirit is not a Lutheran invention but is deeply grounded in the Scriptures' own witness to Christ's bearing of the Spirit in His ministry of proclamation and His breathing of the Spirit on the Church to continue such ministry today in His name. Instead of viewing this as extraordinary, one should realize this as a very basic tenet of faith regarding how the Holy Spirit works and operates: through means.

In many ways this harkens back to the previous discussion regarding deputized discourse from the previous chapters, where God commissions people to speak on His behalf.<sup>52</sup> They are His mouthpieces. They are His means to speak His Word to others. In thinking about this kind of discourse, Jesus tells his disciples: "It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Matt. 10:20). As a result of this representation, when those believing in Christ make a declared pronouncement about justifying forgiveness or election, it is as though the Spirit were making the statement Himself.

Therefore, when someone wonders how they can find freedom from their transgression and be justified by faith through the Word of God, the answer lies in the notion of deputized discourse.<sup>53</sup> For since God has chosen to deputize His Word through means (e.g. the mission of Christ and the mission of God's people), then one should expect to find the working of faith by these means through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>52</sup> Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 37.

<sup>53</sup> Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 42–43.

## Pneumatology and Faith

Earlier I have explained both justification and the Word and their relationship to faith in terms of the modern philosophy of language.<sup>54</sup> This reality of the Spirit's work to elicit faith through the means of the Word also can be explained in these terms. As the Spirit works through the means of the Word, speech acts and word events are taking place. Declarations are made. Promises are enacted. When the Spirit speaks through His Church, the Spirit Himself is making a declaration about someone, either making a declaration of condemnation or the proclamation of a promise which enlivens. When this takes place, the Spirit enacts a new reality for that person. It is not conceptual, hypothetical, or theoretical, it is actual. When His Word declares to condemn, He condemns. When His Word declares to elect, He elects. When His Word declares to absolve, He absolves.

As Searle explains, declarations in and of themselves are those which realize their propositional content.<sup>55</sup> This takes place both in the oral proclamation of the Word (such as in absolution and preaching), as well as in the visible proclamation of the Word (such as in baptism and the Lord's Supper).<sup>56</sup> Thus, when the Lord's Supper is administered and baptisms are conducted, the Holy Spirit is making declarations through the Church. When believers open their mouths and proclaim God's truths, declarations are spoken on God's behalf. Eyes are illuminated, hearts are softened, and people come to faith.

However, as has also been mentioned, the Spirit is not controlled by the will and whim of man. In other words, although this chapter has emphasized how both the means of the Word and

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<sup>54</sup> See above, 86–91, 126–27.

<sup>55</sup> Searle, *Consciousness and Language*, 174.

<sup>56</sup> See Augustine, Tractates on John LXXX, 3 (on John 15:3; MPL 35:1840, *NPNF*, ser. 1, 7:344); Ap. XIII, 5; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 219–20.

the agency of the Spirit are essential to the creation of faith, it should also be recognized that elicited faith in the promises of God is not the Holy Spirit's faith. Although this has often been perceived as a tension by Lutherans it does not need to be thought of as contradictory. Instead, Pieper writes:

Lutheran dogmaticians have given this formulation: Faith may be called a work if the word is not used in the specific sense, signifying a work commanded by the Law, but in a general or wider sense, signifying a movement, an activity, in the intellect and will of man. It is not the Holy Ghost, but man who believes through the operation of the Holy Ghost.<sup>57</sup>

In other words, the Holy Spirit does not believe on behalf of man, nor can the Holy Spirit be used or controlled by people to create faith. Instead, man himself is called to believe—to have faith. It is a personal and active event. In describing this paradox, Braaten writes: “On the one hand, Luther can say that faith is a work which must be done by a human being, and on the other, that faith is not a human work at all, but a gift of the Holy Spirit. Both statements are true when seen from the right perspective. In any case, faith is a work. It is an act.”<sup>58</sup> Therefore, while faith is elicited by the promise of God which comes by His initiation, faith is still an active response of man. It is man who takes the intentional state and trusts in that declared promise.

In writing about the role of the “self” to respond to speech acts or word pronouncements, John Searle theorizes that with a proper understanding of intentional states, the hearer is directed to the one speaking and that what is said is taken as one's object.<sup>59</sup> It is this intentionality, Searle writes, which necessarily responds to word pronouncements particularly. In other words, whenever there is a speech act or word event, one should expect to see people intentionally put

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<sup>57</sup> Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2: 422.

<sup>58</sup> Braaten, *Justification*, 25.

<sup>59</sup> Searle, *Intentionality*, 1.

themselves in relation to it.

Therefore, in assessing the statement, “I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my LORD or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel,”<sup>60</sup> it is 100% the work of the Holy Spirit to elicit faith through the Word. At the same time, faith is equally 100% the action of man by the Spirit to trust in the promises of God which have been made to him. This is not synergistic, nor does it displace the initiative of Spirit to bring man to salvation. Rather, it recognizes that the faith of man which is brought about by the work of the Spirit is man’s faith and that he is the subject of the relationship with God. It is man who has been brought from death to life. It is man who confesses that “Jesus is Lord.”

### **Conclusion**

In congruence with the other work set forth in this dissertation, this pneumatological framework stands together with the aforementioned understanding of justification and a theology of the Word in order to set forth a proper understanding of faith. Therefore, in seeking to assert a constructive understanding for the nature of faith, this chapter provides the end of the treatment. Throughout this process, this dissertation has endeavored to show how faith is that which is elicited by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit who works through the means of God’s Word to elicit faith in the lives of those who God justifies. Each of these theological frameworks are essential for a proper understanding of saving faith and are intricately related to one another. Saving faith is elicited then through the Spirit’s use of the Word to enact both a “killing” and “enlivening” work in man by the justifying declaration of God.<sup>61</sup> These words of law and gospel are not meant to be rationally assented to, to be received as propositions, or perceived as

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<sup>60</sup> SC, II, 6; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 355–56.

<sup>61</sup> Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, 29.

experiential encounters. Instead the Holy Spirit applies these Word to threaten with eternal damnation and to bring life from the dead.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **PROOF OF CONCEPT**

#### **Introduction**

This final portion of this project is concerned with the embodiment of this research into the ministerial life of the Church. A theological framework for understanding the nature of faith has been set forth. But it needs to be tested. It needs to be shown that it can deal with the questions and confusions that make the question about saving faith important in the first place. As a way of proof of concept and in an effort to solve some of the key theological and practical issues raised by this dissertation, this work concludes by specifically focusing on the connection between this dissertation's understanding of faith and its embodiment in the law and gospel distinction, baptism, evangelism, sanctification and confirmation.

#### **The Law and Gospel Distinction**

Once again, the distinction of law and gospel is both a characteristic feature of Lutheranism, and also a contemporary topic of debate and disagreement. In the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this tension was illustrated by Karl Barth and Werner Elert and the famous "Law and Gospel Debate," but has been a debate which has carried forth into the present. The reason the distinction of law and gospel matters for my purpose is because different positions reflect different understandings regarding the nature of faith. For the Lutheran Church, it has generally been the conviction that it is the promise of the gospel which serves to elicit faith in the lives of those who hear it and who have been terrorized by the effect of the law. But agreement with this statement often fails to translate into practical ministry. Instead, many Lutherans end up preaching the law or explaining "what to do" to their parishioners, even though they think that



they are presenting the gospel.

### Illustration

As an illustration of this kind of problem in the local congregation, where there is a presentation of Scripture, but a failure to distinguish law and gospel, Thomas Long tells the story about the beginning of his pastoral ministry. He was sitting in his office at his new congregation and one of the active members stopped by for a visit.

