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*Confessional Propria in Relation to
New Testament Texts*

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Lutherans, when they explicate their position, might well begin with *sola scriptura*. Yet *sola scriptura* dare not be understood as an assertion of biblical positivism, as an assertion that in a wooden fashion the Bible in all its parts is equally valid. Luther's practice is helpful at this point. When he published his translation of the New Testament in 1522 he placed Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation at the end. In contrast to the other New Testament writings, they were not numbered in the table of contents. Like the Apocrypha of the Old Testament, these four books were clearly separated from the previous material by an empty space.

More important were Luther's reasons for doing this. After citing Hebrews 6:4-6, 10:26, and 12:17, Luther concludes: "This seems, as it stands, to be against all the Gospels and St. Paul's Epistles; and although one might make a gloss on it, the words are so clear that I do not know whether that would be sufficient."¹ Concerning James he writes: "Directly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture, it ascribes righteousness to works, and says that Abraham was justified by his works. . . . In summary: he wants to guard against those who relied on faith without works, and he is too weak for this task in spirit, understanding and words. He rends the Scriptures and thereby resists Paul and all Scripture."² Jude he praises, but "it is an epistle that need not be counted among the chief books which are to lay the foundation of the faith."³ Revelation he criticizes in the same fashion: "Finally let everyone think of it as his own spirit gives him to think, my spirit cannot fit itself into

this book. There is one sufficient reason for me not to think highly of it, that Christ is not taught or known in it."⁴

What Luther did was *Sachkritik*—content criticism. Is what he did to be rejected as an arbitrary and limited viewpoint, or is it part of what is called "discerning the spirits" (1 Cor. 12:20; 1 John 4:1)? Luther himself did not consider his judgments about these four books to be slips of the pen or purely occasional opinion. To be sure, he later modified what he had written about James and Revelation, but the preface to Hebrews remained the same. As is well known, for the rest of his life he was very critical of James; for example, in 1542 in Table Talk he says that James "has no syllable about Christ."⁵

None of this is to imply that Luther did not take Scripture very seriously, for he did, and in its literal sense. To the contrary, precisely because he took Scripture seriously and in its literal sense, he faced the fact that there were problem passages. We, as his spiritual and intellectual heirs, are called upon to do the same.

The issue, of course, is not whether the New Testament is made up of twenty-three books, or even of twenty-two books as in the eastern Syriac church or of thirty-three books as in the Ethiopian canon, although each subtraction or addition is obviously a matter of concern. The issue is whether an individual book is added or subtracted because it does or does not conform to that "something" which makes *scriptura* to be *scriptura*.

The issue, to put it in traditional terms, is that of the canon within the canon. One dare not be apologetic about this much-disputed concept, for there always is a canon within the canon. An examination of the ways various Christian groups use Scripture indicates that no matter what counterclaims may be made each in fact operates with a canon within the canon. It has sometimes been said that each part of Scripture has been found to be useful to some part of the Christian church at some time and (a) therefore there are no impossibly problematic passages in Scripture, (b) therefore there is no "center," such as justification, which governs the rest of Scripture, and (c) therefore Scripture in each of its parts must equally be considered "canon." However, such a concept of the "useful" is very elastic and could just as well be stretched to include such books as 1 Clement and Barnabas, which were included in the canon in some parts of the ancient church. Furthermore, what happens in practice is that a choice is always made, as it must be, between Paul and James.

How is it possible to discern what the "center" of the New Testament is? Can we leave it to the New Testament scholars (or, for that matter, to the systematicians)? As a matter of fact, scholars add to the complexity of the problem.

Take Paul, for example. Stephen Neill writes: "Yet, when we have done our best, we shall always find that the apostle goes beyond us. When we think that we have caught him, like Proteus he escapes from our grasp. . . . We know that we shall always fail."⁶ Does this mean that Paul is inconsistent in a way which goes beyond the inconsistency into which each of us as human beings falls? Or does this mean that we have not yet discovered the categories which are needed in order to interpret his theology? Or, more probably, that the categories which are needed can no longer be discovered because we no longer have access to the materials needed for the task?

The problem becomes more complex when we face the question of context. The New Testament scholar tries to find the context of each word in the paragraph, and of the paragraph in the letter Paul has written. But the task does not end here. It is essential also to discover the historical context of each letter, if the material allows, and when this has been done, it turns out, some would say, that each letter applies only to a specific and concrete situation.⁷ An additional difficulty is the fact that New Testament scholars often do not agree about these historical contexts. Moreover, once certain less specific, that is to say, more universal lines of Paul's thought have been discovered, it may turn out that they are so foreign (apocalyptic, *heilsgeschichtlich*, Gnostic, or whatever) to our ways of thinking that we would have to de-apocalypticize, de-heilsgeschichtcize, de-gnosticize, or de-whatever them before they could apply to our present-day concerns. And all the above has to be said *mutatis mutandis* about every New Testament writer.

