

The new book, *The Essential Forde*, is Pseudo-Forde (9)

Therefore, what about homosexuality? Forde was a strong defender of marriage as the union of one man and one woman. He opposed the gay agenda on the basis of the harm it does to the social order, the family, and the need of children for a mother and a father. He used reason and the wisdom of the Bible and tradition in his arguments, but he never claimed that the issue is settled by the Bible. He never claimed that Ten Commandments give us “divine law” or that moral law found in the New Testament is “God’s answer.”

In contrast, his *Lutheran Quarterly* editors regard the issue of homosexuality as settled by divine law which they have access to in the Bible.

1. Inerrancy and disguised moral absolutes	
Forde’s editors	Forde
<p>“In Luther’s day a dispute arose when the clever preacher John Agricola proposed that the way to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ was to leave out the preaching of the law entirely....Wouldn’t that be nice for a preacher? No more need to accuse anyone or bother with the law even when it is plainly in the Scripture to be preached....They [ELCA pro-gay supporters] believe they are the messengers and purveyors of a new and higher law than had ever existed before in church and world—even laws given by God himself. Furthermore, this new and higher form of law comes in the person of the Holy Spirit who gives them new spirit-led revelations that are not in Scripture but are supposed to be part of God’s hidden plan.....Fanatics think that the Holy Spirit has given them a new word not found in Scripture that approves of homosexual acts....They know, even though they have no word from God to stand on.¹ [In this view the Bible gives us divine law, an eternal moral order, by which we judge morality today: “the law is there plainly in the Scripture to be preached.” When the texts deal with slavery, usury, divorce,</p>	<p>“[Lutheranism] has resorted mostly to a dogmatic absolutism largely dependent on a view of scriptural inerrancy, which usually brought with it disguised moral absolutisms of various sorts as well.”⁵</p> <p>“At the same time, a theology seduced by nomism (all too often the case in the church) is ill equipped to do battle with antinomianism. Since it has already compromised the eschatological gospel, it can fight only from the position of law and charge its opponents with the ‘terrible heresy’ of being anti-law. Thus, the term ‘antinomian.’ One gets the impression that whereas other heresies are relatively mild, being antinomian is about the worst thing one could be! At any rate, to defend itself, nomism appeals to already given anti-gospel sentiments, compounding the confusion. So the general victory of nomism over antinomianism in the church is hardly cause for celebration. Nothing is solved. No insight into the nature of the problem is gained. The war of words is only inflated and the issues obscured.”⁶</p> <p>“For faith in the end of the law leads to the view that its purpose is to take care of this world, not</p>

¹ Steven D. Paulson, “Against the holy blasphemers,” *Network News* 10,8 (December 2009) 5-6. Bolding added for emphasis here and below. Italics in originals.

⁵ Gerhard O. Forde, “Radical Lutheranism,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (1987) 13.

⁶ Forde, “Fake Theology: Reflections on Antinomians Past and Present,” *dialog* 22 (1983) 246-51, here 247.

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<p>then the defenders of this view modify their stance, appealing to changing time and context.]</p> <p>“Forde is absolutely convinced of the effectual power of this word – and it alone – to radically transform the world, including sexual practices. Our culture tends to idolize sex – exploit it and not receive it as a gift to be enjoyed and given within divinely established limits. As such, sex too can be a vehicle of God’s ‘wrath,’ our very practices creating a system and climate ruled by death and not life. God’s word alone creates the pathos of new life, allowing human sexuality to be more natural.”² [Divinely established limits = eternal law and third use of the law. Talk of the radical transformation of the world is anti-two kingdoms, and not Forde’s position.]</p> <p>“The written word of Scripture is not obscure—as Erasmus had hoped it would be, full of possible interpretations over which one can exercise free choices. Instead, it is perspicuous—clear, plain, obvious, unmistakable—thus not hidden but revealed...It is not Scripture itself that is both hidden and revealed. In God there are many things hidden—as Scripture (and experience) says plainly, such as, ‘Of that day no one knows but the Father’ (Mark 13:32). But Scripture itself is not God hidden in majesty; it is</p>	<p>to prepare for the next. That means that we do not possess absolute, unchangeable laws. If the law no longer takes care of this world, it can and must be changed. As even Luther put it,⁷ we must write our own decalogue to fit the times.”⁸</p> <p>“The ‘post-liberal Lutheran’ is, of course, something of a shadowy, if not menacing, figure on the contemporary scene, perhaps not yet clearly defined, often a puzzle to both friend and foe, usually mistaken simply for a hard-line conservative confessionalist or orthodoxist. But that is seriously to misread the situation. It is a post-Enlightenment, post-liberal position. A post-liberal Lutheran is one who has been through the options spawned since the Reformation and realizes that they have all been used up. Least of all does infallibilism or reactionary conservatism of any sort provide an answer. In any case, Lutherans have always been uneasy with infallibilist solutions to faith’s questions. Even where they have flirted with the ideas of scriptural infallibility they have had some anxiety and suspicion that it might be contrary to a gospel appropriation of the scriptural message.”⁹</p> <p>“In our deliberations [on homosexuality], the wisdom of Scripture and the tradition cannot be cited as ‘God’s answer’ to the matter, but</p>

² Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson, “Introduction: Taking the Risk to Proclaim,” *The Preached God. Gerhard O. Forde. Proclamation in Word and Sacrament.* Eds. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 25.

⁷ Martin Luther on the law as human and changing: “Indeed, we would make new decalogues, as Paul does in all the epistles, and Peter, but above all Christ in the gospel” (LW 34:112). “This text makes it clear that even the Ten Commandments do not pertain to us” (LW 35:165). “The Gentiles are not obligated to obey Moses. Moses is the *Sachsenspiegel* for the Jews” (LW 35:167).

⁸ Forde, “*Lex semper accusat?* Nineteenth-Century Roots of Our Current Dilemma,” *dialog* 9 (1970) 274; “*Lex semper accusat?*” *A More Radical Gospel.* Gerhard O. Forde Eds. Mark C. Mattes and Seven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 49; “*Lex semper accusat?*” *The Essential Forde.* Gerhard O. Forde. Eds. Nicholas Hopman, Mark C. Mattes, and Steven D. Paulson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019) 193.

⁹ Forde, “The Catholic Impasse: Reflections on Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Today,” *Promoting Unity. Themes in Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue.* Eds. H. George Anderson and James R. Crumley Jr. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989) 67-77; here 72.

1. Inerrancy and disguised moral absolutes	
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<p>God revealed—plainly.³ [This is seventeenth century orthodoxy, where inerrancy was especially emphasized. According to this view, God's law is clearly revealed in scripture.]</p> <p>“By ‘external word’ Luther means the text of Scripture, along with its miraculous bestowal or mediation from one person to another via the office of ministry. That office is the outward office of the Word that utters the two words of God in perfect clarity: first the Law that tells us exactly what to do and judges us; and then the gospel that tells us precisely what Christ thinks of us—apart from the law.”⁴ [This is inerrancy without using the term. The moral law found in the Bible clearly reveals God's will; it “tells us what to do and judges us.”]</p>	<p>neither ought that wisdom be summarily dismissed as irrelevant or outdated.¹⁰</p> <p>“The only way to overcome the problem of the hiddenness of God not preached is by God preached. But that will not happen by attempting to infer God's will from the law.”¹¹</p>

2. The moral and ceremonial law end in Christ	
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<p>“Because of the absolute certainty of their cause. Leviticus tells you to sacrifice a goat. So there. Why don't you sacrifice a goat? A fanatic cannot make the proper distinction between the law and the gospel and to identify where the law applies and where it comes to an end. A fanatic cannot make the distinction. Now Lutherans and Lutheran theology should know better. It should know there is a distinction between the law and the gospel and as Paul says very clearly it is not</p>	<p>”Theologically, both before and after the Reformation, the most common move toward domesticating freedom has been the attempt to qualify the Pauline claim that Christ is the end of the law to those of faith. ‘Reason,’ as Luther would put it, simply cannot entertain such an idea, the conviction that in Christ the law comes to an end, that law is over and freedom begins. As we have seen, freedom as usually conceived needs law as the mediator of possibility. What</p>

³ Steven D. Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God. Hiddenness, Evil, and Predestination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018) 1:98.

⁴ Steven D. Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God. Hidden in the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019) 2:140.

¹⁰ Donald H. Juel, “Homosexuality and Church Tradition,” *Word & World* X:2 (1990) 169. Forde, in his article, “Law and Sexual Behavior,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 9:1 (1995) 3-22, includes a reference (fn. 21) to the above article by Don Juel. Forde dedicated his last book, *The Captivation of the Will*, “To Don Juel, colleague and friend, in memoriam.”

¹¹ Forde, “Postscript to the Captivation of the Will,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 19:1 (2005) 78. *The Captivation of the Will. Gerhard O. Forde. Luther vs. Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage*. Ed. Steven Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 79.