"I know I shouldn't feel this way," she said after the briefest of introductions, "but I just don't think God can ever forgive me."

I tried everything. Rogerian-style reflection, in vogue at the time, yielded only an endless-loop tape, ceaselessly returning to its starting point. Direct questioning drew a blank. "What do you think you have done that God can't forgive?" I probed. This person was a devoted mother, a loyal wife, a committed church member. She had never robbed a bank, did not have a hidden addiction, had no shameful secrets to bear.

"I don't know," she said earnestly. She could not name her stain, could not identify what she had done to displease God. Still she was certain of her guilt, and the wound would not be healed. Exasperated, I began to do what I had left seminary vowing never to do. I started to babble out spiritual sound bytes. "God loves you," I assured her. "I know," she replied. "God loves you so much that, in Jesus, he forgives all your sins." "Yes, I know," she said, her head hanging now. What I intended as a quick cure, a theological tourniquet to stop the bleeding, was coming across as a scold. Still, she had enough courage to tell the truth. "I know God loves me. I know Jesus died for my sins. I know all that. I just can't overcome the feeling that God stands in judgment of me."<sup>1</sup>

Long understood that this woman was plagued by doubts and did not have an untroubled trust in God. He knew that she had a personal problem with her faith. But he did not know how to elicit faith. He explained to her that there was forgiveness, that God loved her, and he expected—hoped in desperation, perhaps—that faith in what God had done would be the

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Long, "Bold in the Presence of God," *Interpretation* 52, no. 1 (1998): 53–54, <https://cs1.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0000908105&site=eds-live>.

response. However, just the opposite took place—the parishioner left his office feeling uncertain about what God thought about her or her sin. In his work, *Theology is for Proclamation*, Gerhard Forde describes this approach as “explanation” or “talk about God.”<sup>2</sup> Instead of enacting the Word of God as a personal promise, there was only explanation or a proposition talking about God, such as “God loves you” or “God forgives you.” While statements of explanation are certainly true statements, they are only explanations about God or about what has happened. They do not purport to do anything or enact anything about someone’s position or status before God. They do not declare people to be forgiven or invite them to follow Jesus. Explanation is not a personalized promise—it’s only a proposition.<sup>3</sup>

The failure to engage in proclamation is a common reality in contemporary churches. There is “explanation” that takes place instead of “proclamation.” Good news is explained to people, but not enacted to them in preaching, in evangelism, and in pastoral care.

In formal theological terms, what was the problem with Long’s approach? We could explain it in several ways. Long identified himself it as a failure in atonement. We could also explain it as a failure to justify the sinner. But if we pursue Forde’s diagnosis, then we could explain it as a failure to properly distinguish law and gospel. All Long had available to him were

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<sup>2</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> This is also evidenced in those who advocate for a “propositional revelation,” which holds “that a theological or dogmatic faith was necessary, that is to say a faith understood as the firm acceptance of truths which are divinely revealed and which are defended and promulgated by the Church. Given this understanding of faith, knowledge of religious truths is necessitated, not mere belief that some teaching is true. This distinction between knowledge and belief is reflected in our ordinary speech as in observing, “I believe that I will win the race, but I do not know that I will.” To know  $\chi$  is not only to believe  $x$ , but also to have “good reasons” for believing  $x$ . Hence this view of faith requires, as a minimum, knowledge that God exists while the “good reasons” which undergird this knowledge could be, in this tradition, either the claim of revelation or the reasoning of natural theology or both. This developed position posits a clear commitment to propositional revelation.” Wayne G. Johnson, “Issues in the Propositional Revelation Debate: Faith Without Words Is Dead?” *Perkins Journal* 33, no. 3 (1980): 24, accessed April 12, 2017, <https://cs1.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0000776241&site=eds-live>.

theological explanations, but no promises. All Long could call on was rational assent, which is what theological explanations call for. This is how to fail in distinguishing law and gospel in practice.

As this dissertation has addressed how “faith” is properly understood and elicited through the theological frameworks of justification, a theology of the Word and pneumatology, this dissertation will consider how the same theological framework applies in addressing the confusion related to the distinction of law and gospel.

### A Justifying Declaration

First, in considering the nature of the gospel, there is undoubtedly the recognition that a declaration has been made which has immediate bearings on the life of the one who hears it. God’s Word has gone forth and has made a personal pronouncement. Because of this, it cannot be ignored. It cannot be discounted. Instead, it requires that the one addressed should respond to life in those terms—to either accept or reject what is said. As Forde states: “Proclamation as primary discourse demands an answer in like discourse be it positive or negative: “I repent, I believe” or “I don’t, I won’t, I can’t.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, when someone hears the gospel, no matter how young or how old, a word of proclamation has been given. A response is required to this word-event: either faith or rejection. In thinking about what this does for one’s concept of the gospel, this realization takes the gospel from merely being a trite saying to being a “word-act,” which necessitates a response. What this means is that the justifying word of the gospel purports to actually accomplish something in the life of the person listening and demands some kind of response.

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<sup>4</sup>Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 2.

## An Effectual Word

Additionally, in considering the law and gospel distinction, not only is a declaration made but the pronouncement of the gospel is an effectual word for those who hear it. What this means is that the pronouncement of the gospel does not just inform people that their sins are forgiven, it forgives sin. It does not just inform them that they are chosen, it chooses them. But explanation is not neutral. It condemns, kills, and terrorizes. As Long's visitor said, "I know God loves me. I know Jesus died for my sins. I know all that. I just can't overcome the feeling that God stands in judgment of me." This is the work of the law. Even explanation can be an effectual Word, but it effects guilt and alienation, not forgiveness and reconciliation.

The claim that the declaration of God's Word actually "effects something" is substantiated by the clear testimony and principles of the Lutheran Confessions and of the Word of God. A key example of this is in the Word of God through the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. God declares:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Is. 55:10–11)

In taking God at His Word, one is forced to acknowledge that God's Word does not return without some kind of effect. It is powerful to accomplish the purpose and will of God. Therefore, it is impossible for God's Word not to elicit some kind of response when it is heard.<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, it is inconceivable that someone could merely sit under the proclamation of the Word of God without some effect taking place. Some kind of response is naturally required. One

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<sup>5</sup> This dissertation would argue that the Word is spoken with the intent of being heard. Thus, in the instance of a private incantation or pronouncement, if the Word is not heard, it does not go forth to an object.

will either trust in God's Word or will willfully reject it.<sup>6</sup>

A key illustration of this is Jesus' parable of the sower. Jesus tells his disciples:

A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. (Matt. 13:3–8)

In explaining the meaning of the parable to his disciples, Jesus took time to demonstrate that each of the different recipients of the seed (which Jesus explains is the Word) had some kind of response to it:

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty. (Matt. 13:19–23)<sup>7</sup>

Some did not understand it, some received it joyfully, some were apathetic toward it, and others heard it and understood it. However, in each instance, something happened when the Word was heard—there was a reaction necessitated. In this case, there were four completely different

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<sup>6</sup> “Proclamation as primary discourse demands an answer in like discourse be it positive or negative: “I repent, I believe” or “I don’t, I won’t, I can’t.” In other words, when the proclamation announces, “I declare unto you the forgiveness of all your sins,” the appropriate response is not, “Well, that’s your opinion!” Perhaps the only thing the absolver could say to such irrelevancy would be, “No, that’s not my opinion. If I were to give my opinion about you it would likely be something else! We are not dealing with human opinion here, but with the Word of God!” Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 2.