The history of the interpretation of New Testament texts adds another dimension to the complexity. The variations in the interpretation of each verse down through church history make evident the problem of depending on the scholars to discern what the "center" of the New Testament is. We today, for example, would not accept many of the exegetical conclusions from the sixteenth century. Even the same scholar within the space of a few years will vary; for example, Krister Stendahl has recently announced basic changes in his exegetical position.⁸ And when and if some agree about certain passages or about the New Testament as a whole, their agreement seems to be on the basis of schools of thought, and the opposing camps play the game of "here is a passage

which does not fit your analysis" and "you have not dealt with all the evidence."

What is the preacher supposed to do? He knows that right preaching is preaching the "center" of the New Testament. Yet he cannot stop preaching until the scholars somehow agree on this center, for it may be years or the Parousia before that happens. Nevertheless the church has continued down through the centuries.

Then does historical scholarship have any role to play in discerning the "center"? Much in every way. For historical scholarship helps to keep *Sachkritik* honest. It forces us to take the text seriously. As such it is a deadly weapon against any "infallible" tradition which tries to impose itself upon the text.

Sola scriptura equals *solus Christus*. Luther in his Table Talk describes Christ as the "*punctus mathematicus*" of Scripture.⁹ More definitive is his famous sentence from 1535: "If the opponents use Scripture against Christ, then we use Christ against Scripture."¹⁰ Christ himself is the foundation on which everything rests, and no other foundation is possible (1 Cor. 3:11). He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Thus the "center," the truth, is a historical person of a particular time and place. No information about him, even if within the New Testament, is in itself the "center," for he is not the equivalent of information about him. No ideas or combinations of ideas about him, even if within the New Testament, determine who he is, for he is the "truth" who determines what all other truth is. Luther's phrase *was Christum treibet* has become a kind of slogan to summarize this whole approach.

All the genuine sacred books agree on this, that all of them preach Christ and deal with Him. That is the true test, by which to judge all books, when we see whether they deal with Christ or not, since all the Scriptures show us Christ (Romans 3) and St. Paul will know nothing but Christ (1 Corinthians 2). What does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even though St. Peter or Paul taught it; again, what preaches Christ would be apostolic, even though Judas, Annas, Pilate and Herod did it.¹¹

This whole approach, however, does not prove to be as useful in determining the "center" as it seems it ought to be, for any and all camps agree that Christ is the "center," and therefore the problem of determining the "center" is no closer to resolution than before. Luther's *was Christum treibet* is in itself simply a phrase, an empty vessel, ready to be filled with whatever each camp is convinced is part of the "center."

Christ as the *punctus mathematicus* of Scripture remains precisely that, without dimension, like the *x* in an equation.

Solus Christus may also be stated as *the gospel*. Once again, however, "gospel" is but a word. It indicates the "something" that is the "center" of the New Testament, but does not in itself establish that "something." In practice "gospel" often serves as a kind of ecumenical wallpaper, covering a host of differences. A look at the New Testament usage of the word shows that we cannot find there a unified sense (such as "the historical person of Christ") which would establish the meaning of this "center." To be sure, the "gospel" is closely identified with Christ in Mark 8:35 and 10:29; in Paul it often means the living power of God in Jesus Christ that effects salvation in the world now (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:24; 2:5; 9:16;¹² Gal. 2:5, 14;¹³ probably Mark 1:14-15, "kingly rule"). But "gospel" can also mean the revelation about Christ (2 Cor. 2:12; 9:13; 10:14; 11:4; Gal. 1:7-9; Phil. 1:27), the life of Jesus (Mark 1:1; 14:9), teaching about Christ (in pre-Pauline creedal formulas, Rom. 1:3-4; 1 Cor. 15:1-2), and sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:10-11).

A more generalized approach that is not tied to the concordance asks if there is not an idea, theme, or theology which is the "center," the *gospel*. Some of the proposals have been: Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 8:6; 12:3; Phil. 2:11); the tension between already and not yet (although Qumran has this as well); the kingdom of God (Luke 11:20);¹⁴ the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:14); and justification (Rom. 1:16-17).

But each of these formulas, even when it is used as the "central" theme, has relationships to the other formulas and to the other ideas in the New Testament. In Romans 10:9-10 "Jesus is Lord," resurrection, justification, and salvation are all together within one short passage. 1 Corinthians 1:30 has righteousness, sanctification, and redemption in close association with Jesus Christ as our life and wisdom. In Matthew 5:20 the kingdom is based upon a righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. The distinctive meaning of each concept must, of course, be determined in each verse according to the context.

