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The Soteriological Approach to Christian Doctrine

† F. E. Mayer

[*Ed. Note.* How can we help to make 1974 a real "year of our Lord"? What can we do to help ourselves appreciate the gifts of grace which God plans to shower upon us this year? One way in which to begin to chart our path through the coming year is to review the path which has brought us to where we are now. It was 20 years ago that Concordia Publishing House issued F. E. Mayer's volume *The Religious Bodies of America* (St. Louis, 4th ed., 1961). That book to this day has continued to guide the inquisitive student through the labyrinth of American denominations. As will happen with anything worthwhile, Dr. Mayer's work has grown in value through the years. His insights into the nature of Lutheranism are especially helpful to our own church today, reminding us of the great traditions which are ours. The bibliography has been updated for this reprint.

Since this book is no longer in print, the staff of CTM has decided to make available this reprint of selections from Mayer's work on Lutheranism. A study guide has also been prepared by Ronald W. Roschke to accompany this issue's reprint. The guide is to be used in a course designed for the first 6 weeks of the new year. That seems to be a most appropriate time for us to rediscover our theological roots: not only is it a time of new beginnings, but it is also the Epiphany season—the season of light and revelation. Even as the star guided those ancient Magi to the Christ Child, it is our hope that the classic "soteriological approach to Christian doctrine" can also be a light to help guide us to appreciate even more the goodness of God through His only Son. (We are grateful to Concordia Publishing House for its kind permission to reprint.)]

The Lutheran Confessions present all Christian doctrine from the soteriological standpoint, that is, from the meaning each has for our salvation. Each and every doctrine of Christian revelation must be viewed *in actu*, not only *in statu*; it must be within the focus of a real spiritual problem and be presented only in its soteriological significance.¹

THEOLOGY

The Lutheran Confessions make no attempt to define God. This may be due in part to the antipathy of the Reformers during the early days against the scholastic method, which tried to define God in purely metaphysical terminology without any regard or reference to the soteriological implications. The Lutheran Confessions recognize that it is impossible to define the Infinite, chiefly because the transcendent God

reveals Himself only as He enters into a personal relationship with man, i. e., God confronts man either as the Law-giver or as the Law Remover. And conversely man's relation to God is either that of being under God's wrath because of man's transgressions or that of being under God's grace because of Christ's redemptive work in freeing man from the demand and the threats of the Law.²

The Lutheran Confessions lay great emphasis on the reality of the wrath of God, not as an academic question, but as real life experience. The Lutheran Confessions say that God's law is man's dreadful enemy either inasmuch as the Law makes presumptuous hypocrites, or inasmuch as it causes rebellion against God, or because it creates terrors of conscience and leads to

² F. E. Mayer, "Reflections on Trinity Sunday," *CTM*, XXI (1950), pp. 451 ff.; John Theodore Mueller, "The Concept of God in the Lutheran Confessions," *CTM*, XXVI (1955), 1-16; Lewis W. Spitz Sr., "The Soteriological Aspect of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity According to the Lutheran Confessions," *ibid.*, pp. 161-71.

¹ Symbolics may therefore serve admirably as an introduction to Lutheran dogmatics. Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, Philadelphia, 1961.

despair. At any rate it always increases man's enmity against God. The Law demands perfect obedience of man without in any way helping man to render it, and at the same time reveals the wrath of God and constantly accuses man and shows man the "angry God."³ Thus the Law becomes a dreadful thunderbolt (*Donneraxt*) with which God knocks into a heap both the manifest sinners and the vaunted hypocrites and drives them all together into terrors and despair. Only from the revelation of God's Word does man fully understand the greatness of God's wrath, when the Law shows man his dreadful condition and the reality of the wrath of God.⁴

But God terrifies and slays the sinner in order to come to His real work, namely, to quicken and comfort the frightened sinner, to whom God under the Law is the object of his fear and terror, but under the Gospel becomes a lovable object, *obiectum amabile*.⁵ Lutheran theology holds that unless this distinction between the Law and the Gospel is strictly observed, and unless the fact is kept in mind that God is both a God of wrath and a God of love, terrible confusion will result. The resultant description of God will be a caricature of God and lead the sinner either to false security or to despair. On occasion the Lutheran Creeds picture God as the God of wrath (Law); and again as One who

has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart, his sheer, unutterable love.⁶

³ See LC I 16, 31, 37, 38. Ap II 42; IV 9, 79; XII 34 (compare with the German text). Melancthon complains that his opponents were "inexperienced theologians," for they could not understand the doctrine of the grace of God, because they had never experienced the "terrors of conscience."

⁴ Ap IV 36, 37, 40, 62, 295 (*lex semper accusat*); SA III I, II, III (Of Sin, the Law, Repentance).

⁵ Ap IV 129. See XII 51 f.; FC SD V 12-15.

⁶ LC Creed 64. All quotations from the Confessions are from the Pappert edition.

In Lutheran theology even the words "to have a God" are given a soteriological meaning, for these words are said to mean that the Christian has someone to whom he can flee for refuge in every trial, and from whom he can seek good for every life situation; in short, that he trusts implicitly in God's never-ending love. Such faith is well anchored, according to the Confessions, because God is like a fountain whose supply becomes the richer and purer, the more water it gushes forth.⁷

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not presented as a cold dogmatic proposition, nor has it been included in the Augsburg Confession merely to give historic and "legal" standing to the Evangelical party. Lutherans affirm the Quicumque (Athanasian Creed), which maintains that whoever will be saved must worship the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity. The Confessions carefully distinguish the three Persons and yet maintain the absolute Unity. However, the Trinity in Unity and the Unity in Persons is not presented for mere contemplation, but for our salvation. Soteriologically this means, on the one hand, that the One Eternal has redeemed us, and, on the other hand, that all three Persons have co-operated in each specific phase of the divine work. The Confessions state:

[In the Three Articles God reveals that] He created us for this very purpose, to redeem and sanctify us. Moreover, having bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, he has given us his Son and his Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself. As we explained before, we could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and

⁷ *Ibid.*, I 1, 4, 14, 15; Second Perition 56.

terrible Judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit.⁸

The Christian is instructed to view the divine work of creation in its soteriological significance, since God is our Creator that we may benefit from Christ's work. For that reason the Confessions are concerned, not with describing the creation of the world as a historic fact in the distant past, but rather with establishing the significance of the creation for the individual: "God has created me and all that exists."⁹ It is this soteriological emphasis, which prompts the Lutheran Confessions to say that God has done this not from any motive of self-glorification, from *eros*, an egotistic love, but as a loving Father who provides His children with all they need in temporal and spiritual blessings.¹⁰

ANTHROPOLOGY

Man as God's Creation

The Lutheran Confessions present the doctrine of man under two aspects: (1) man as God's creation, (2) man as a sinner. Against all Neoplatonic theories the Lutheran Confes-

sions maintain that the total man—body and soul—is God's handiwork and that the body, no less than the soul, must be held in high regard.¹¹ This means in the first place that, in spite of his sin and corruption, man is still God's creation.¹² Though subject to bondage because of man's sin, the entire creation is given to man for his use and enjoyment.¹³ Lutheranism holds that all creatures, including social institutions, are God's means for man's temporal welfare. This applies especially to the estate of matrimony, based upon the "attraction" of husband and wife to each other.¹⁴

This means, secondly, that the total man, body and soul, has been redeemed by Christ, has been sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Lutheranism teaches that Baptism is one of God's means by which He brings the blessings won by Christ not only to the soul but to the body as well. Baptism benefits the entire person; in particular, it assures the total man not only that his soul shall live forever, but that in the resurrection of the body the

⁸ Ibid., Creed 64. The 19th-century German liberals held that by retaining the ancient doctrine of the Trinity the Lutheran Reformers only caused confusion. See esp. Adolf Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, III, 741. The fact is, of course, that Athanasius long before had won the battle against all forms of monarchianism by setting forth the soteriological significance of the Trinity. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: 1971), pp. 203-207.

⁹ At this point Lutheranism departs basically from the position of Rome's philosophy, from the Calvinistic doctrine of God's sovereignty, and from liberalism's anthropological motto of the universal fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man.

¹⁰ LC Creed 17-24, 28-30, 63, 69; Lord's Prayer 51. See Julius Koestlin, *Theology of Luther*, trans. Charles E. Hay (Philadelphia, 1897), II, 208, 284. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, I, 108 ff., II, 463 ff.

¹¹ Neoplatonic views are largely responsible for the ascetic practices in Roman theology and the heavy emphasis in Calvinism on mortification and contemplation of the future life as means to subdue the "body." This view prevails in some modern cults which see sin primarily as residing in the body, while the soul is considered good and able to return to God. See Pelikan, "The Doctrine of Creation in Lutheran Confessional Theology," *CTM*, XXVI (1955), 569-579, as well as Paul Meehl, Richard Klann, Alfred Schmieding, Kenneth Breimeier, and Sophie Schroeder-Sloman, *What, Then, Is Man?—A Symposium of Theology, Psychology, and Psychiatry* (St. Louis, c. 1958), especially chs. ii, ix—xiii. Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* (London, 1958)

¹² See FC SD I 33 ff.

¹³ LC First Commandment 26.

¹⁴ Ibid., Fourth Commandment 116, 109; Sixth Commandment 206-208. Ap XXIII 3, 7, 19, 32, 52 f., 63, where mandatory celibacy is condemned. See AC, XXIII.