<sup>7</sup>The “word of the kingdom” is not just a saying but is a declaration. This can be seen in such examples as John 14:4, “I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” or John 14:19, “Because I live, you also will live.”

illustrations given by Jesus regarding the effect of the word upon those who heard it. It was not just a saying, but an effectual act.

### The Presentation of Law and Gospel as the Spirit's Activity

In the discussion of law and gospel, it is essential to also recognize that where the Word of God goes forth, one should expect to see the Spirit of God at work there as well. This is not to say that the Spirit of God is bound by some kind of a cause-and-effect,<sup>8</sup> but instead is to acknowledge that the Word of God is the chief means of the Spirit of God. Furthermore, when the Spirit uses the Word as His means, He does so to “kill” and “make alive.” He principally does this by convicting of sin and pointing to the truth (John 16:8, 13). Therefore, as the Word as law is pronounced and the Word as promise is made, one should expect to also see the Holy Spirit at work to convict of sin and to make alive. The goal for this is that ultimately faith would be elicited.

As has been previously mentioned, the Spirit does this through the promise of good news for those who have perished. He promises them they have new life and life abundantly (John 10:10). He promises them that God has rescued, redeemed, and justified them (Rom. 3:24; 2 Cor. 5:19). He promises them that they are children of God (John 1:12). As a result of the Holy Spirit's work to make alive through the gospel, this is how people come to the point of faith where they can say: “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor. 12:3).

However, this effect cannot take place unless the law has been first proclaimed. In other words, in order to receive a spiritual resurrection, there is the presumption that one is in need of being resurrected. Therefore, in a spiritual sense, one must be spiritually “dead” in order to be

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<sup>8</sup> Sánchez, “Pneumatology,” 127.

raised to life. Thus, when God's Word goes forth proclaiming His moral law, the Spirit of God uses it in judgment and condemnation against those who live in conflict to it (Jn. 16:8). This primarily takes place as the Spirit threatens those who stand against God's moral law with eternal death and damnation.

Therefore, in light of the Spirit's agency in using the Word of God, one should acknowledge that as the Word goes out, the Spirit is there at work as well. This work of the Spirit is not only to place someone under condemnation, but also to bring about new life—to elicit faith.

### Conclusion

In light of the greater theological framework set forth in this dissertation, the distinction of law and gospel comes into a greater focus. The law is that which never brings reassurance or comfort. It serves as God's holy will which demonstrates how we are to live. When people's lives fail to measure up to his holy will, as they always do, the law of God serves to reveal sin and condemn them. Face to face with the law, people have no chance or hope to be found perfect and righteous in the sight of God. Moreover, the Spirit of God applies that law to the heart of man to spiritually kill him and put him to death.

However, God's Word does not only present the law, but it also presents the gospel. This is a word of hope, of promise, which does not demand holy living or condemn those who fall short of a standard. Instead, it declares a promise of miraculous resurrection to be trusted by those who are dead in regard to the law. The Spirit of God takes this Word and uses it to elicit faith and to bring about a new and transformed life. This distinction of law and gospel then gives a sense of what saving faith must be—not a doubting, not a shame or guilt, but the enacting proclamation of the gospel, the good news.

Therefore, when Pastor Tom Long met with the lady in his office, she did not need an explanation of what Jesus had done for her or the application of the law telling her what to do or how to react. Instead, she needed an enactment of the gospel promise of God to her—a word of absolution. If Pastor Long would have stopped and said something like, “As a called and ordained minister of the Church of Christ and by His authority, I declare to you the entire forgiveness of all of your sins,” that would have done something for the woman. That would have enacted the promise of the gospel to her that she could trust in by faith. But without it she was left in trying to understand and accept propositions about what had historically happened and live under the burden of the law.

### **Baptism**

Few topics divide more Protestants than baptism. Entire denominations have formed and churches have split over a debate about the proper understanding of what baptism is, who it is for, and what it accomplishes. Some hold to *credobaptism*,<sup>9</sup> the notion that baptism is only for those who express belief and have been instructed. But others hold to *paedobaptism*,<sup>10</sup> the belief that baptism can even be applied to an infant child. Furthermore, there are nuances within each position. For example, among credobaptists, some hold to a covenantal theological approach,<sup>11</sup> while others refer to an “age of accountability” which one must first reach in order to be baptized.<sup>12</sup> These positions vary in regard to the subject of baptism, the timing of baptism, or

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<sup>9</sup> See Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn Wright, eds., *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> See David P. Scaer, *Infant Baptism in Nineteenth Century Lutheran Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> See Gregg Strawbridge, *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> See Patricia & Brian Field, Kent Field, and Brian Field, *A Study of The Age of Accountability: Is the Bible Silent?* (Independently published, 2014).



even its purpose.

However, as was mentioned in chapter two, even Lutherans, who generally agree that baptism is a “means of God’s grace” and that it is to even be practiced for infants,<sup>13</sup> reflect confusion over baptism and its relation to faith. They agree that baptism relates to “faith,” but there are often elements of both credobaptism and paedobaptism present in the same Lutheran congregation. As explained earlier in this work, this arises not in abstract assertions, but comes through in the liturgical rite and in the catechization for baptism. Elements of credobaptism emerge when baptism is treated as something done for God. Elements of paedobaptism are reflected when baptism is viewed as a promise made by God. In addition, some treat baptism as a means by which God infuses grace to be saved. This happens when baptism is taught as the bestowal of the gift of faith to the baptized, Others treat it as a means by which He impute his gracious favor. This happens when faith is understood as the response to what God is declaring in baptism. These variations demonstrate that confusion regarding baptism as it relates to the nature of faith. Therefore, even though those in the Church may agree with the platitude that baptism entails some connection with “faith,” there are many interpretations of what that looks like.

#### Illustration

To imagine this in real life, suppose a baptism will be taking place on a Sunday morning and a pastor is meeting with the family beforehand. Each family member acknowledges that this is a special day for the child, and they are excited to fill their cameras with pictures. During a lull, an older brother blurts out: “Pastor, why do we do this anyway?” The photos stop and all

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<sup>13</sup> See David P. Scaer, *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics: Law & Gospel & the Means of Grace* (St. Louis: Luther Academy, 2008).

eyes turn toward the pastor. Put on the spot, the pastor's head spins.

One possibility is for the pastor to respond by saying that baptism is something that is a commitment to God. After all, the pastor thinks: "Peter tells the crowd in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized." This is a command and requires some kind of commitment, right?" Consequently, the pastor goes on to describe baptism as a commitment of faith and a matter of obedience—something done for God as "proof" of being a disciple, or as a mark of "personal faith." In this instance, what is the relationship of baptism and faith? Baptism is not administered to elicit faith. Here baptism is associated with a call for personal responsibility and obedience, rather than trust in a promise.

Another possibility is for the pastor to explain that the child receives the "gift of faith" in baptism. The pastor goes on to say that in baptism, God grants His grace and making this child "righteous in His sight." In this case, baptism is understood to bestow a gift of God upon the baptized. The baptized is an unengaged recipient of this work of God. In this instance, too, baptism is not administered to elicit faith, as there is no trust or recognition of response. Instead, this understanding of baptism only focuses on the recognition of the child's inability and the proclamation of what is happening to the child—the infusion of God's grace to a passive recipient.

How could the pastor properly explain how baptism relates to faith? The pastor might explain the function of baptism how what is actually taking place through the ritual act relates to one's larger theological framework. In light of the constructive work previously done in this dissertation which has set forward a conception of faith as a trust in a declared promise in relation to justification, a theology of the Word, and pneumatology, it is a natural outworking of this project to consider how this framework sheds light on the nature and function of baptism.