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<p>the law but faith which makes one righteous. We can go right to Romans 3:28. Right at the end of the chapter. I think it's verse 33 where he says what then shall we say? Does this remove the law altogether? No, it establishes the law. It puts the law in its proper place. But the proper place for the law is not the means by which you are made righteous. This is a fanatic opinion. A fanatic opinion thinks that its judgment on homosexuality is going to be a righteous one that will make them righteous. And it will actually impart righteousness to another human being apart from the forgiveness of sins entirely. This is the way fanaticism operates, and it can't make a distinction between the law and the gospel any longer. Anybody who spends any time discussing the distinction between law and gospel knows there is a distinction now between the law of the decalogue, the law of the Ten Commandments that we're talking about here, and the so-called ceremonial law that identifies how it is that you do a sacrifice of a goat. This is why we teach the Ten Commandments at the beginning of the Small Catechism. We don't teach the sacrifice of a goat. But you'll find both of these in the Old Testament. You have to make the proper distinction. Of course the issue of sexuality is an issue now of the decalogue and the proper establishment of the law and the way we teach and preach that law."¹²[This wrongly states that the ceremonial law ends in Christ but not the moral. The moral law endures and is established in God's left-hand kingdom. Rather, Forde:</p>	<p>shall we do if there is no law to tell us what to do? But is Paul then wrong in his claim? Theologians as usual, however, have found a way to have their cake and eat it, too. They made a distinction in the content of the law – something Paul never did – between ceremonial or ritual laws on the one hand and moral law on the other. Then they proceeded to say that Christ was the end of ceremonial law but not the moral law. Christ ended the necessity, that is, for sacrifice, circumcision, food and ritual regulations, etc., but not the demands of moral law (e.g., the Decalogue). Christ died, it seems, to save us from the liturgiologists! One might grant, of course, that this is no small accomplishment, but the price does seem a bit high!"¹⁴</p> <p>"Early in Christian history some tried to accommodate to law by altering the law's content, arguing that while ceremonial law came to an end with Christ, the moral law did not. Nervousness about the effectiveness of the gospel in the confessional generation of Protestantism resulted in the positing of an added <i>function</i> of law: a 'third use' by the 'reborn Christian.' The gospel does make a difference, supposedly, but only such as to add to the function of the law."¹⁵</p> <p>"This too is an old, old game. Nervous about Paul's claim that Christ is the end of the law to faith, tropologists of all ages have tried to escape by making distinctions in the content of the law, something Paul never did. The favorite move has been to say that Christ is the end of the ritual or ceremonial law but not the moral law. But when that is done, the use is turned to its opposite. Two things happen. First, eschatology is the</p>

¹² Paulson at a Lutheran CORE meeting, Roseville Lutheran (11/18/2010). Transcript of the CD at 25:52.

¹⁴ Forde, "Called to Freedom." Presidential Address to the International Congress for Luther Research, 1993. Reprinted in *The Preached God*, 259.

¹⁵ Forde, "Fake Theology: Reflections on Antinomianism Past and Present," 249.

2. The moral and ceremonial law end in Christ	
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<p style="color: red;">“Precisely the proper distinction between law and gospel limits and humanizes the law.”^{13]}</p>	<p>inevitable casualty. There is no new creation, there is only the moral tropology which persists, come hell or high water, or even the end of the world! Second, if Christ is the end of the ritual but not the moral law, then it is precisely Jewish particularity that becomes the object of theological attack, not the universal human predicament ‘under the law.’ ...For a proper eschatology, law belongs strictly to this age. It is to rule over the ‘flesh’ and the affairs of this age. Christ and the gospel promise of the new age are to rule in the conscience....”¹⁶</p> <p>“Unable to rhyme Matt. 5:17-18 with Rom. 10:4, the dogmatic tradition has experienced nothing but trouble over the law.... Paul and Matthew are at irreconcilable odds. The tradition tried to arrive at a compromise. The result was the idea that in Christ the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament were abrogated (thus throwing a sop to Paul’s claim that Christ was the ‘end’ of the law) while the ‘moral’ law was not (thus supposedly satisfying Matthew’s claim that not one iota or dot would pass away until ‘the end.’ But that is patent nonsense which only confuses the issue further and completely obscures the eschatology involved. Neither Testament makes that kind of distinction between ceremonial and</p>

¹³ Gerhard O. Forde, “Forensic Justification and the Law in Lutheran Theology,” *Justification by Faith. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII.* Eds. H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 300-301.