Holy Spirit will complete His work of sanctifying the entire person.¹⁵

Man as Sinner

In agreement with all branches of Christendom the Lutheran Confessions declare that man lost his original righteousness, or the image of God. However, the Confessions refer to man's original state only in passing and describe it briefly as the state in which man knew, feared, and trusted in God. The lost image will be restored again in man's regeneration, when he receives the true knowledge of God.¹⁶

The Confessions approach the doctrine of sin solely from the soteriological aspect, never as a mere academic question or even as a problem in sociology or biology. The apparent overemphasis on or preoccupation with sin in Lutheran theology has led some to view Lutheran theology as rather morbid; however, the detailed discussion of sin was necessary not only because of the antithesis in Roman and Zwinglian theology, but primarily because of man's natural inclination to deny his utter corruption and to boast of his own worth and dignity.¹⁷ The adherents of the Augsburg Confession teach

that since the fall of Adam all men who are propagated according to nature are born in sin. That is to say, they are *without fear of God, are without trust in God, and are concupiscent*. And this disease or *vice of origin* is truly sin, which even now damns and brings eternal death on those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

The Lutheran Confessions view sin as the total and deep corruption of every man. They do not separate original sin from actual sins as though each belonged into a specific compartment, as was done by later Lutheran dogmaticians. The Confessions call "original sin" the "capital sin," from which the so-called actual sins proceed.¹⁹

In their antithesis to Roman Semi-Pelagianism (and subsequently to Lutheran synergism) the Confessions were constrained to present original sin both negatively, namely, as a complete lack of fear of God and trust in God, and positively, as concupiscence or constant evil inclination. The sin with which man is born is not only a lack of righteousness but also an active rebellion against the Creator. By nature man has no faith in God, no love toward God, and at the same time hates God, despairs of God's grace, and puts his trust in temporal things, preferably his own wisdom, power, and moral goodness. Original sin is not a single act, but the inherent and constant sinful inclination, or concupiscence, which drives man to rebel against God and His will and, contrariwise, to seek only his own interests.²⁰

¹⁵ LC Creed 57f. The Confessions state: "This is the reason why these two things are done in Baptism; the body has water poured over it, though it cannot receive anything but the water, and meanwhile the Word is spoken so that the soul may grasp it. Since the water and the Word together constitute one Baptism, body and soul shall be saved and live forever: the soul through the Word in which it believes, the body because it is united with the soul. . . ." (*ibid.*, Baptism 45). See Lord's Supper 68 and WA, XXIII, 178-181.

¹⁶ Ap II 15 ff.; IV 230; FC Ep I 10.

¹⁷ On Luther's theology concerning sin see Theodosius Harnack, *Luther's Theologie* (Munich, 1927), I, 193 ff.; Koestlin-Hay, II, 338-358. Concerning Melanchthon's doctrine of sin see H. Engelland, *Melanchthon, Glauben und Handeln* (Munich, 1931), *passim*.

¹⁸ AC II (Latin text, italics ours).

¹⁹ SA III I: "Dies heisst die Erbsünde oder Hauptsünde" (*hoc nominatur originale, haereditarium, principale, et capitale peccatum*). Cp. FC Ep I 21; SD I 5.

²⁰ Ap II 3, 8, 25, 26. Because of original sin man is not only *aversus a Deo* but *adversus Deum*, turned from God and turned against God. The papal Confutation rejected the Lutheran description of original sin. It held that concupiscence, or evil inclination, is a deed and therefore an actual sin (*ibid.*, II 1).

In the controversy between the synergists and the Flacians it became necessary to stress particularly the fact that the total person is corrupted so that there is nothing whole or uncorrupted in man's body or soul, in his interior or exterior powers.²¹ Against the Zwinglian view, shared by the later Arminians, that original sin is a sickness, a kind of infection, an imposed burden, the Confessions stress that all of man's powers in his reason, will, and affections are totally and continually corrupted. In the words of Luther:

Original, or natural, or personal sin is the real chief sin. If this were not true, there would be no real sin. This sin is not committed like all other sins, but it exists, it lives, and it commits all sins, and it is the essential sin, which does not sin for an hour or for a time; but where and how long the person exists, there, too, is the sin.²²

Because of the sin of our origin, we are under the wrath of God and the tyranny of the devil. The Confessions present this as a Scriptural fact, without any attempt to explain the mystery of the transmission of Adam's sin to his descendants.²³ The most deplorable

²¹ FC Ep I 8. On the Flacian Controversy see F. Bente, *Historical Introduction to the Book of Concord*, reprinted 1965 from *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis, 1921), pp. 144 ff.; F. H. R. Frank, *Theologie der Concordienformel*, I, 50 ff.; W. Preger, *Matthias Flacius Illyricus und seine Zeit* (Erlangen, 1861); Lauri Haikola, *Gesetz und Evangelium bei Matthias Flacius Illyricus* (Lund, 1952).—The terms "substance" and "accident" were employed in this controversy to set forth in philosophical concepts the distinction between nature, which is the handiwork of God, and man's original sin, which is in nature. The theological emphasis of the terms was to maintain both that man is totally corrupted and that he is responsible for his rebellion.

²² WA, X, I, 508 ff. Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia, 1947), p. 150, quotes this passage.

²³ FC SD I 13, 19; Ap II 46. The Lutheran Confessions apparently favor the theory of traducianism as more nearly in conformity with the doctrine of man's original corruption than is possible when creationism is maintained. See

thing about man's sinful condition is the fact that he is unable to know God's wrath over sin or the depth of his own wicked condition, in fact, man's ignorance of this his condition constitutes his gravest sin. Strictly speaking, man is ignorant of God, and at best he has only a faint spark of knowledge that there is a God. He cannot know God's wrath nor His grace, because original sin is essentially ignorance of God. When the Confessions state that human reason understands the Law in a certain way they refer to the external work of the Law, not to the real meaning of God's law, which implies fear and love of Him above all things and trusting Him in all afflictions. Man recognizes that there is a divine law, but he fails to understand the real meaning of the fact that it is God's law which confronts him. Original sin is described as such a deep corruption of our nature that we cannot understand it. And the greatest detriment is not only that we have to suffer the wrath of God but also that we fail to understand what we are suffering. Nor does man understand his own nature and its corruption. He does not realize that the law of God in its accusations only increases his inherent enmity and rebellion against God. He does not recognize the Law as the ever-accusing Word of God, the thunderbolt which destroys both the manifest sinners and the vaunted hypocrites. Only the revelation of God's wrath in the Law shows us the reality of God's wrath over sin, the total incapacity of man to do something about his sin.²⁴

²⁴ Ap II 7 f., 13 f., 17, 51, 81, 131, 159; IV 295. LC First Commandment 17-19; Creed 52; FC SD II 9. See Robert Hoeferkamp, "Natural Law and the New Testament," *CTM*, XXIII (1952), 645 ff. Cp. Schlink, pp. 82 ff. Karl Barth rejects natural theology entirely. Cp. Hermann Sasse, *Here We Stand*, pp. 156-159. The position of Melancthon on the natural knowledge of God is treated by Friedrich Huebner, *Natuerliche Theologie und theokratische Schwaermerei bei Melancthon* (Gütersloh, 1936), pp. 15-25.

In describing the wrath of God and the deplorable condition of man in such detail, the Lutheran Confessions are not motivated by a psychopathic exaggeration of man's sinfulness—a type of religious masochism—but entirely by a soteriological interest. The Confessions express the faith of men who had experienced the terrors of conscience, wrought by the Law, and the grace of God, revealed in the Gospel. They wanted others to share their experiences with them. The authors of the Lutheran Confessions present the depth of sin and the infinite greatness of God's wrath in order that man might see the greatness of his redemption through the Person and work of the Redeemer.²⁵

THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

The Person of Christ

The Lutheran Confessions give expression to the Chalcedonian Christology. In presenting this doctrine they use such terms as the personal union, the communion of natures, and the communication of attributes. This terminology became necessary in the controversy concerning the Real Presence of Christ's body in the Lord's Supper.²⁶ The Lutheran Confessions, however, present Christology solely for its soteriological significance. They

ask: "What does it mean that Jesus Christ has become my Lord?" and answer:

It means that he has redeemed me from sin, from the devil, from death, and from all evil. Before this I had no Lord and King but was captive under the power of the devil. I was condemned to death and entangled in sin and blindness. . . . The devil came and led us into disobedience, sin, death, and all evil. We lay under God's wrath and displeasure, doomed to eternal damnation, as we had deserved. There was no counsel, no help, no comfort for us until this only and eternal Son of God, in his unfathomable goodness, had mercy on our misery and wretchedness and came from heaven to help us. Those tyrants and jailers now have been routed, and their place has been taken by Jesus Christ, the Lord of life and righteousness and every good and blessing. He has snatched us, poor lost creatures, from the jaws of hell, won us, made us free, and restored us to the Father's favor and grace. He has taken us as his own, under his protection, in order that he may rule us by his righteousness, wisdom, power, life, and blessedness.²⁷

Therefore the Lutheran Confessions state:

It is not enough to believe that Christ was born, suffered, and was raised unless we add this article, the purpose of the history, "the forgiveness of sins." [*causa finalis historiae: remissio peccatorum.*]²⁸

The Lutheran Confessions bring every Christian doctrine into the focus of Christ's saving work. To know Christ means to know and accept His benefits.²⁹ There is no Christology without soteriology. This applies particularly to every facet of the rich, mysterious,

²⁵ FC SD I 3; Ap II 34; IV 5, 46 f., 147 ff., 186-188; XII 44.