The principal reason for this is that no matter what one thinks about baptism, there is a general realization that this ritualistic act is connected with “faith.” As this dissertation has addressed how “faith” is properly understood and elicited through the theological frameworks of justification, a theology of the Word, and pneumatology, this dissertation will consider how that same theological framework applies in addressing the confusion related to baptism.

### Baptism as a Justifying Declaration

First, in baptism, it is explicit that a declaration is made. The pastor is making a pronouncement: “I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Thus, when considering what baptism is, it must be evaluated in regard to this inescapable pronouncement. In seeking to examine the statement made, when someone says, “I baptize you,” it is specifically a certain type of statement—as Gerhard Forde categorizes, a word of proclamation. It is a first-to-second person discourse, an “I-to-you” statement.<sup>14</sup> Because of this, it cannot be ignored. It cannot be discounted. Instead, it requires the one addressed to respond to life in those terms—to either accept or reject what is said. As Forde states: “Proclamation as primary discourse demands an answer in like discourse be it positive or negative: “I repent, I believe” or “I don’t, I won’t, I can’t.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, when someone is baptized, no matter how young or how old, a word of proclamation has been given. A response is required to this word-event: either faith or rejection. Thus, whatever one may think about baptism, one must acknowledge this component.

In thinking about what this does for one’s concept of baptism, this realization takes baptism from merely being an external ritual act to being a “word-act,” which necessitates a response.

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<sup>14</sup> “Proclamation is present tense: I here and now give the gift to you, Christ himself, the body and blood of the Savior. I do it in both Word and sacrament. This is God’s present move, the current “mighty act” of the living God.” Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 2.

What this means is that baptism is to be recognized not as a “doing” by the baptized, but as a “declaring” by God. Thus, instead of worrying about if the water is too warm or too cold, or whether the person is young or old, the Church should be primarily concerned with what is being said or declared to the person being baptized and question what the reaction is going to be to what has been pronounced.

### Baptism is the Enactment of the “Visible Word”

If baptism is intended to elicit faith, then it is not enough to think of it as a declaration. We must be more specific and think of it as that which makes a specific promise from God. But in practice this can be impossible to discern. For example, the minister may administer baptism as though conducting a routine ritualistic act. Furthermore, the words “I baptize you” do not sound like a promise. Therefore, it is fair to ask how God is actually making a specific promise through this ritual act. No promise appears to be explicitly spoken or appropriated.

The promise of baptism comes through when baptism is thought of as a “visible Word.” As Ap. XIII states:

And God moves our hearts through the word and the rite at the same time so that they believe and receive faith just as Paul says, “So faith comes from what is heard.” For just as the Word enters through the ear in order to strike the heart, so also the rite enters through the eye in order to move the heart. The word and the rite have the same effect. Augustine put it well when he said that the sacrament is a “visible word,” because the rite is received by the eyes and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore both have the same effect.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, the sacraments of God operate as a picture of the declared Word of God. They are a sign for what is being spoken and declared in that instance regarding the participant. It is for this reason that Paul says that in baptism, the sacramental ritual of an individual being

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<sup>16</sup> See Augustine, *Tractates on John LXXX*, 3 (on John 15:3; MPL 35:1840, *NPNF*, ser. 1, 7:344); Ap. XIII, 5; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 219–20.

immersed with water in the name of the Triune God, serves as a visible picture of the declared promise that the baptized is united in burial with Christ and rises again in Him.<sup>17</sup> In addition, Paul also mentions that in baptism, there is the visible picture of the declared promise that the baptized is being clothed with Christ.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, in baptism, a visible Word is proclaimed: “You are the righteous child of God.”

In light of this, the Church should not look at baptism as only a symbolic act or ritualistic rite of the Church but as the enactment of a promise of God. Again, this kind of act cannot be ignored. Although the action is done with only the words “I baptize you,” there is so much more behind those words than first appears. It is the “visible Word” of God, enacting a promise to the recipient. Therefore, some kind of response is necessary and the one being baptized is required to now account for life in those terms.

#### Baptism as the Spirit’s Activity

As baptism is a declaration of the Word and the enactment of a visible promise, it is also essential to recognize that where the Word of God goes forth one should expect to see the Spirit of God at work there as well. This is not to say that the Spirit of God is bound by mechanical cause-and-effect relationship or that baptism is *ex opere operato*,<sup>19</sup> but instead it is to acknowledge that the Word of God is the means of the Spirit of God. Furthermore, when the Spirit uses the Word as His means, He does so to “kill” and “make alive.” He principally does this by convicting of sin and pointing to the truth (John 16:8, 13). Therefore, in regard to

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<sup>17</sup> “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” Rom. 6:3–5.

<sup>18</sup> “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Gal. 3:27.

<sup>19</sup> Sánchez, “Pneumatology,” 127.

baptism, as the Word is pronounced and a promise is made one should expect to also see the Holy Spirit at work to convict of sin and to make alive. The goal for this is that ultimately faith would be elicited. Again, this is not to say that one should expect to control the Spirit's activity, but simply to acknowledge that when the Word goes forth, the means of the Spirit's working goes forth as well. Therefore, in light of the Spirit's agency in using the Word of God, one should acknowledge that as the Word goes out in baptism the Spirit is there at work as well. This work of the Spirit is not only to place someone under condemnation but also to bring about new life—to elicit faith.

### Conclusion

Therefore, in light of this wider theological framework, baptism should be thought of as God's Spirit working through the declared Word of promise to elicit faith in the life of the one baptized. Thus, baptism is the means of God's grace which declares a new reality for the one "spiritually dead" and in need of resurrection.

With this understanding in mind, when the family meets with the pastor before the baptismal service, the pastor need not shy back from describing to the family what is taking place in baptism. Instead, when asked, he could describe the different elements of the ritual act and describe in detail what is taking place and why. As he does so, he can explain how the central elements from the baptismal ritual: (1) the enactment of the direct declarations from God's Word, (2) the nature of God's Word as promise, and (3) the Spirit's presence in conjunction with the Word, all function to elicit faith. Therefore, even though the one being baptized may be a small infant without intellectual ability or understanding, God Himself is addressing this child and making a promise to the child that He adopts him as His own. This declaration and enactment of the promise is used by the Spirit of God to elicit faith which takes

hold of the promise of God as its object.

## **Evangelism**

As previously mentioned, there are many in the Church who believe that Christians are on the same page regarding what evangelism is and what it is not. Like the topic of faith, this is because “evangelism” is a primary aspect of life in the Church. Jesus tells His disciples to be His witnesses, the book of Acts is primarily centered on the evangelistic mission of the Church, and the apostle Peter even gives a pointed admonition to “Honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). Consequently, it is common to find an assortment of books on evangelism in the local congregation written from a variety of affiliations.<sup>20</sup> Even when it is recognized that doctrine and practice divides the Church, many church leaders believe that Christians generally agree on the matter of evangelism. Moreover, there may be different approaches to evangelism, such as friend to friend approach<sup>21</sup> versus a “cold turkey” approach,<sup>22</sup> but Christians seem to generally acknowledge that “evangelism” is still taking place. Consequently, if there were any topic which those in the Church would find unity, one would think it would be evangelism. However, even for those who sit next to each other in the pew in Church, one often finds confusion in regard to what evangelism really is and how it relates to faith.