¹⁶ Forde, “Luther and the *Usus Pauli*,” *dialog* 32:4 (1993) 277-78. What about 1 Cor 7:10 and other places (1 Cor 7:17, 25; 9:14; 11:23; 14:37; 1 Thess 4:15), where Paul speaks on the authority of the Lord? When faced with the 613 rabbinic laws of the Old Testament, which include things such as forbidding eating pork, some Lutherans who insist on a third use of the law claim that the ritual laws of the Old Testament are not binding, but the moral laws are. They use texts such as 1 Cor 7:10 as proof that Paul viewed the moral law as binding on the basis of Jesus own words, and thus as evidence for a third use of the law. But Wolfgang Schrage in his well-known book, *The Ethics of the New Testament*, rejects this interpretation: “...Paul does not quote the actual words of the Lord verbatim but allows himself the liberty of modifying them: what matters is not the words themselves but what they say. The parenthetical statement in 1 Cor. 7:11a, where Paul appears to concede divorce in spite of the word of the Lord, might also confirm that Paul does not think of Jesus’ words as authoritative in an external and legalistic sense that is content with observing the letter of the law.” See Wolfgang Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) 207-11, here 210.

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	<p>moral law. Furthermore, the tradition was left with the problem of deciding just what was moral and what was ceremonial. Are the first three commandments, for instance, moral or ceremonial? One might, of course, as happened more generally, try to settle on the decalogue as the moral law. But there is a good deal in the Old Testament and the New outside the decalogue which might also qualify as moral and ethical material of the highest quality. Who is to decide? The outcome of such confusion was, in general, that natural law [understood as an eternal order of law] became the arbiter. Natural law decides what is moral and what is not. But therewith the fate of the church's understanding of law was sealed, as well as of its eschatological outlook. Natural law became the structural backbone of the theological system, displacing eschatology....</p> <p>"Once the eschatological outlook has been displaced by an eternal order of law, antinomianism is the attempt to remedy the situation with a false and realized eschatology....</p> <p>"Once justification had again been reasserted in radical fashion, it was natural that heavy pressure would be brought to bear on the received understanding of law. John Agricola rightly sensed that justification by faith could not simply be combined with the older idea of law as an eternal order, still evident in some of Philip Melanchthon's theological constructions."¹⁷</p>

¹⁷ Forde, "Justification and This World," *Christian Dogmatics*. Eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Philadelphia; Fortress, 1984) 2:447-48.

3. The Ten Commandments	
Forde's editors	Forde
<p>“Anybody who spends any time discussing the distinction between law and gospel knows there is a distinction now between the law of the decalogue, the law of the Ten Commandments that we’re talking about here, and the so-called ceremonial law that identifies how it is that you do a sacrifice of a goat. This is why we teach the Ten Commandments at the beginning of the Small Catechism. We don’t teach the sacrifice of a goat. But you’ll find both of these in the Old Testament. You have to make the proper distinction. Of course the issue of sexuality is an issue now of the decalogue and the proper establishment of the law and the way we teach and preach that law.¹⁸ [Any attempt to counter antinomianism by bringing back “revealed” or “natural” law, even “evangelical counsels,” to settle ethical issues, contradicts the gospel (Galatians 5:1).]</p>	<p>“For faith in the end of the law leads to the view that its purpose is to take care of this world, not to prepare for the next. That means that we do not possess absolute, unchangeable laws. If the law no longer takes care of this world, it can and must be changed. As even Luther put it,¹⁹ we must write our own decalogue to fit the times.”²⁰</p> <p>“Law belongs to earth, not to heaven. It is natural, not supernatural. It is a servant, not a master.</p> <p>“That is why Luther did not speak of law as something static and unchangeable. Laws will and must change in their form as the times demand. Luther, for instance, refused to grant eternal status even to the laws of Moses. They are strictly ‘natural,’ he said, not unlike the common law of any nation. Men on this earth simply don’t have access to eternal laws. But men do have the gift of reason and the accumulated wisdom of the ages as well as the Bible. Here is the task for man’s reason and created gifts.”²¹</p>

¹⁸ Paulson at a Lutheran CORE meeting, Roseville Lutheran (11/18/2010). Transcript of the CD at 25:52.

¹⁹ Martin Luther on the law as human and changing: “Indeed, we would make new decalogues, as Paul does in all the epistles, and Peter, but above all Christ in the gospel” (LW 34:112). “This text makes it clear that even the Ten Commandments do not pertain to us” (LW 35:165). “The Gentiles are not obligated to obey Moses. Moses is the *Sachsenspiegel* for the Jews” (LW 35:167).