²⁶ The Lutheran Symbols, here as elsewhere, are concerned wholly with reproducing and defending Biblical and Catholic teaching. Thus, for instance, Article VIII argues: "The created gifts which have been given to [Christ's human nature] . . . do not measure up to the majesty which the Scriptures, and the ancient Fathers on the basis of Scriptures, ascribe to the assumed human nature in Christ. . . . According to the Scriptures we should and must believe that Christ received all this . . . and that it was all given and communicated to the assumed human nature in Christ. But . . . we must correctly explain this doctrine and defend it against all heresies." (SD VII 54, 60)

²⁷ LC Creed 27-30.

²⁸ Ap IV 51.

²⁹ Cp., for example, Ap II 50; IV 46, 101; VII 33; XXIV 72; LC Creed 43; FC SD I 3.—In the *Loci* of 1521 Melancthon wrote: *Hoc est Christum cognoscere beneficia eius cognoscere* ("This is to know Christ, to know His benefits.")

and inscrutable doctrine of the person of Christ, the God-man. The doctrine of the Personal Union is the very foundation of Christ's redemptive work. Any Nestorian attempt to separate the two natures is a negation of Christ's work.³⁰ This is true also when the Person of Christ is viewed under the aspect of the communion of natures, since it is to emphasize particularly that in the theanthropic person (God-man) a true union and communion exists between the divine nature of Christ and His human nature so that it can truly be said of Him that in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the God-head bodily. Thus alone could He become my Lord, the Lord of Life, the Book of Life.³¹ The authors of the Formula of Concord devote much space to the so-called threefold communication of attributes, especially to the second mode of communication of attributes, known to dogmatists as the *genus maiestaticum*, that is, the divine glory is communicated to the human nature, not as an essential, but as a communicated attribute, so that the human nature of Christ from the moment of the incarnation shares in all divine properties. The detailed presentation of this doctrine in the controversy with the Zwinglians and later the crypto-Calvinists concerning the real presence of Christ in the Holy Supper may at first glance appear to be no more than a logomachy, a mere sparring with metaphysical concepts.³²

³⁰ FC SD III 56; VIII 43, 84, 20.

³¹ Cp., for example, LC Creed 30 f; FC SD XI 13 ff., 65 f., 70.

³² FC SD VIII 76-87; cp. also 12, 18, 28 ff., 64, 66. Some modern Lutheran theologians say that the Lutheran Confessions went beyond the traditional position of the church and therefore strenuously object to the doctrine of the *genus maiestaticum*. Cp. Paul Althaus, *Die Christliche Wahrheit* (Bertelsmann, 1949), II, 223 f. Althaus contends that Lutheran dogmatists lost the Christ faith in the interest of a Christ theory and apparently believes that Melancthon's complaint in the 1521 *Loci* against the Romanists is applicable against the later Lutheran theologians. Melancthon, *Concordia Formula*, 1572.

But according to the Lutheran viewpoint the *genus maiestaticum* is of great soteriological significance. This doctrine guarantees that in His threefold office Christ is present with His church not only according to His deity but also and especially according to His human nature. This means that Christ speaks to us as man to man; sympathizes with us as one who has experienced in His assumed human nature all temptations which come to us; rules the entire universe also according to the nature whereby He is our brother and we are flesh of His flesh.³³ The doctrine concerning the two states is presented in the Lutheran Confessions only in its relevance to Christ's redemptive work. They teach that though Christ possessed all divine properties in the state of humiliation,³⁴ He used His divine glory only when it was necessary to accomplish the work of our redemption. Also the state of glorification is presented primarily from its soteriological significance.³⁵

know Christ is to know His benefits, not to look at His natures and the modes of His incarnation." Consult the exhaustive treatment of Christology in Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, II, 85-305. Cp. also "Catalogue of Testimonies," an appendix to the Lutheran Confessions. This is a catalog of Scripture references and quotations from the church fathers to show that Lutheran Christology is in accord with Scriptures and ancient tradition. Althaus, 380-400; Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body* (Minneapolis, 1959).

³³ See especially FC SD VIII 76-87. The Lutheran Confessions maintain that a denial of the Real Presence is the denial of significant soteriological facts. VIII 41 ff.

³⁴ The German text, FC SD VIII 26, has *voellige Possess*, which seems to imply that the man Christ did not fully possess the divine properties until His glorification. Cp. *Bekennnisschriften*, p. 1025, fn. 4; p. 1032, fn. 5. It must be kept in mind that *Possidere* is undoubtedly derived from the Latin *possidere* and denotes to exercise one's authority.

³⁵ Modern kenoticists hold that Christ emptied Himself of all divine attributes in such a way that He did not possess them, but gradually regained them as a reward for His perfect obedience. They charge that the Lutheran Confessions maintain a Christology in which Christ's deity no longer is a true deity and His humanity a real humanity. Althaus, 229 ff.

The Work of Christ

The Lutheran Confessions teach that a knowledge of the history of Christ is meaningless unless the purpose of His life, death, and resurrection are immediately added, namely, that Christ lived and died to gain the forgiveness of sin, upon which faith each individual Christian must lay hold.³⁶

In Lutheran dogmatics the work of Christ is usually presented under Christ's threefold office as Prophet, Priest, and King. This is a very effective way to present soteriology. The Lutheran Confessions do not make this distinction, though they use the terms "Mediator," "Prophet," "Priest," and "Head of the Church" to describe Christ's work.³⁷ The Augsburg Confession and the Apology present the work of Christ under the concept of Mediator, namely, as Mediator of satisfaction and of intercession. The life, Passion, and death of Christ are viewed as His satisfaction for all sins and His sacrifice to reconcile God; and His glorification as the means to bring these blessings to us.³⁸

The doctrine of Christ's redemptive work runs as a golden thread through all the Confessions³⁹ and is presented in variegated hues. Christ is both the Victim, the Lamb that bears the sin of the world, and the Priest. He is both the Mercy Seat before God and the High Priest, who intercedes for us.

³⁶ See Ap IV 46, 51; XXIV 72 f.

³⁷ FC SD VIII 47. Calvin's Christology employs the distinction of the threefold office. See *Evangelical Quarterly*, 1948, p. 233; Werner Elert, *Der christliche Glaube* (Hamburg, 1960), pp. 332-336; Gottfried Voigt, "The Speaking Christ in His Royal Office," *CTM*, XXIII (1952), 161 ff. The Eastern Orthodox theologians also use the terminology "threefold office."

³⁸ AC III: *ut reconciliaret nobis patrem*. Cp. IV; XX 9; XXI 4; XXIV 21. Cp. also Ap IV 53, 57, 81, 162, 165, 179, 317; XII 76; XV 12; XXI 14, 17 ff.; XXIV 19-24, 58; SA II 1; LC Creed II 31.

³⁹ It is treated *ex professo* only in AC III and

He is the Mediator and the Mediation; the Treasure—in Roman theology the "thesaurus" is the alleged depository of Christ's and the saints' superabundant merits—and the Treasurer; the Payment and the Payer; the Redeemer and the Redemption.

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." That is, the law condemns all men, but by undergoing the punishment of sin and becoming a sacrifice for us, the sinless Christ took away the right of the law to accuse and condemn those who believe in him, because he himself is their propitiation, for whose sake they are now accounted righteous.⁴⁰

The Confessions emphasize the vicarious character of Christ's work. As the Mediator of all redemption, Christ is presented as having fully and completely kept the Law in our stead, paid the penalty of our guilt, placated the wrath of God for us, as the perfect and complete Propitiation for the sins of the world. Christ's work is absolutely complete both intensively and extensively. It requires no complement in any respect. It needs only to be accepted in faith.

By freely accepting the forgiveness of sins, faith sets against God's wrath not our merits of love, but Christ the mediator and propitiator. This faith is the true knowledge of Christ, it uses his blessings, it regenerates our hearts, it precedes our keeping of the law.⁴¹

Any attempt on the part of man to supplement Christ's work by his own effort is condemned as contrary to divine revelation, as an insult to Christ's work, and as a denial of

⁴⁰ Ap IV 179; cp. also XII 140; XXIV 8, 56; XXI 41 f., LC II 31; FC SD III 57.

⁴¹ Ap IV 46. The German text reads: "That faith which receives the forgiveness of sins freely by grace is a genuine faith which will not place against the wrath of God its own words and merits. These amount to no more than a tiny feather in a hurricane (*ein Federlein gegen den Sturmwind*), but faith places over against God's wrath the Mediator Christ. And such faith is truly knowing Christ."

Christ's honor.⁴² The Lutheran Confessions concentrate on the vicarious work of Christ for man's redemption and reject the view that Christ is primarily man's Exemplar and man's new Lawgiver. All those who would like to harmonize the promises of Christ with the sentences of Socrates are charged with crucifying and burying Christ anew, darkening His glory, insulting His honor, and completely obscuring His benefits.⁴³ The denial of the vicarious character of what dogmatists call Christ's active obedience—as was done by Anselm and the Lutheran George Karg (Parsimonius)—and the Calvinistic tendency to overemphasize Christ's active obedience prompted the Lutherans to present the whole work of Christ as obedience and to discuss in particular the place of what dogmatists call Christ's "active" obedience in the plan of our redemption.⁴⁴ They present the whole work of Christ as an act of obedience and show that from His holy and innocent birth to His ignominious death upon the cross He

rendered to God a perfect and full obedience to recompense for our disobedience. This complete and full obedience of Christ both in His life and in His death is accounted to the believer for righteousness.⁴⁵

JUSTIFICATION

The Augsburg Confession declares:

Men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works but are freely justified for Christ's sake through faith when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in his sight (Rom. 3, 4).⁴⁶

The doctrine of justification is considered the most important article of the Christian faith.⁴⁷

In presenting this doctrine the Confessions stress two central thoughts: Justification is solely for Christ's sake and solely by faith.