For instance, some understand evangelism as “getting someone to agree with you,” others

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<sup>20</sup> See Mark Cahill, *One Thing You Can't Do in Heaven*, 5th ed. (Rockwall, TX: Mark Cahill Ministries, 2002); Robert E. Coleman and Billy Graham, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> David Geisler and Norman Geisler, *Conversational Evangelism: Connecting with People to Share Jesus*, (Eugene: Harvest House, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Greg Stier, *Dare 2 Share: A Field Guide To Sharing Your Faith*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Arvada, CO: Dare 2 Share Ministries, 2015).

as the assertion of propositional information, and still others as “the declaration of good news to be trusted.” These different understandings of the nature of evangelism also represent very different goals. All may agree with the platitude that evangelism entails “hearing about faith,” there are varied interpretations of what that looks like. Naturally, it is appropriate to evaluate how one knows which one is right or even if evangelism is being done in such a way that faith is actually elicited.

### Illustration

As a means for evaluation, consider this scenario: Two friends are sitting in a coffee shop and the discussion turns towards spiritual things. One friend is a Christian and the other is not. The Christian friend has often hoped for a good opportunity to evangelize to her friend and now the situation seems right. But what should she do? What kind of evangelism puts her friend in a position where she has the opportunity to respond by faith?

One possibility is for the Christian friend to begin making a persuasive argument, trying to convince the other with logic and reason why she is right. She might say: “Surveys have proven that all people have some kind of inherent moral compass” or asks: “In what way have you tried to deal with your sin?” In cases like these, when Christians try to ask questions or make assertions to “save her friend,” they put pressure on their unbelieving conversation partners “to intellectually agree” with what is said. They may agree, or they may rationally explain it away, or they may be indifferent. What is unlikely, or at least unexpected, is that the result is faith understood as trust. This is because the reasoning of a persuasive presentation is emphasized.

Another possibility is that the Christian tells her friend what she believes in a propositional fashion. The Christian might first ask her friend, “Can I share what I believe with you?” In proceeding to “evangelize” to her friend, she recounts a series of facts: “We all have a sin



problem, in which we are prone to do bad things. God decided to come and do something about that and sent His Son Jesus to save us from our sin. He did this by dying on the cross to pay the price that we deserved to pay for our sin...” After the Christian recounts everything that she can about sin and about Jesus and what He has done, she asks her friend if she accepts these facts. The Christian figures she has done her job in “evangelizing” and that if her friend acknowledges what was said, then she has faith. However, in this instance, faith has not been elicited. Instead, the unbelieving friend has only received some facts to accept and remember.

So how can a Christian know whether their evangelism will foster the opportunity for someone to come to saving faith? Once again, a way to discern this is to assess whether one’s understanding of evangelism falls in line with the larger theological framework about what faith is and how it is elicited. In light of the work done in this dissertation which has set forward a conception of faith as trust as it relates to justification, a theology of the Word and pneumatology, it would be a natural outworking of this project to consider how evangelism coheres with that same framework of faith. The principal reason for this is that no matter what one thinks about evangelism, it is done for the purpose of seeking “faith” as its outcome. Therefore, as this dissertation has addressed how a proper understanding of the nature of faith is one which coheres with justification, a theology of the Word, and pneumatology, this dissertation will also consider the same theological framework in addressing the confusion related to evangelism.

### Evangelism as a Justifying Pronouncement

Again, if the goal of evangelism is to bring about “faith,” evangelism must first and foremost be understood as having the justifying pronouncement by God as its aim. For as has been previously mentioned, faith is elicited through a justifying declaration of God. St. Paul even

clearly gives this testimony, stating, “It is God who justifies” (Rom. 8:33). Man cannot do anything in and of himself to be justified. He cannot pass that verdict on himself. He is left waiting and hoping to receive that word from God alone. Consequently, if evangelism is to be concerned about bringing about faith, it must be inherently directed to being a justifying pronouncement of God.

One obstacle to this understanding is that God Himself is not evangelizing. God is not audibly speaking to people on the streets or in their homes and converting them. Instead, when we observe evangelism taking place, it is believers—God’s Church—who are going out. This fact obscures understanding that evangelism is intended to lead to a justifying pronouncement by God. To deal with this, it is important to recall what has already been discussed at length: God Himself *is* still the One making the justifying declarations, through the means of people. As Wolterstorff explains in his work, *Divine Discourse*, although an audible pronouncement is not often spoken by God Himself, this pronouncement is made by God through means—which Wolterstorff calls “Deputized Discourse.”<sup>23</sup> What Wolterstorff means by this is that it is not only the words of a man that are being heard when a believer shares the Word of God with someone else, but that what is being spoken is the very pronouncement of God.

The recognition of this as a fundamental Lutheran understanding culminates in Article V of the AC. The Confession holds that Almighty God has instituted the Office of Holy Ministry for this purpose: that His servants, as means, may articulate the declarations of God’s unconditional promises to His people. AC V states: “To obtain such faith God instituted the office of

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<sup>23</sup> Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 38.

preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel.”<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, in light of the consideration that faith is elicited by the justifying pronouncement of God, which He makes through His people as His means, evangelism is well conceived as the making of a justifying pronouncement in the authority of God as His ambassador. This is evangelism as Paul described it to the church in Corinth: “We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20).

#### Evangelism as the Enactment of the Word

Furthermore, in light of the discussion in this dissertation that faith comes about through the power of the Word to effect change and elicit something, evangelism is not to be thought of as just a saying but as an effectual act.<sup>25</sup> When the Word is proclaimed evangelistically, it is spoken with the intent and purpose to effect a new reality in the life of the person hearing: *faith*. This means that the promises of God’s Word do not only inform people that their sins are forgiven, but it actually forgives sin. Thus, whatever one would think about evangelism, one must acknowledge that eventuates in an effectual act, in the enacting the promises of God upon the individuals who hear it.

This does not mean that evangelism always has a result of conversion. Rather, it is to say

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<sup>24</sup> AC V, 2; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 40.

<sup>25</sup> “The preacher of the gospel, according to Forde, not only explains the word of God, he *does* the word of God by the authority Christ gave his church. ‘The proclaimer must so announce the forgiveness to those gathered here and now as to amaze them by the audacity of it all. Perhaps they will even glorify God once again. The proclaimer must, on the authority of Jesus, have the guts to do it again in the living present always done once upon a time... To do the deed authorized, not merely explain the deeds of the past... The deed is to be done.’” Andréa D. Snavely, *Life in the Spirit: A Post-Constantinian and Trinitarian Account of the Christian Life* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2015), 133; Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 157.

that evangelism is authentic and faithful when it aims for converting through the promises of God. Moreover, it is to say that it is impossible for the promise of God's Word not to elicit some kind of response when it is heard. Consequently, it is inconceivable that someone could merely sit under the proclamation of the Word of God without some effect taking place. Some kind of response is naturally required. One will either trust in God's Word or will willfully reject it.<sup>26</sup> As previously mentioned, a key illustration of this is Jesus' parable of the sower. In explaining the meaning of the parable to his disciples, Jesus took time to demonstrate that each of the different recipients of the seed had some kind of response to it. However, in each instance, something happened when the Word was heard—there was a reaction. In this case, there were four completely different illustrations given by Jesus regarding the effect of the word upon those who heard it. It was not just a saying, but an effectual act.

Therefore, in light of the consideration that faith is elicited by the effectual nature of the Word of God, which demands a response to the promise of God, evangelism is best conceived as the enacting of the promises of God to unbelievers and allowing His Word to bring about its intended result.