²⁰ Forde, “*Lex semper accusat?*” *dialog* 9 (1970) 274; *A More Radical Gospel*, 49, *The Essential Forde*, 193.

²¹ Forde, *Where God Meets Man* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972) 111.

4. Reason is the arbiter in decisions about homosexuality	
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<p>For Forde's editors Scripture is most often the arbiter for the moral use of law because it gives divine law. "Natural law" is sometimes said to be the arbiter in the moral use of law, but not reason, in contrast to Forde: "Precisely the proper distinction between law and gospel limits and humanizes the law."²²</p> <p>"Our culture tends to idolize sex – exploit it and not receive it as a gift to be enjoyed and given within divinely established limits."²³["Divinely established limits" = divine law.]</p> <p>"If the law were endless, one would inevitably believe that one must fashion an end of it for one's self. Nevertheless, a Christian may affirm that the Mosaic law is still useful – it may agree with 'natural law,' for instance." [Here the Mosaic law is regard as less than divine, but maybe "still useful," if it agrees with "natural law," which is implied to be the arbiter in ethical disputes.]</p> <p>"God giving his heart in Jesus Christ is not a simple matter. It complicates things for us on earth, especially those of us who are trying hard (sometimes) to live according to God's divine plan as revealed in the law."²⁴ [Divine law is here the standard which governs faith and life today.]</p> <p>"By 'external word' Luther means the text of Scripture, along with its miraculous bestowal or mediation from one person to another via the office of ministry. That office is the outward office of the Word that utters the two words of God in perfect clarity: first the Law that tells us exactly what to do and judges us; and then the gospel that tells us precisely what Christ thinks of</p>	<p>"Some in the church like to argue that since the church has changed its mind on matters like divorce or ordination of women it seems consequent that it could change its stance on sexual behavior as well. But in questions of the civil use of law it is not legitimate to argue that one example of change justifies another. Each case has to be argued individually. ["Argued individually" is a way of saying that "reason," not revelation, is the arbiter in disputes about sexuality.]</p> <p>[Paul in Romans 13:10: "Love does no harm to the neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Lutherans ask: What are the harmful consequences of same-sex behaviors to those who practice them and society at large?]</p> <p>"The second thing that needs to be said is that the fundamental concern of the civil use of the law is for the care of the social order. The purpose of laws regulating sexual behavior is to foster healthy, joyous, and socially fruitful sexual relationships and to guard against the social destruction that results from aberrant sexual behavior. The struggle to establish an order within which sexual behavior can be beneficial to society has been a long and arduous one.... What is being harmed [by the advocates for same-sex behavior] is the very social order itself. And that is the concern of the civil use of the law.</p> <p>"It may, of course, be true that many laws concerning sexual behavior ought to be changed. But the problem is deeper, especially when law passes over into its theological use. What used to be called the 'natural' law, in the sense of the law 'written on the heart,' inexorably does its work. What that law enjoins</p>

²² Forde, "Forensic Justification and Law in Lutheran Theology," 301.

²³ Mattes and Paulson, "Introduction: Taking the Risk to Proclaim," 25.

²⁴ Mattes and Paulson, "Introduction: Taking the Risk to Proclaim," 10.

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<p>us—apart from the law.”²⁵ [Here “the Law that tells us exactly what to do” is God’s divine law.]</p> <p>“Of course the issue of sexuality is an issue now of the decalogue and the proper establishment of the law and the way we teach and preach that law.”²⁶ [Here Mosaic law is divine law and is the moral arbiter in the civil use of law.]</p>	<p>is love of and service to the neighbor. That is its fundamental and ineradicable content.”²⁷</p> <p>“Men on this earth simply don’t have access to eternal laws. But men do have the gift of reason and the accumulated wisdom of the ages as well as the Bible. Here is the task for man’s reason and created gifts.”²⁸</p> <p>“Reason, i.e., critical investigation using the best available wisdom and analysis of the concrete human situation in given instances, is to be the arbiter in the political use of the law.”²⁹</p>

²⁵ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 2:140.

²⁶ Paulson at a Lutheran CORE meeting, Roseville Lutheran (11/18/2010). Transcript of the CD at 25:52.

²⁷ Forde, “Law and Sexual Behavior,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 9:1 (1995) 8-9, 18; *The Essential Forde*, 155-56, 165.

²⁸ Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 111.

²⁹ Forde, “The Viability of Luther Today: A North American Perspective,” *Word & World* 7 (1987) 27.