"For Christ's Sake"

Justification is the imputation of Christ's perfect obedience. The Confessions present justification as a forensic act, i. e., God declares the sinner righteous. Justification is always God's, never man's act. The Apology declares:

In this passage "justify" is used in a judicial way to mean "to absolve a guilty man and pronounce him righteous," and to do so on account of someone else's righteousness, namely,

⁴⁵ SD III 22, 56, 58. The Formula of Concord uses neither the term "active obedience" nor the term "passive obedience"; instead it speaks of Christ's *ganzen vollkommen Geborsam* and of *der ganzen Person Christi ganzer Geborsam*. Cp. Theodore Engelder, "The Active Obedience of Christ," *CTM*, I (1930), 810 ff.

⁴⁶ AC IV (Latin text). See Henry W. Reimann, "Vicarious Satisfaction: A Study in Ecclesiastical Terminology," *CTM*, XXXII (1961), 69-77; Henry P. Hamann Jr., *Justification by Faith in Modern Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary School for Graduate Studies, 1957).

⁴² The AC and the Ap rejected the propitiatory sacrifice of the Mass, the propitiatory power of fasting, the obligatory observance of human traditions, the satisfactory character of monastic vows, not because these were humanly ordained ordinances, but because they were observed as a necessary supplement to Christ's work. Cp. AC XX 9; XXV 14 ff.; XXVI 1, 21; XXVII 38.

⁴³ Ap IV 3, 15, 81. In a letter to the Christians at Strasbourg, Dec. 15, 1524, Luther points out that Christ as an Exemplar does not differ greatly from the saints. WA, XV, 396, 18-19.

⁴⁴ Anselm's satisfaction theory is presented in his *Cur Deus Homo?* George Karg taught that according to His human nature Christ was subject to the Law and thus obligated to keep it and hence His perfect life in conformity with God's will has no vicarious value. Without realizing it, Karg actually separated Christ's two natures. He ignored that since Christ is both God and man, He is at the same time subject to, and Lord of, the Law. Cp. Bente, p. 160; Frank, II, 29; also Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (New York, 1899), I, 274. Gustav Aulén, *Christus Victor* (New York, 1967), pp. 84-92;

Christ's, which is communicated to us through faith. [Thus] in this passage our righteousness is the imputation of someone else's righteousness. . . .⁴⁸

This "someone else's righteousness" is a divinely established constant, an invariable, a *datum*, a permanent reality, regardless of man's personal piety, emotion, and experience.

The Confessions use several concepts promiscuously and synonymously: "forgiveness of sins," "justification by faith," "renewal," "adoption," "reckoning of Christ's righteousness."⁴⁹ This has occasioned the question whether the doctrine of justification is really central. The fact is that a specific antithesis requires a specific emphasis. This is true of the apparent contradiction in Melancthon's own presentation, when he describes justification as a forensic action and then adds "justification means to make righteous people out of unrighteous." There is no problem, however, since Melancthon is speaking antithetically to Rome's theory that justification is a process by which sin is eradicated progressively. Against this false view Melancthon must point out that through justification man enters into a new relation with God in which he also becomes righteous.⁵⁰

The believer accepts the "entire Christ" and is therefore always perfectly justified in the presence of God. There is no room in Lutheran theology for the view that justification is progressive, through the infusion of some supernatural quality (the *gratia infusa* of Pelagian theologians) or through the indwelling of Christ

(Andrew Osiander and his party).⁵¹ It is a Lutheran theological axiom that justification is always complete and dare never be equated with a progressive sanctification.

"By Faith Alone"

Faith plays a central role in the Lutheran doctrine of justification. Therefore it is essential to keep in mind that faith, according to the Lutheran Confessions, is described as "to want and to accept the promised offer of forgiveness of sins." Faith is to receive, to accept, to reach for, the full mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Faith is always a dynamic activity, a running after, a seeking; it is to "dare" God to give Christ and His complete redemption. Faith is praised so highly, not because it is a good work, but because it has so glorious an object. Faith is said to be the highest worship because it accepts God at His gracious promise. Faith is actually the righteousness which avails before God, because by faith—not on account of faith—Christ's righteousness is imputed to us as our own.⁵²

In Lutheran theology the term *sola fide* is used to exclude all works from the doctrine of justification. Faith is said to be the beginning, middle, and

⁵¹ FC SD III 6, 30, 56; Andreas Osiander ascribed man's justification to the "Christ in us" rather than to the "Christ for us." Bente, pp. 152 ff.; Preger, I, 205-298; Paul M. Tschackert, *Die Entstehung der lutherischen und reformierten Kirchenlehre* (Göttingen, 1910), pp. 489 ff.

⁵² AP IV 48: [*Fides*] est velle et accipere oblatam promissionem remissionis peccatorum et iustificationis. AC XX 26. Cp. also Ap IV 49, 57-59, 106, 182. Roman Catholic dogmaticians sometimes define faith merely as an intellectual knowledge of and assent to the historic facts of redemption and distinguish between such assent and confidence. The Lutheran Confessions also employ the terms "knowledge, assent, confidence"; not, however, as three distinct steps leading to a full faith, but merely as three aspects of faith. The assent which devils and the godless give to the history of Christ is faith in no sense of the word, and it is actually condemned. The Lutheran Confessions describe

⁴⁸ Ap IV 305, cp. 252. FC SD III 17.

⁴⁹ Cp. FC SD III 17-21.

⁵⁰ Cp. Ap IV 72. Among the many monographs on this difficult section see Engelland (fn. 17, above), pp. 541 ff.; Reinhold Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (Leipzig, 1920), IV, 403 ff.; Wilhelm Walther, *Lehrbuch der Symbolik* (Leipzig, 1924), pp. 366-371, 376-383; Schlichter, pp. 194 ff.

end of justification. The Confessions point out that the sinner's justification is in no way effected or affected by man's good works, either before or subsequent to God's act of justification.⁵³ Man cannot prepare himself for God's activity by a deep sorrow, an earnest longing, or partly by faith and partly by good works. Man is justified solely by faith for Christ's sake, not by Christ for faith's sake. Therefore the Lutheran Confessions made the somewhat bold statement that God imputes this faith for righteousness in His own sight. This does not mean that God justifies the sinner because He considers his faith such a fine and morally excellent work, but solely because faith accepts the promise of Christ's all-sufficient work.⁵⁴

The Lutheran emphasis on the centrality of the doctrine of justification by faith has led to two charges. The first is that Lutheran theology has so stressed the exclusion of good works from justification that it has surrendered the dynamics for Christian

saving faith as "special faith," which knows, believes, and accepts unconditionally that Christ is our Righteousness. Ap IV 45-48, 50; XII 45, 60; XIII 20 f.; AC XX 23. The term "special faith" is used against the Roman Catholic view of *fides informis*, a mere knowledge of God's existence and acceptance of the church's authority, in distinction from the *fides formata*, when faith is said to be active in love and takes on form. Ap IV 182, 215-217.

⁵³ The synergists in the Lutheran Church held that some are converted and justified and others not because the conduct of some prior to God's activity is better than that of the others. The issues in this question were resolved in FC II. See Robert D. Preus, "The Significance of Luther's Term *Pure Passive* as Quoted in Article II of the Formula of Concord," *CTM*, XXIX (1958), 561-570. The Majorists held that subsequent to justification good works are necessary to retain faith and salvation. Cp. FC IV.

⁵⁴ The Confessions state that men are justified *propter Christum per fidem*, not *per Christum propter fidem*. Ap IV 45, 46, 48, 56, 106, 113, 194, 308; FC Ep III 19, 20; SD III 11, 28. In the several instances where the Apology does employ the formula *propter fidem*, as in IV 177, "faith" is taken metaphorically for its object, viz., Christ. Cp. Schma, pp. 170 ff.

piety. It is true that the Lutheran Confessions make a sharp distinction between justification and everything that precedes or follows justification.⁵⁵ This, however, is only a logical distinction, not a chronological differentiation; a distinction, not a separation; the one an act in the heart of God and the other an act in and by man; the one the complete and present victory over every foe, the other the continuous battle between the Christian and his enemies; the one as the "already," the other as the "not yet." This distinction maintains the *sola gratia* of justification and the believer's obligation to be active in sanctification, expressed in the epigrammatic statement *Sola fides iustificat, et tamen numquam est sola* (Faith alone justifies, but faith is never alone).⁵⁶

There is no ground for the second charge, that the Lutheran Confessions present the *sola fide* in such a way that faith is viewed as a static, intellectual assent to a body of Christian truth and that consciences are lulled to sleep. The Confessions prepared by Luther and Melancthon speak of that faith which

is not an idle thought, but frees us from death, brings forth a new life in our hearts, and is a work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore this cannot exist with mortal sin, but whenever it appears it brings forth good fruits.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ This point had to be stressed both against the Romanists and against Andrew Osiander, who taught that Christ so dwells in the believer that by this divine indwelling sin gradually disappears as a drop of ink is dissolved in the ocean. This theory failed to observe the distinction between justification and sanctification. Cp. fn. 51, above.

⁵⁶ See FC, Ep III 10, 19, 20; SD III 19, 22-24, 26, 27, 30, 32, 35, 36, 43; Par. 41 quotes Luther: "There is a beautiful harmony between faith and good works. But it is faith alone which apprehends the blessings, yet faith is never alone." Cp. also IV 15, 31; Ap IV 125.

⁵⁷ Ap IV 64. Cp. AC XX 27-40; SC Baptism Qu. 4. The Confessions reject in unmistakable terms the theory of "once in grace, always in grace." Cp. SA III IV 42 ff. Cp. Ap IV 143, 144; FC SD IV 15, 31.