#### Evangelism as the Spirit's Activity to Kill and Make Alive

Lastly, in light of this dissertation's discussion that faith comes about through the Spirit's use of the means of the Word to kill and make alive, it is consequently of utmost importance to recognize that evangelism by nature must be understood as that which recognizes the Spirit's

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<sup>26</sup> "Proclamation as primary discourse demands an answer in like discourse be it positive or negative: 'I repent, I believe' or 'I don't, I won't, I can't.'" In other words, when the proclamation announces, "I declare unto you the forgiveness of all your sins," the appropriate response is not, "Well, that's your opinion!" Perhaps the only thing the absolver could say to such irrelevancy would be, "No, that's not my opinion. If I were to give my opinion about you it would likely be something else! We are not dealing with human opinion here, but with the Word of God!" Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 2.

activity to “kill” and “make alive” through the means of the Word.

On the one hand, the Spirit uses the Word as gospel to make alive and raise men, women and children from spiritual death to spiritual life. Through it, the Spirit promises good news for those who have perished. He promises them they have new life and life abundantly (John 10:10). He promises them that God has rescued, redeemed and justified them (Rom. 3:24; 2 Cor. 5:19). He promises them that they are children of God (John 1:12). As a result of the Holy Spirit’s work to make alive through the gospel, this is how people come to the point where they can say: “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor. 12:3).

However, the Spirit also works through evangelism to spiritually “kill.” As God’s Word goes forth proclaiming His moral law, the Spirit of God uses it in judgment and condemnation against those who live in conflict to it. Consequently, if there was anything in man that thought that he could get to God on the basis of his own works or efforts, this ideology is murdered by the Spirit’s use of God’s Law. It leaves no hope for man except certain damnation. Jesus clearly makes this pronouncement concerning the work of the Spirit in John 16:8, saying: “And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”

### Conclusion

Therefore, since the goal of evangelism is to bring about saving faith, evangelism is best to be thought of as the justifying declaration of the Word of God which the Holy Spirit utilizes to enact spiritual condemnation and proclaim life to the heart of the one hearing the Word.

With this understanding in mind, when the topic of spiritual things arises at the coffee shop the Christian friend need not shy back from enacting the direct declarations from God’s Word to her unbelieving friend, trusting in the Spirit’s ability to use that Word to elicit faith. Maybe the Christian friend applies Romans 3:10 to condemn the sin in her friend’s life, saying: “You are

not righteous in the sight of God.” While this might put the unbelieving friend in an awkward situation, this forces her to do something with this statement. It is a declaration that cannot be ignored. Perhaps the Christian friend then applies 2 Corinthians 5:20–21 to the situation, imploring her friend to be reconciled to Christ by faith and proclaiming to her the promise “He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” This approach to evangelism is that which speaks a promise with an intended result in mind: *faith*. Faith that God actually will do what He has committed to do. Faith in where we stand before Him after believing what He has done for us.

### **Sanctification**

The topic of sanctification has also proven to be a subject of much confusion for the Church. Some believers have created entire denominations or Church movements over this issue.<sup>27</sup> Much of the Bible is devoted to exhortations regarding how to “live as a follower of Christ” (Matt. 5:21–48; Rom. 12:9–21; Eph. 5:1–21). So a stress on holiness and sanctification and good works is to be expected among all Christians. But while believers generally acknowledge that they are to live by faith, they differ and disagree about how to live by faith or what this looks like. Among modern Lutherans, this discussion frequently has centered on the use of the law to give instruction for the believer.<sup>28</sup> They spend time questioning the purpose and function of the law, whether it only accuses or if it is truly able to give instruction regarding how to live. These represent significantly different positions, each with a very particular view of the Word of God and its implications for Christian life.

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<sup>27</sup> See William Kostlevy, *The A to Z of the Holiness Movement*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> See Biermann, *A Case for Character*; Cooper, *Lex Aeterna*; Murray, “The Third Use of the Law in American Lutheranism 1940 to the Present.”

Additionally, questions often persist in the Church today regarding who is responsible for the work of sanctification in the life of the believer. Thus, although all Christians can look at the Word of God and read about God’s call to holy living, some look at the exhortation to holy living as a work which they produce,<sup>29</sup> while others look at it as something in which God produces in them.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, some look at their good works as a way to make them right with the Lord, where some consider their works as a result of being made right with God.<sup>31</sup> Again, each of these is a very distinct way of conceiving of sanctification and has a variety of implications for the Church. Therefore, even though those in the Church may agree with the platitude that sanctification entails “living by faith,” there are many interpretations of what that looks like.

#### Illustration

As an example of confusion about sanctification, imagine a few friends talking on Sunday morning about helping at the local community shelter. One says that he enjoys doing things like this and that they always make him feel like he has a better relationship with God. Another friend says that how one feels about doing good is not the point, but that we do these because “that’s just what Christians do.” As the conversation becomes animated, these friends look to a third friend for his input. They are looking for him to settle the question: “Why do Christians do these things after all?” But regardless of the answer he gives, there is more to sanctification than Christians doing things “just because.” Instead, the reasons and motivations for one’s acts of

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<sup>29</sup> See Joel Osteen, *Become a Better You: 7 Keys to Improving Your Life Every Day*, Rep. ed. (New York: Howard Books, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> See Adolf Koberle, *The Quest for Holiness: A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Investigation*, trans. John C. Mattes (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> See Bayer, *Living by Faith*. Bayer has a discussion comparing different understandings of sanctification in the Church, particularly comparing those who look at it as something they do to be made right with God versus something they do because they have been made right with God.

“sanctification” are both explicitly and implicitly connected to describing what a life of “faith” looks like. Consequently, how one is justified and what the role of the Spirit is in one’s life matter greatly.

In considering a conceivable response, one possibility is for the friend to agree with the friend who does “good deeds” because it makes him feel like he has a better relationship with God. Perhaps he reasons that God calls us to live holy and godly lives, so if he does “good deeds,” then God will be more pleased with him. However, this reasoning for doing good works implies a relationship with God in which the believer is trying to impress God or make Himself right with God. This is not a “life of faith” which trusts in the promises of God and the work of the Spirit, but rather a life which is relying and trusting upon one’s own works and merits to make one right with God.

Another possibility is for the friend to agree that these things are done because it is just “what Christians do.” In this perspective, doing good works is not something that one does to be “better with God,” but the focus is still on the human subject to “do the work.” The implications for this kind of understanding demonstrates an understanding where God has reached in and brought salvation—but that is as far as God’s activity is concerned. This is akin to an understanding of God as one who sets everything in motion but then takes a backseat to “watch the show.” This thinking does not consider the Christian life a “life of faith,” but one which centers the life of faith on the working and action of man.

### Sanctification as Living as One Declared Right with God

In discussing sanctification, the matter must begin with the recognition that the one has been put in a right relationship with the Lord. Man has been justified by God and is called to “live” in light of this faith. Without this concept of justification as the presupposition, there is no



way to understand and explain properly how to “live by faith.”<sup>32</sup> It is essential to think of sanctification in light of what has already happened to the believer—noting that sanctification is produced by declared right with God.

One basic implication is that any talk about sanctification should not pertain to trying to please God or impress Him. God’s pleasure has already been shown in justification. Instead, as one has already been made right with God, trusting in His promises, sanctification should be understood as a daily continuance of living in coherence with the statements and declarations of God for one’s life. It is living life in light of what God has declared to be the case.