So the Formula of Concord was compelled to enter upon the problem of the proper relation of faith and works. In their concern to defend the Lutheran doctrine against every form of antinomianism and to find a stimulus for good works, some Lutheran theologians maintained that "good works are necessary to salvation."⁵⁸ Against this view the Formula of Concord stresses two points. First, any mingling of man's good works into the doctrines which deal with Christ's work, with the sinner's justification and our eternal salvation, leads to despair or to false security.⁵⁹ Second, the Christian must perform good works, not to merit salvation, but for other reasons. It is the very nature of faith to do good works, because

faith is a divine work in us that transforms us and begets us anew from God, kills the Old Adam, makes us entirely different people in heart, spirit, mind, and all our powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it. Oh, faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, so that it is impossible for it not to be constantly doing what is good. Likewise, faith does not ask if good works are to be done, but before one can ask, faith has already done them and is constantly active. Whoever does not perform such good works is a faithless man, blindly tapping around in search of faith and good works without knowing what either faith or good works are, and in the meantime he chatters and jabbars a great deal about faith and good works. Faith is a vital, deliberate trust in God's grace, so certain that it would die a thousand times for it. And such confidence and knowledge of divine grace makes us joyous, mettlesome, and merry toward God and all creatures. This the Holy Spirit works

⁵⁸ George Major, who was the chief exponent of this "Romanizing" maxim, modified it to read: "Good works are necessary to retain faith." Nevertheless the formula was rejected as paving the way for making good works a condition of justification and salvation instead of a consequence. Cp. Bente, pp. 112 f.; Frank, II, 148 ff.; 216 ff.; Preger, 351 ff.

by faith, and therefore without any coercion a man is willing and desirous to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything for the love of God and to his glory, who has been so gracious to him. It is therefore as impossible to separate works from faith as it is to separate heat and light from fire.⁶⁰

Lutheran confessional theology insists that a Christian must do good works because God wills them; they are fruits of the Spirit; they show forth God's praise; they are a constant exercise of faith and a testimony of our faith to the world.⁶¹ That we are justified by grace for Christ's sake through faith is so central in Lutheran confessional theology that it is the *leitmotiv* of every doctrine. As this theme is central in justification, so also in the doctrine of conversion, or regeneration, and sanctification in both the wide and the narrow sense.

THE MEANS OF GRACE

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. And the Gospel teaches that we have a gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merit of Christ, when we believe this.⁶²

In the terminology of the Lutheran Confessions the means of grace designate the God-appointed means or instruments (*Werkzeug*) through which

⁶⁰ Luther in Pref. to Romans quoted in FC SD, IV 10-12; VI 17. Cp. Ap IV 262, 274; XII 58 (German text).

⁶¹ Ap IV 189. Cp. 349: The Christian is admonished to make his calling and election sure by his own good works. FC SD, IV 33. Robert W. Bertram, "The Radical Dialectic Between Faith and Works in Luther's Lectures on Galatians," in Carl S. Meyer, *Luther for an Ecumenical Age* (St. Louis, 1967), pp. 219-241; Frederick W. Danker, "Faith Without Works," *CTM* (1956), 513-535, 593-612.

⁶² AC V (German). See also the Latin text.

- (1) God offers and conveys His grace in Christ to me, and through which
- (2) He engenders faith to accept this grace.⁶³

The Gospel

The Gospel, in the first place, actually brings Christ to men. It is much more than a historical record of God's great work in Christ. It actually makes us contemporaries of the great events and partakers of the great blessings which Christ accomplished. The Gospel is not only a promise of a future blessing, but it actually conveys to us the entire Christ with the totality of His gifts as a present possession. In effect the Confessions can say: We are reconciled through the Gospel. In his exposition of the Third Commandment Luther states:

The Word of God is the true holy thing [*Heiligtum*] above all holy things. Indeed, it is the only one we Christians acknowledge and have. . . . God's Word is the treasure that sanctifies all things. . . . At whatever time God's Word is taught, preached, heard, read, or pondered, there the person, the day, and the work are sanctified by it. . . .⁶⁴

The Confessions assert again and again that eternal things, eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life can be bestowed only through the God-appointed means, the Word and the sacraments. They state with equal emphasis that in and through the Gospel God offers and conveys to man everything that he needs for his eternal salvation. The Gospel is not only the promise of the forgiveness, but in reality the absolution itself, as certainly as if Christ Himself pronounced it. The Gospel is more than a doc-

trine about the reconciliation; it is the gift of a reconciled God.⁶⁵

The Gospel, in the second place, actually creates faith. By nature—this is the consistent teaching—man is blind, deaf, ignorant, spiritually dead, and therefore incapable of seeing the grace of God, hearing the Gospel, understanding and wanting divine grace. Therefore the Holy Spirit must work saving faith. This He does solely and only through the Gospel. In the offer and invitation to accept God's grace lies also the power to create faith to accept it. According to Lutheran theology, two facts must be kept in mind: (1) The Holy Spirit is given only through the Word, and without the Word—as far as man knows—the Holy Spirit uses no vehicle to reach man; (2) the Holy Spirit is always in the Word, and therefore the Gospel in all its various forms is always divinely efficacious. The Gospel not only commands us to come to Christ, but is the power of the Holy Spirit to create in man every necessary faculty to come to Christ.⁶⁶ The Lutheran Confessions protest against every form of "enthusiasm," which teaches that the Holy Spirit operates outside the specified means. They condemn all religious views which are not based upon Scripture as devils' doctrines designed to mislead

⁶⁵ AC XXVIII 9; cp. XVIII 3 (the Holy Spirit is given through the Word); Ap IV 67 f., 120; VII 36; XXVII 11, 40; SA III IV; FC SD II 5. Richard R. Caemmerer, "How the Gospel Works," *CTM*, XLIV (1973), 83-88.

⁶⁶ AC V; XXVIII 8; Ap XII 40: *Deus vere per verbum vivificat*; XXIV 79; *per verbum operatur Spiritus Sanctus*. Cp. IV 67, 81, 85 (German text, *Triglot*, p. 212, or *Bekennnisschriften*, p. 224); VII 15; SA III VIII 3, 10, 11; LC Second Petition 53: the kingdom comes only through the Word and faith; Baptism 30. See extensive discussion in FC SD II 48-57; XI 26,

⁶³ Accordingly Lutheran dogmaticians usually ascribe a twofold power to the means of grace; the *vis collativa* and the *vis effectiva*.

⁶⁴ LC Third Commandment 91, 92; Creed

men.⁶⁷

In its antithesis to Rome's theory that the sacraments are efficacious *ex opere operato*, the Lutheran Confessions stress the necessity of faith to appropriate the Gospel and state that the Word both requires and engenders faith. In antithesis to all forms of "enthusiasm," Lutheranism maintains that the Spirit is always in the Word and the sacraments and that they are efficacious regardless of man's attitude, but that the salutary use requires "all hearts to believe."⁶⁸

The Lutheran Confessions are not consistent in listing the various means of grace. Sometimes they use the generic term "Gospel," then merely the term "Word," then Word and sacraments. At times the Confessions place the total emphasis on the oral proclamation, *Predigt*. In describing the Gospel the Confessions state that God in His richness has provided that the Gospel come to us

first, through the spoken word, by which the forgiveness of sin (the peculiar function of the Gospel) is preached to the whole world; second, through Baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of keys; and finally, through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren.⁶⁹

The claim is sometimes made that Lutheran theology holds that the Holy Spirit is operative and effective only in the oral proclamation. The fact is that

both the preached and the written Word are said to be the means of grace.⁷⁰

LAW AND GOSPEL

The proper distinction between Law and Gospel is called the most brilliant light of the Reformation.⁷¹ This statement has significance only in the light of the Lutheran understanding of the Gospel as the means of grace. Lutheran dogmaticians usually speak of the Gospel as the power of God to bring us Christ and His treasures (*vis dativa*) and also the power to create faith, which makes these treasures our own (*vis effectiva*). Any mingling of the Law into the Gospel message is viewed not only as poor theology but as actually obscuring the Gospel and robbing Christians of the Gospel comfort.

The danger of mingling and confounding the two doctrines is very real, because both doctrines must always be preached side by side. In fact, the entire Scriptures must be divided into these two parts, Law and Gospel. God can be viewed only in one or the other of His works, either as Lawgiver or as Law Remover; either as the God who strikes terror into man's heart, who threatens, who kills, or the God who

⁷⁰ SA III II 15, where the context indicates that "Word of God" is the written Word. See Ap XII 42 ff. See also Fred Kramer, "*Sacra Scriptura* and *Verbum Dei* in the Lutheran Confessions," *CTM*, XXVI (1955), 81-95.

⁷¹ FC Ep V 2; SD V 1. Edward H. Schroeder, "Law-Gospel Reductionism in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," *CTM*, XLIII (1972), 232-247; Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis, 1962), *passim*; Elert, *Law and Gospel* (Philadelphia, 1967); Robert C. Schultz, "The Distinction Between Law and Gospel," *CTM*, XXXII (1961), 591-597; Thomas M. McDonough, *The Law and Gospel in Luther* (London, 1963).

⁶⁷ Ap XII 141; SA III III 5; FC SD II 4, 5, 80; XII 30.

⁶⁸ The statement in AC V: "Where and when God wills" does not imply that the Word is efficacious only at certain times, but is meant rather as an admonition to employ the means at all times, since we do not know when and what God will do through the means.

has prepared comfort for us, who quickens, who heals, who saves.⁷²

The Lutheran Confessions declare that the mingling of Law and Gospel is an ever-present and a real danger to Christian theology. Throughout the Scriptures both doctrines are presented side by side, in fact, so closely that the two doctrines are contained in one sentence.⁷³ To maintain the proper distinction between the two doctrines, it is mandatory to understand clearly the nature and function of each. Some theologians reduce the Gospel to a "new Law" when they impose on men the "evangelical counsels" and "commandments of the church" as necessary for salvation. The antinomians, on the other hand, pretend to elevate the Gospel by doing away with the Law entirely,⁷⁴ and thereby unwittingly they also reduce the Gospel to Law. While there is an inseparable conjunction between the Law and the Gospel, the functions of the two

dare never be confounded, lest the Gospel be changed into Law and the whole Christian proclamation be turned topsy-turvy.⁷⁵

The Lutheran Confessions present the function of the Law as twofold: (1) to restrain sin, and (2) to reveal original sin and its fruits. Actually the Law increases sin and thus makes men worse, because the Law forbids the very things that they want to do, and they respond in open mutiny and violent rebellion. Sometimes this rebellion manifests itself in haughty pride. The Law shows how comprehensively sin has corrupted man and how unable he is to do God's will. But proud man assumes the right to cut down God's holy demands to his own standard and capacity. This procedure implies that man completely ignores God's holy demands in the First Table and so changes the demands of the Second Table that at best no more remains than a mere outward conformity with the letter of the Law.⁷⁶ In short, the chief function of the Law is to drive man to despair, to a realization of total bondage to his sin and of his enslavement under Satan.⁷⁷

The Law, secondly, reveals God's wrath. The theme of a large section of the Apology is: The Law constantly accuses us and shows us only God's wrath. The two adverbs "constantly" and "only" occur again and again. By revealing God's wrath over sin the Law can produce only hatred of God. And this endures throughout eternity,

⁷² Ap IV 5, 102, 186, 257; XII 53; FC SD V 23. Lutheran dogmaticians usually present the Christian doctrine under larger headings, such as bibliology, theology, anthropology, etc. But it would be fully in accord with the Lutheran Confessions to divide all dogmatical material under the two major headings Law and Gospel, and to treat every phase of Christian revelation from the twofold aspect of Law and Gospel; for example, man under the Law and under the Gospel. Cp. fn. 2, above.

⁷³ Ap XII 44 refers to Matt. 11:28, where the burden of sin (Law) and coming to Christ (Gospel) are mentioned in the same breath. Alfred von Rohr Sauer, "The Message of Law and Gospel in the Old Testament," *CTM*, XXVI (1955), 172-187, 256-264.

⁷⁴ Some antinomians in the Lutheran Church, like Agricola, maintained that no preaching of the Law dare to be tolerated in the Christian pulpit because the Christian must learn the way of salvation only from the "Gospel." Other Lutherans showed antinomian trends by stating that the Law knows nothing of faith and therefore cannot reveal the sin of unbelief; it is therefore the function of the Gospel to reveal the greatest of all sins, man's unbelief. These two views were condemned in FC V, VI. See Frank, II, 148 ff., 243 ff.; Preger, I, 336 ff.; Tschackert, 478 ff., 514 ff.; Bense, 161 ff.; Heikola,

⁷⁵ There is also a semantic problem, since both terms are used in a narrow and broad sense. The term "Law" may denote the Law written into man's heart, the image of God, even "the good counsel" of God, Ap IV 351; FC Ep V 2; SD I 10; II 50; VI 5. The Gospel is spoken of as the entire New Testament message, the proclamation of both God's wrath over sin and His pardon for the sinner.

⁷⁶ SA III II 1 ff. Cp. Ap IV 35, 130, 131; XII 145 (see the German text). FC SD V 10-17.

⁷⁷ Ap IV 20, 212.

for the verdict "Depart from Me" is a word effective not only in the moment when God pronounces it, but it is an eternally active and effective word.⁷⁸ And this revelation and knowledge of God's wrath is an actual experience of God's wrath; it is the terrors of conscience, it is an actual state of eternal dying under the curse of God.⁷⁹ The real and proper function of the Law is to reveal sin and God's wrath. Whatever therefore reveals God's wrath is Law, be it in the Old or the New Testament. Thus even the Passion history is Law in so far as it shows the greatness of God's wrath.⁸⁰

The Apology speaks of only one chief purpose of the Law, to condemn; the Smalcald Articles speak of two and the Formula of Concord even of three "uses" of the Law.⁸¹ The term "third use" of the Law is used primarily to designate the preaching of the Law to the Christian, in so far as and because he is still at all times a sinner. The Christian according to his old man has his own ideas as to what is sin and what is a God-pleasing work. For that reason the old Adam, the recalcitrant and bucking bronco that remains in the Christian, must be forced to do good works not only with coaxing and threatenings, but also with the heavy stick of afflictions and punishments. Until we strip off the body of sin in death and are perfectly renewed in the

glorious resurrection, the Christian is under the demands, threats, and punishment of the Law. What is sometimes called the "third use" is in reality the "chief use" of the Law in its proclamation to the regenerate in so far as he still has the old Adam.⁸²

The only purpose of preaching the Law as the proclamation of God's wrath is to lead man to a knowledge of sin. This is the "alien office" which enables the Holy Spirit to come to His real and proper office, namely, to preach the Gospel, which, strictly speaking, is nothing but the proclamation of what man should believe in order to obtain forgiveness for his sins, which the Law has revealed.⁸³ Therefore both Law and Gospel must be preached in the Christian church until the end of human history. This juxtaposition, however, dare never lead to a mingling of the two. For though they always go together, they are as far apart as heaven and earth.⁸⁴ They stand in a dialectical relation to each other, so that the one always and categorically denies what the other affirms. The Law announces to man: "God demands everything of you if you hope to be saved." The Gospel declares: "Christ has done everything for you." The Law declares: "You are a sinner; God hates you; you are eternally lost." The Gospel proclaims the very opposite: "You are righteous; God loves you; you are eternally saved." According to the Lutheran Confessions both pronouncements must always be proclaimed. If the church proclaims: "Do the best possible, and you will be saved," she dishonors Christ and His work and actually abolishes the Gospel. If, on the other hand, she proclaims: "It is God's nature to overlook and pardon man's weaknesses," she dishonors God's holiness, abolishes the Law,

⁷⁸ SA III III 7. Ap IV 40. The phrase *lex semper accusat* occurs in several variations in the Ap (IV 249, 295, etc.). Elert, *Structure*.

⁷⁹ SA III III 2; Ap IV 37, 47; and many other references.

⁸⁰ Luther: "What more terrible preaching of God's wrath than the suffering and death of His own Son?" FC SD V 12.

⁸¹ SA III II (twofold); FC Ep VI 1 (threefold). Werner Elert, *The Christian Ethos* (Philadelphia, 1957), pp. 294-303, declares that the later Lutheran dogmaticians have no ground for appealing to Luther in their view of the "third use" of the Law, but that this concept came into Lutheran theology from Calvinistic theology, where the "third use" is considered the primary use of the Law.

⁸² FC SD VI 6-9, 18-25.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, V 11-17, 20-22.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, V 24; Ap IV 186.

and thus negates Christ's vicarious work. Both Law and Gospel must therefore always be preached together, but in such a way that the fact that they are diametrical opposites is always observed.⁸⁵

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Some later Lutheran dogmatists present all Christian doctrines sequentially, beginning with regeneration and concluding with glorification (the order of salvation). The Lutheran Confessions of the 16th century do not systematize so precisely. Their chief concern is to retain the Christological implication of the Christian proclamation in its central position. The article concerning Christ, His Person and work, is the primary and principal article also in the doctrine of sanctification.

It is frequently charged that the Lutheran Confessions failed to evaluate accurately the significance of sanctification or the Christian life and that the best they could do was to use the term "fruits of faith."⁸⁶ However, the term "fruits of faith" is good, for it points out that good works never have an independent purpose, e. g., to serve as merits whereby to gain eternal life. Man's good moral behavior has no value by itself. Nevertheless Lutheran theology esteems good works highly, but for other reasons than in the Roman system. This becomes evident in the fact that Lutheran theology has

no "system of ethics" in the usually accepted definition of the term.⁸⁷ Without attempting to prescribe a detailed catalog of "dos" and "don'ts," the Lutheran Confessions describe in broad terms the implications of "the new life in Christ." A frequent charge is to the effect that the Lutheran emphasis of *sola gratia* and *sola fide* destroys every incentive for good works or will inevitably lead to antinomianism. This charge is wholly false.

Faith and Good Works Inseparable

In accord with their central doctrine the Lutheran Confessions point to the indissoluble union between faith and good works. They affirm the axiom "Good works do not make a man pious, but a pious man does good works." Paradoxically Lutheran theology teaches that man is saved *sola fide* and at the same time not only requires good works, but also shows how good works can be done. By properly stressing both the *sola gratia* and the necessity of good works it makes the Christian life rich and meaningful.⁸⁸

The statement "Good works are necessary" is directed against the Roman Catholic theologians and against the Majoristic trends within the Lutheran church.⁸⁹ Some Lutherans held that the phrase "good

⁸⁵ FC SD V 1, 23 ff. Cp. C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis, 1929). Theo. Harnack, I, 444 ff.

⁸⁶ Hans Asmussen, *Warum noch Lutherische Kirche?* (Stuttgart, 1949), pp. 95-105. *Aus der Unterscheidung* [between justification and sanctification] *wird leicht eine Scheidung*, i. e., the "and" in "justification and sanctification" may easily prove to be fatal.