#### Sanctification as a Life Trusting in God’s Word of Promise

In thinking about sanctification, “Christian living,” it is also important to remember that it is that which centers on the promise of God’s Word. As Jesus promises to his disciples in John 15:4–5, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” As Jesus is speaking with his disciples, we see that he gives them a promise. He tells them that those who are in him will bear much fruit. For those who remain in Him and He in them, spiritual fruit is borne in their lives. However, apart from Him, they can do nothing. This is the commitment of Jesus. In considering the promise of Jesus, it is clear what Jesus says about living the Christian life. For those who are in Christ Jesus, it is His commitment that He will be doing a work in and through their lives. Spiritually, fruit will be borne. It is an effectual proclamation. Consequently, one does not have to wait around and wonder if sanctification will take place in

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<sup>32</sup> See Bayer, *Living by Faith*. A life of sanctification always follows a justified life.

one's life. Instead, Christians should expect and have faith that God is committed to His promise and will be faithful to what He has obligated.

In considering what Paul says to the Church of Thessalonica, he also expresses this same reality, stating: "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it" (1 Thess. 5:23–24) In considering Paul's words as he speaks on behalf of God regarding "living by faith," he is clear in promising that God Himself is faithful to this work of sanctification. It is His promise and His trustworthiness that is on the line. He is the One who is committing and obligating Himself to this act in the life of the Christian regarding holy living.

With this in mind, it is important to remember that such promises of God are not just sayings but they are effectual acts. Sanctification always follows justification. It is the result of the promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation. In light of this understanding of the effectual promise of God, sanctification is to be best understood as the elicited result of the enactment of God's will, which is explicitly expressed through the promise of His Word. Thus, sanctification is the performative work of God.

#### Sanctification as a Recognition of the Spirit's Activity

In assessing sanctification, "living by faith," it is also essential to recognize how it is a new life for the Christian by the Spirit's activity. This is the consistent testimony of Scripture, which both Paul and Peter explicitly testify: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Gal. 5:22–23), "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11), and "According to the

foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you” (1 Pet. 1:2).

Therefore, if one wants to understand sanctification, one must acknowledge an understanding of it as life in the Spirit.

In addition, this life in the Spirit is not one which merely considers the Spirit’s work to “help” or to “support” when needed but one which views sanctification as the Spirit’s operative work. To those who may be skeptical of this, when one considers who it is that is the cause of good works, the answer lies in plain sight. Contrary to the opinion of some, love, joy, or peace are not the byproduct of the work of man and his initiative but they are the fruits of the Spirit. What this means is that although such actions take place through the life of man, they are attributed to the working of God’s Spirit. He is the one producing the fruit. This is why vocation or love for one’s neighbor is often referred to as the “masks of God” in Lutheran theology.<sup>33</sup> Sanctification is God’s Spirit at work. It is His accomplishment of good works in the lives of those who have faith.

### Conclusion

In light of this greater theological framework, sanctification is best to be thought of as God’s Spirit working in the life of the one who has been justified and who is trusting in God’s declared Word of promise to work out “good deeds” in their life. With this understanding in mind, when the believers are talking about why they help out at the local community shelter a clear answer can be given on the matter. Instead of good works being done to feel like one has a

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<sup>33</sup> The good that man does on earth is God’s creation, and it is to be directed toward his neighbor. Before God the good is not man’s but God’s. Only before one’s neighbor does the good done appear as coming from him who does it. Through this we can understand the concept of man as “mask” of God.” WA 38, 373; Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 18–19.

better relationship with God or because “that’s just what Christians do,” the friend can explain what it really means to live by faith. The friend states: “In doing good works, we’re not doing something to make us right with God nor are we doing this separate from the work of God in us; instead, we live by faith in the promise of God that He will bear good fruit in our lives and that the Holy Spirit is producing those things in us.”

### **Confirmation**

As mentioned earlier in the dissertation, but confirmation often demonstrates confusion about the nature of faith. Again, this is not only the case across Lutheran denominations, but also within the same denominations. A popular pamphlet in the Evangelical Lutheran Church, entitled: “Confirmation...Why?” demonstrates this well. On page one, it states: “Confirmation is an ordinance of the church by which the baptized child is given the opportunity publicly to confirm the Baptismal covenant into which he entered as an infant.”<sup>34</sup> However, directly following this, there is the statement: “When the child approaches the age of discretion he is assumed to be mature enough for the intensive instruction (teaching) and preparation for confirmation.”<sup>35</sup> This mention of 'age of discretion' in today’s situation risks confusion with an Anabaptist theology and its conviction that baptism is a sign made by the candidates of their commitment, rather than a sign from God that elicits trust. To be sure, it may well have been carelessness in writing and not theological looseness which gives us this sentence. But however this came to be written and published, it was written and published, and we have to deal with its implications.

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<sup>34</sup> *Confirmation . . . Why?* (Book Mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, n.d.; Minneapolis: Ambassador Publications, 2002), 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Confirmation . . . Why?*, 2.

On the one hand there is a recognition of the faith that the child has from baptism and confirmation as the opportunity to affirm that faith and on the other hand a Baptist display of an “age of accountability” where one is now at the point to “prepare” for confirmation. Therefore, even though those in the Lutheran Church may agree with the platitude that confirmation entails “affirming faith,” there are many interpretations of what that looks like. Some recognize that the faith is already there and present from the time of the baptismal covenant, while others believe that there needs to be some kind of maturation and intellectual progress to discern if one truly has “faith,” treating the confirmand as if he currently does not have faith at all.

Again, each of these is a very distinct way of conceiving of confirmation and each has a variety of implications for the Church. Therefore, even though those in the Church may agree with the platitude that confirmation entails “affirmation of faith,” there are many interpretations of what that looks like.

### Illustration

As an illustration of this dilemma, a few moms are busy ironing the confirmation gowns for their students in preparation for Confirmation Sunday and are spending time talking about their confirmands. One jokes that it seems like just yesterday that all of them were doing the exact same thing, except with baptismal gowns for their children. After a few light conversations, one of the moms confesses that she is so ready for confirmation to be over so that they can get their life back. She has been glad for her son to have the experience of confirmation, but now that he knows all of what it means to be a Christian, she is glad that they can be done with the process. Flabbergasted, another mom chimes in and states that confirmation is not about just getting through and knowing all of the right answers, but it’s about giving your child the opportunity to

decide for themselves what they think about faith. The last mom can hardly believe what she is hearing. She knows that what she is hearing is wrong, but she is not sure what to say.

While hypothetical, this scenario is all too readily apparent in the Church. Some view confirmation as nothing more than a time to get all of your “knowledge” about God. Once the required knowledge is completed and the homework assignments are turned in, that individual is “right with God.” Others view confirmation as an evangelistic opportunity, where the student has the chance to hear the Word of God and then decide if they believe it or not. As this dissertation has sought to address how “faith” is properly understood and elicited through the theological frameworks of justification, a theology of the Word, and pneumatology, this work will consider how the same theological framework applies in addressing the confusion related to confirmation, an “affirmation of faith.”

#### Confirmation as an Affirmation of Faith in God’s Declaration of Promise

In thinking about confirmation as an affirmation of faith, confirmation must be recognized as that which is associated with a declaration which has been made by God. As faith has been seen to be that which takes an object and is a trust in a declared pronouncement of God, confirmation is naturally to be understood as an affirmation of faith in that declared pronouncement. For the Lutheran Church, one of the places where we expect to see that justifying pronouncement take place for people is in the sacrament of baptism. In such instances, the declared promise of God’s good news is pronounced. However, many times this is not readily acknowledged, as the words “I baptize you” does not sound much like a promise. While this is admittedly the case when one focuses solely on the words spoken, there is so much more taking place at baptism than just the speaking of certain words—there is the enactment of a

“visible Word.”<sup>36</sup> The reason for this is that the sacrament of God operates as a picture of the declared Word of God. It is a sign for what is being spoken and declared regarding the participant. It is for this reason that Paul says that in baptism, the sacramental ritual of an individual being immersed with water in the name of the Triune God serves as a visible picture of the declared promise that the baptized is united in burial with Christ and rises again in Him.<sup>37</sup> In addition, Paul also mentions that in baptism, there is the visible picture of the declared promise that the baptized is being clothed with Christ.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, in baptism, “a visible Word” is proclaimed: “You are the righteous child of God.”