⁸⁷ In Lutheran theology Christian ethics is usually not treated as a separate and distinct phase of dogmatics. Cp. Adolph Harless, *Christliche Ethik*, 1845; Johann Michael Reu and Paul H. Buehring, *Christian Ethics* (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1930); Elert, *The Christian Ethos*; Eric H. Wahlstrom, *The New Life in Christ* (Philadelphia, 1950), ch. iv; George W. Forell, *Ethics of Decision* (Philadelphia, c. 1955); Joseph Sittler, *The Structure of Christian Ethics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958).

⁸⁸ AC VI, XX, XXVII; Ap IV 124, 125, 136, 140; SA III IV 40; and many other references.

⁸⁹ For bibliog. on Georg Major's extreme statement and its Romanizing trends cp. fn. 58 above.

works are necessary" involves compulsion and coercion. The Lutheran Confessions answer that good works are indeed necessary, not by a necessity of coercion, but of immutability, since it is the very essence and nature of faith to be active constantly and willingly in good works.⁹⁰

The prime requisite of a good work is that it be in conformity with the will of God. Therefore the Lutheran Confessions reject the whole battery of human-devised works as being no better than pagan idolatry.⁹¹ At the same time the Confessions point out that mere outward conformity with the letter of the commandment does not constitute a good work. Since the summary of all commandments is love of God, and since love is the actual fulfilling of the Law, the attitude of the heart determines the character of a work. Without such love all worship, no matter how holy it may appear, is an empty shell without any kernel, yes, it is an abomination in the sight of God and the dead, cold, ineffective work of a hypocrite. The Christian's good works are never coerced, but always flow from a willing spirit, because the Law is written into his heart.⁹²

⁹⁰ AC XXVII; Ap IV 189; XII 77; FC Ep IV; SD IV 7, 14. The Christian "must" do good works by a *necessitas ordinis mandati et voluntatis Christi ac debiti nostri, non autem necessitas coactionis*, SD IV 16.

⁹¹ AC XX 3; XXVII 36; Ap XV 14 ff.; XXVII 54; XIII 77; LC Decalog 102, 115, 116, 311; FC SD IV 7; VI 5, 25.

⁹² Ap II 15-22; IV 123-125, 130, 131, 136-144, 219, 289. Cp. the entire article against monastic vows, esp. XXVII 25; FC IV 12, 17 f. Lutheran theology holds that civic righteousness is necessary for successful social living and that man is able to render it. Lutheranism teaches that such outward and civic righteousness is a divine ordinance whereby God checks the evil designs of the devil and wicked men and maintains decency in the world. Though God has promised to reward such civic righteousness, this philosophic righteousness remains only a Pharisaic righteousness, and its sphere is exclusively secular and temporal. Ap IV 14-16, 22-24, 28, 130, 288.

In antithesis to the Roman and Arminian views which consider good works necessary for man's salvation, the Apology in the German text summarizes the significance of good works as follows:

One must do good works, because God wills it; they are fruits of faith, as St. Paul says Eph. 2:10; therefore good works must follow faith as an expression of gratitude toward God; furthermore, that faith may exercise itself, grow and increase, and that through our confessions and godly conduct others may be admonished.⁹³

Sphere of Christian Activity

The sphere of Christian activity does not consist in self-appointed and unnatural practices. The Christian life is "new obedience" in whatever sphere of activity the Christian finds himself. This means, first of all, that in his every activity the Christian devotes his service entirely to God and to his fellow-man and is never prompted to seek his own welfare. The Christian life cannot be viewed atomistically, as though it consisted in observing certain canonical hours, exercising oneself in specific virtues, performing certain prescribed works perfunctorily. The Christian's entire life is simply "new obedience." Therefore also affliction or the "holy cross" is part of the Christian life in so far as the Christian for God's sake will gladly and willingly endure the perse-

⁹³ Ap IV 189. The Christian's good works serve as an admonition to others, since Christ displays His glorious kingdom and celebrates His victory over Satan, not only in the missionary and pastoral successes of a Paul or Augustine, but also in the humblest good work of every Christian. Good works are said to be necessary also to assure us of the state of grace and to make our calling and election sure, inasmuch as they are an evidence of the Christian's faith. Ap XX 12 f.; cp. FC SD IV 33.

cutions incident to his state as a believer.⁹⁴

Lutheran theology has, secondly, a deep interest in God's creation. True, Lutheranism is otherworldly. Paradoxically, for this very reason, it is truly this-worldly in a God-pleasing manner. To confess: "I believe in God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth," means that I must and will find joy in the things which God has created and use everything which God has created for me and in which He reveals His fatherly heart toward me. The Christian worships and serves not only the "Redeemer God," but also the "Creator God."⁹⁵

Lutheranism, thirdly, always deals with the total person. It allows for no conflict between the this-worldly and otherworldly view in the Christian life; it grants no double standard of morality, one motivated solely by the Holy Spirit, and the other controlled by reason, personal advantage, or some social factor. The Christian as a total person is active in good works, and his one standard is love toward God and toward the fellowman. Thus the Christian's good works are called "fruits of the Spirit," while the unbeliever's are "works of the Law."⁹⁶

A fourth phase which Lutheranism stresses in the doctrine of sanctification is the high value which Holy Scripture places upon the vocation. In antithesis to monasticism the Lutheran Confessions maintain that by divine ordinance and creation God has ennobled every Christian vocation. The Lutheran Confessions repeatedly contrast the works of "the saint" who

attempts to serve God in his self-appointed labors of fasting, mendicancy, pilgrimages, whereby he serves neither God nor man, and the Christian who sees God's command in every form of labor and state of life and therefore knows that his work is nobler than that of any monk or nun.⁹⁷ In vocational counseling the Lutheran will observe only the principle that in his vocation the Christian serve God and his fellowman. He rejects the false notion that a specific command given to a specific person, for instance, the Savior's injunction to the rich young ruler, is a universally binding command. The Christian's concern is to occupy himself with such holy works as are Christ's victories over Satan and thus most glorious works in the sight of God.⁹⁸

Christian Perfection

The Lutheran Confessions set forth the Scriptural view on Christian perfection in antithesis to the flight from the world advocated by scholastics and Anabaptists. The former held that Christian perfection is obtainable by a specific mode of living, preferably the "religious" life with the careful observance of the various rules of the respective religious order. Lutheranism maintains that "Christian perfection" consists in this, that the heart trusts God, believes that for Christ's sake God is gracious and merciful, seeks everything from God, and confidently

⁹⁴ See AC XXVII 31, 32; LC Lord's Prayer 65. Cp. Wilhelm Walther, pp. 394-422. The Lutheran Confessions were written to a large extent against the exaggerated and sinful views of the "religious" life in distinction from the "secular" life.

⁹⁵ LC Creed 12-24. See Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "Christ and Culture: A Lutheran Approach," *Response*, II, 1 (Pentecost, 1960), 3-16.

⁹⁶ AC XVI 5; EC SD VI 10-16.

⁹⁷ See LC Decalog 120, 117, 143, 148. See Oscar E. Feucht et al., eds., *Engagement and Marriage: A Sociological, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (St. Louis, c. 1959), chs. 5-7, 10, and the same editors' *Sex and the Church* (St. Louis: c. 1961), chs. 6-9, 12.

⁹⁸ Ap IV 191 ff.

asks God for whatever is necessary in our trials and tribulations.⁹⁹ The Anabaptists and Schwenkfeldians maintained that in conversion the Holy Spirit works such a change that man becomes completely holy in this life. Against this false view the Lutheran Confessions point out that Christians must indeed lead righteous lives, but that the incipient righteousness of Christians is very imperfect and pleases God only for Christ's sake.¹⁰⁰

Antinomianism is another type of perfectionism. It anticipates the perfected and glorified state of the Christian when it claims that because Christians are the temples of the Holy Spirit, they require no preaching of the Law. The Lutheran Confessions maintain that while the Christian is free from the Law according to the new man, according to the old Adam he is still under the demands, coercion, threats, and curse of the Law; that although the Christian's sins are covered by the perfect obedience of Christ, and although he daily mortifies the old Adam, nevertheless the Christian retains the old Adam as long as he dwells in the flesh, and he is therefore always *simul iustus et peccator*, at the same time a just man and a sinner.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ AC XXVII 44-50; Ap XXVII 24-33, 49, 50. See entire Article XXVII, on "Monastic Vows." The Lutheran Confessions brand the whole theory of the meritoriousness of the works of supererogation as devils' doctrine, because it actually suppresses the doctrine of the Gospel. Ap XII 45, 65.

¹⁰⁰ Ap IV 161, 293, 308, and many other references. Some of the early Quakers adopted the Anabaptist principle. Currently the position of the Anabaptists is shared in a large measure by the Holiness bodies.

¹⁰¹ FC SD VI 2-8; Ap IV 160 f. The doctrine of perfectionism is predicated on the denial of the true nature of sin, particularly the theory that nothing is really sin unless it is a conscious and voluntary action. Ap II 42 ff.; IV 166-171.

THE SOURCE AND RULE OF LUTHERAN THEOLOGY

[*Ed. Note.* In this reprint we have dropped the terms "formal" and "material" principle. They are useful terms for theological discussion, but in the present context of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod their use engenders more confusion than clarity. This is in part because we have often adopted the Aristotelian understanding that views both principles as identical in function and authority. Classical Lutheranism has never affirmed this; hence we are substituting other terms in the hope of clarifying the proper function of both "principles" and their necessary relationship to each other.]