#### Confirmation as an Affirmation of Faith in the Enactment of God’s Word

Closely related to being an affirmation of faith in the declaration of God’s promise, confirmation is also an affirmation of faith in the enactment of God’s Word. The realization of this is made when one acknowledges that in baptism, not only is a declaration made, but a specific promise is enacted by God. As a “visible Word,” it does not just say something, but it does something. In light of this recognition, when a confirmation student looks back to their baptism or a time in which they heard the gospel proclaimed to them, this was not just a symbolic act or ritualistic rite of the Church but it was the enactment of a promise of God. This

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<sup>36</sup> “And God moves our hearts through the word and the rite at the same time so that they believe and receive faith just as Paul says, “So faith comes from what is heard.” For just as the Word enters through the ear in order to strike the heart, so also the rite enters through the eye in order to move the heart. The word and the rite have the same effect. Augustine put it well when he said that the sacrament is a “visible word,” because the rite is received by the eyes and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore both have the same effect.” See Augustine, *Tractates on John LXXX*, 3 (on John 15:3; MPL 35:1840, *NPNF*, ser. 1, 7:344); Ap. XIII, 5; Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 219–20.

<sup>37</sup> “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” Rom. 6:3–5.

<sup>38</sup> “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Gal. 3:27.

kind of act cannot be ignored but reveals what God Himself has done about their standing before Him. Although this action is done with only the words “I baptize you” or “I forgive you,” there is action behind those words. It is the “visible Word” of God which actually does the deed of making someone right in the sight of God and adopted as His child. Some kind of response is necessary and the one being baptized is required to now account for life in those terms. Therefore, in coming to confirmation, the confirmand has the opportunity to affirm the enactment of that promise of God and to affirm the faith that God has elicited in his or her heart.

#### Confirmation as an Affirmation of Faith through the Spirit’s Activity

In assessing confirmation as a time of “affirmation of faith,” it is also essential to recognize the work that the Spirit of God has done and is doing in the heart of the confirmand. Insofar as the confirmation student is professing a faith in Christ, there is a clear recognition that the Spirit of God has been and is active through the Word in the life of that child, as “no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). Therefore, in confirmation there is an affirmation that the Spirit of God has been and is alive and active in the work of the student and that it is the Spirit’s activity that has brought about an elicited faith in their life.

#### Conclusion

In light of this theological framework, confirmation is best to be thought of not as a graduation or an opportunity for someone to “come to faith,” or a merit of faith based on one’s homework but as an affirmation of the faith that is already present through God’s Spirit working in the life of the one who has been justified and who is trusting in God’s declared Word of promise. With this understanding in mind, the mom could respond in the situation by saying: “Ladies, do you not remember when pastor baptized our children and told us of the life of faith that was beginning as our children heard the promise of the Word of God? This Confirmation



Sunday is not about a fulfillment of a knowledge requirement or a time that our children can now finally decide what they think about faith, but a time that they can publically affirm the faith that God elicited in their lives and has been faithful to keep until now.”

### **Final Statement**

Although this has been a cursory application for each of these key topics, each of them having the possibility of further study and research, it is the hope of this author that a better light has been cast on each topic in light of a proper understanding of faith. Furthermore, it is the prayer of this author that further discussion will be able to take place not only in regard to these three areas, but that the Church as a whole will continue to see how central and pivotal faith is to the discussion of other doctrinal treatises or ministry practices. Lastly, it is the intent of this author that this dissertation will allow for a fresh conversation to be had for similar topics throughout all of Christ’s Church.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **CLOSING REMARKS**

I began this project with a sense of discomfort about the assumptions, concepts, and categories that have governed the current understanding of faith. In the Church, there is genuine confusion that exists regarding such a foundational and key topic for God’s people. Some view faith as a Rational Assent. Others view faith as a Quality. A few even admit that faith is nothing more than Passive Reception. Not only are these conceptions radically different from one another, with significant implications for ministry practices and doctrinal formulations, but they are often represented by those even in the same congregation.

This sense of discomfort led me on a journey to solve a problem. How do I understand faith? In seeking to find an answer, this study led me in the direction of the work done by Oswald Bayer, Gerhard Forde, Regin Prenter and others in conceiving of the gospel as “promise.” This gospel, when proclaimed, elicits faith in the one who hears. Someone is made right with God and is justified and the Holy Spirit is working through the means of that pronounced Word. Throughout this process of studying, I came to realize that an understanding of “faith” is not a stand-alone topic but is intricately connected with a greater theological framework. Therefore, my goal in this process has been to set forth an understanding of faith that would be demonstrably consistent with some of the other key theological treatises that are at the core of faith—namely—a proper understanding of justification, pneumatology and a theology of the Word. In pursuing this framework, I found that each of those three areas contributed to and shed light upon a proper understanding of the nature of faith.

This theological framework which provides a holistic understanding of faith does not answer every question, nor does it claim to do so. Instead, its intent is to set forward a new way of having the conversation. This is most obvious in chapters 3 through 5, where I only scratch the surface of the theological contributions to a proper framework of faith. Rather than trying to offer a comprehensive theology about the nature of faith, or to set forth a definition or word-study, my goal has been to provide fresh language to the discussion that is grounded in and consistent with the Word of God and Lutheran theology. It is my hope that as a result of this venture, Christ's Church would begin to rethink how it has thought about the nature of faith.

Regarding possible implications for further study, the same dissertation template could also be applied to the recent discussion over the "Joint Declaration on Justification," in which the Lutheran and Catholic Church came together to discuss the nature of justification. Similar to how this dissertation has utilized the "Law and Gospel Debate" to evidence how multiple understandings of faith are operative in discussions in the Church, the "Joint Declaration on Justification" does the same. Those who understood faith as Rational Assent looked for how man played a role in intellectually apprehending his justification, whereas those who understood faith as Trust presented justification as trust in the declared promise of God.

In addition to the "Joint Declaration on Justification," modern debates over baptism could also be applied to the same dissertation template. Often, there are debates concerning baptism that hold all kinds of underpinning assumptions regarding faith. Those who understand faith as a Passive Reception present baptism as a passive acceptance of God's grace, those who understand faith as Rational Assent present baptism as a commitment that they make, and those who understand faith as a Trust present baptism as an effectual promise by God which elicits trust.

Additionally, there are also several application topics that could be addressed in

opportunities for further study, such as: The Lord's Supper, infant communion, the faith of the mentally handicapped, or predestination. The purpose of this work was to begin to have a conversation that was not being had—namely—that when one approaches a doctrinal topic or ministry practice, they are approaching it through the lens of faith. A certain understanding of faith is always operative to the discussion at hand and multiple understandings of faith should be expected, even within Lutheran circles.

It is ultimately the hope of this work to remedy one of the great problems that the Church faces today: a confused understanding of faith. It seeks that the members of Christ's Church would actually have faith that Jesus is the Son of God and that He is the true and perfect revelation of the Father's will. Furthermore, it strives to set forth a new framework of faith that dispels confusion related to both doctrinal and practical matters of the Church. As a result of this project, it is the intent and hope that this confusion will be remedied and a fresh conversation can be had about the nature of faith and its connectivity to the workings of the Church.

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