The source and rule of doctrine is *sola Scriptura*, Scripture alone. It does seem strange that with its alleged emphasis on the sole authority of Scripture the Lutheran church nowhere has a specific article setting forth its attitude toward Holy Scripture. By contrast the early Reformed Confessions have an elaborate statement concerning the place and the scope of Scripture, including even a list of all the books which are considered canonical. The Lutheran Confessions have no specific article dealing with Holy Scripture for three reasons.

1. The medieval Western church had never questioned the divine inspiration and authority of the canonical writings of the Old and the New Testament. In their conflict with Rome the Lutherans could take for granted that they and their opponents accepted the Bible as God's Word. For this reason the Augsburg Confession states repeatedly that the doctrines proclaimed among the Evangelicals are taken solely from Holy Scripture and asks that all criticisms of the Lutheran preaching be examined in the light of Scripture.¹⁰² Throughout the

¹⁰² See Pref. to AC. In the concluding paragraph of the doctrinal part of the AC the confessors state that the foregoing 21 articles contain about the sum of their doctrine, in which there is nothing that varies from the Holy Scriptures or the Catholic church or the Roman (i. e., the Western) church.

Apology, Melancthon constantly appeals to Sacred Scripture, pleads with the Romanists to compare the Evangelicals' doctrines with Scripture, and complains that they simply ignore the many clear passages which show that faith alone justifies man; in short, says Melancthon, all of Scripture supports the doctrine proclaimed by the Evangelicals.¹⁰³ Likewise the Smalcald Articles declare most emphatically that God's Word alone, and no one else, not even angels, shall determine the doctrine.¹⁰⁴ The authors of the Formula of Concord state specifically that the only rule and norm to judge doctrines are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament, the pure fountain of Israel. All other writings of ancient and modern teachers are in no wise equal to Scripture, but subject to it, and at best only witnesses to the truth.¹⁰⁵ And, finally, the Preface to the entire Book of Concord is in reality only a further exposition of the doxology in the opening paragraph that in the last days of the world's history God has granted a reappearance of the light of His Gospel and Word, "through which alone we receive true salvation." In this Preface the authors of the Book of Concord describe the Augsburg Confession as having been prepared from the Word of God and the most holy writings of the prophets and apostles and as having been accepted as the norm and guide for teachers. They deplore the various controversies within the Lutheran Church, which would have been avoided if all had faithfully persevered in the pure doctrine of God's Word and regulated their teaching according to the rule of the divine Word handed down to posterity in a godly and excellent way through its publicly approved symbols. And of the Formula of Concord,

the last of the Lutheran symbols, the leaders of Lutheranism stated that they accepted it because it agreed with the Word of God and also with the Augsburg Confession. Like a red thread the sole authority of the Scriptures runs throughout the Lutheran Confessions.

2. Lutheran theology usually distinguishes carefully between symbolics and dogmatics. "Symbolics" takes many things for granted which "dogmatics" must discuss in detail. In particular, "symbolics" is the study of the theses and antitheses in a given controversy and the examination of the church's answer to the specific problem, not only as a statement of truth but also as a confessional act. Symbolics has a doxological¹⁰⁶ and a somewhat existential character. It deals with actual life situations and makes no attempt to present the Christian faith in every point nor in a systematic and comprehensive manner.

3. The Lutheran Confessions have no special article on the divine character of Scripture, because their interest was centered so prominently on a Christocentric approach to Scripture. They have no interest in an atomistic, proof-text, concordance approach to the Scriptures. The Confessions state that Scripture must always be presented according to its two main parts, Law and Gospel, for God's two most significant works are first to frighten and slay man and then to justify and vivify the frightened person. Thus, according to the Lutheran Confessions, the main thought of all the Gospels and Epistles of the entire Scriptures is that we should believe that in Christ Jesus through faith we have a gracious God.¹⁰⁷ The Apology points out that "enthusiasts," humanists, and ratio-

¹⁰³ Ap XII 66; IV 102, 107 ff.; XX 2; II 50.

¹⁰⁴ SA II 15, 10.

¹⁰⁵ See FC Ep. Of the Summary Concept 2.

¹⁰⁶ The title page of the AC contains the quotation: "I will speak of Thy testimonies also before kings and will not be ashamed," Ps. 119:46. Cp. Allbeck, 3 ff.; Schlink.

¹⁰⁷ Ap IV 87, 102; XII 53; XX 2.

nalists dissect the Scriptures into individual Bible texts and explain the articles concerning the righteousness of faith in a philosophical and a Jewish manner. But in this atomistic Biblicist manner they actually abolish the doctrine of Christ as Mediator. Without the knowledge of the Gospel the Bible remains a meaningless and useless book.¹⁰⁸ But when the Scriptures are seen as Gospel, as *evangelium*, the Word of God becomes "the true holy thing above all holy things," which sanctifies the person and everything he does.¹⁰⁹

Wherever this Word is preached, it becomes the power of God, an active and creative Word, and engenders the faith which accepts the Bible as Christ's inerrant and final Word. This belief does not depend on rational arguments, but it is a divinely wrought faith.¹¹⁰ The Lutheran Confessions take for granted that a Christian accepts the Scriptures as God's Word, both as God speaking in this Word here and now and as God's Word spoken in times past through the holy writers.¹¹¹ In Lutheran theology the believer does not accept the absolute authority of the Scriptures as an a priori truth, but because he has learned to know Christ as his divine Savior; has experienced the power of His Word in the Scriptures upon his heart; and relies implicitly on Christ's own statement concerning the divine character of the Scriptures. It is there-

fore proper to say that the rule of Lutheran theology is entirely Christological. This holds true with the same force also of the central thought.

THE CHIEF DOCTRINE OF LUTHERAN THEOLOGY

Justification by faith is usually referred to as *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, the article by which the church stands and falls. When speaking of this, Lutherans do not have in mind a basic principle according to which a body of doctrines may be developed. The chief doctrine of Lutheran theology is in reality only a synopsis and summary of the Christian truth. When Lutheran theologians speak of justification by faith as the chief doctrine, they merely wish to indicate that all theological thinking must begin at this article, center in it, and culminate in it. As the various facets of the diamond catch, refract, reflect, the light, so the phrase "justification by faith alone" gives brilliance to every phase of Christian revelation, and in turn each facet of Christian truth sheds new brilliance on this central doctrine, whether it is viewed as justification by faith, or as the work of Christ, or as the distinction between Law and Gospel, or as faith in Christ,

Luther's concept of the Scriptures is discussed by T. A. Kantonen, *Resurgence of the Gospel* (Philadelphia, 1948), pp. 113-124. On the attitude of the dogmaticians of the era of Lutheran Orthodoxy to the Sacred Scriptures, see Robert Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture*, 2d ed. (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1957). Kent S. Knudson, "The Authority of Scripture," *CTM*, XL (1969), 156-165; Herbert J. A. Bouman, "The Inspired Word and the Lutheran Confessions," *Proceedings, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, 1962; idem, "Some Thoughts on the Theological Presuppositions for a Lutheran Approach to the Scriptures," in *Aspects of Biblical Hermeneutics*, *CTM*, Occasional Papers 1, pp. 2 ff.; Hermann Sasse, "Luther and the Word of God," in *Accents in Luther's Theology*, ed. Heino Kadai (St. Louis, 1967).

¹⁰⁸ Ap IV 376.

¹⁰⁹ LC Third Commandment 91, 92, 100, 101.

¹¹⁰ Helmut Echterbach, "The Lutheran Doctrine of the 'Autopistia' of Holy Scripture," trans. John Theodore Mueller, *CTM*, XXIII (1952), 241, 272.

¹¹¹ In Lutheran theology the Scriptures are both *Deus locutus* and *Deus loquens* (God who has spoken and God now speaking). Dialectical theology also employs this terminology. But it views the Scriptures as *Deus loquens* primarily in such a way as virtually to deny the objectivity of the Scriptures. Cp., for instance, Emil Brunner, *The Divine-Human Encounter*, trans. A. W. Loos (Philadelphia, 1945). Another approach to

or as the doctrine of the "righteousness before God."¹¹²

In the Confessions this doctrine is usually presented either as the doctrine of Christ's work or the doctrine of justification. The Formula of Concord quotes the Apology in stating:

This article of justification by faith is "the chief article of the entire Christian doctrine," "without which no poor conscience can have any abiding comfort or rightly understand the riches of the grace of Christ."¹¹³

The Apology summarizes the entire Scriptures in terms such as "the Gospel message," "absolution," "the forgiveness of sin," "justification," or in such concepts as God's new relation to man and man's new relation to God. Melancthon states:

In this controversy [that men obtain remission of sins through faith alone] the main doctrine of Christianity is involved; when it is properly understood, it illumines and magnifies the honor of Christ and brings to pious consciences the abundant consolation that they need.¹¹⁴

¹¹² See Luther, *Pref. to Galatians*, WA, XL/1, 33-37, also *Pref. to Latin Works*, 1545, WA, LIV, 179-187. Martin H. Franzmann, "Seven Theses on Reformation Hermeneutics," *CTM*, XL (1969), 235-246.

¹¹³ FC SD III 6.

¹¹⁴ Ap IV 2. Cp. AC XXVI 4; XXVIII 48.

When in 1537 the Lutherans were confronted by the question whether for the sake of peace they could yield anything, Luther states concerning the "office and work of Jesus Christ, or our redemption":

Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed. For as St. Peter says, "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). "And with his stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:5). On this article rests all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubts about it. Otherwise all is lost, and the pope, the devil, and all our adversaries will gain the victory.¹¹⁵

Only within the frame of reference of the doctrine of justification can any Christian doctrine be considered in a salutary way. The doctrine of justification is, as it were, the strand on which all the pearls of Christian revelation are strung.

¹¹⁵ SA II I 5.

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