The question still remains: how is it possible to discover which of these formulas is the "center"? Or is it impossible? Stendahl writes: "I am not sure that 'the gospel' can be so easily summarized under the rubric of 'the justification of the ungodly' (Rom. 4:5; see 5:6; Käsemann, pp. 75, 78 and passim)—or, for that matter, in any other single theme, Pauline or not."¹⁵ The metaphor of the cut diamond is helpful for understanding what is meant by this kind of thinking. The gospel is the

diamond. The many facets are the various ideas, themes, and formulas—all of them integral to the diamond. Together they reflect light and are brilliant. It would be impossible to take one facet to be the “center.” Metaphors such as the diamond result in equating the gospel with the historical canon of the New Testament.¹⁶

Stendahl understands that those who emphasize the justification of the ungodly and who think that for Paul the Jew typifies the religious man living by the law are anti-Semitic.¹⁷ Paul was asking not how one finds a gracious God but how his mission to the Gentiles fits into God’s plan for the world.¹⁸ One must fault Stendahl for psychologizing Paul (Paul’s “innate arrogance” and “elitism”)¹⁹ and for not heeding his own warning that New Testament issues are specific and may not apply later²⁰ when he analyzes Paul’s reflections about God’s plan. But the most serious error Stendahl makes is not discerning the cosmic dimension of justification for Paul: what is at stake in justification is not primarily conscience but God’s lordship over the world and therefore concretely over the individual and also necessarily over Israel.²¹

The gospel equals justification by grace, not works—that is, *sola gratia*. Therefore the proper distinction between law and gospel must be maintained. For Lutherans the justification of the ungodly is the canon.²² “Justification is no peripheral incident in Pauline thought given a false importance by the Reformation.”²³ This does not mean, however, that Paul becomes the canon within the canon, for it is not Paul but justification which is the canon. Nor does this mean that justification as the canon within the canon can in some way still be thought of as one doctrine among others, even though more important, more fundamental, or the necessary first step. Not simply the doctrine, but the event of justification is the canon for all proclamation, doctrine, and life in the church.²⁴

The doctrine of the justification of the ungodly (Rom. 4:5) guarantees that grace remains grace and sin remains sin. Justification is pivotal. In Christ we become the *righteousness* of God (2 Cor. 5:21); we are justified by his blood (Rom. 5:9). The gospel, the power of God for salvation, reveals the *righteousness* of God (Rom. 1:16–17).

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law” (Rom. 3:21). The law does not lead to righteousness; it is not a way of salvation. To distinguish between law and gospel (i.e., to distinguish between salvation through my own righteousness and salvation through the righteousness of God, which is Christ) Luther calls the highest art in Christianity.²⁵ “All Scripture should be divided into these two chief

doctrines, the law and the promises,” says the Apology.²⁶ Galatians 3:18 also contrasts the law and the promise. Similar distinctions are made by Paul between the law and faith (Rom. 3:28; 4:14; Gal. 2:16; 3:11; Phil. 3:9) and between Moses and Christ (2 Cor. 3:7–12; Gal. 4:21–31). Analogous are the contrasts in Paul between the flesh and the spirit (Gal. 5:17) and between the letter and the spirit (Rom. 2:27–29; 7:6; 2 Cor. 3:6), which combine with the distinction between the two aeons (Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 1:20; 2:6; 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4).

For Paul the law brings knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20; 7:7). The law makes sin increase (Rom. 5:20; see 5:13; 7:5) and revives sin (Rom. 7:9). The law was added because of transgressions (Gal. 3:19); we were confined under the law, under restraint, as a custodian, until Christ came (Gal. 3:23–26). The law is a curse (Gal. 3:10, 13). The law cannot make alive (Gal. 3:21). The law brings wrath, sin, and death (Rom. 4:15; 8:2; see 7:23; 2 Cor. 3:6). Some have sought to establish their own righteousness (Rom. 10:3), but “we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law” (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16; 3:11–13). But now we are “not under law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14; 7:6). “For Christ is the end of the law” (Rom. 10:4) and we are redeemed from the law (Gal. 4:5; see 3:13).

In order that no one pretend that Paul only wrote such things concerning the law because of particular concerns he had for Rome and Galatia, other striking references must be mentioned: “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law” (1 Cor. 15:56); Moses brought a dispensation of death carved in letters on stone, but the dispensation of righteousness has a splendor that causes the old covenant “to have no splendor at all” (2 Cor. 3:7–18); “not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ” (Phil. 3:9).

In Qumran justification was also “of the ungodly” and by grace alone. But this does not mean that Paul builds on Qumran. In contrast to Paul, sin stands in opposition to the law (1QH 4:10), justification means taking up once again salvation by the law, and thus there is no antithesis between faith and works. Faith in Christ, of course, was also not a factor.²⁷

It must be mentioned that there are a few uses of the word *law* that do not seem consistent in Paul. There is no guarantee that Paul could never be inconsistent, but it is also true that we must not expect in him a computerlike use of language (in every case we must understand a word in context) and we must always try to follow the flow of his argu-

ment. Most of the places where Paul's use of "law" seems inconsistent are in Romans 7:7-25. It would seem strange if in this passage Paul suddenly took back what he had said about the law in the previous four chapters and especially in the immediately preceding chapter: "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). When Romans 7:7-25 is seen as parallel to Romans 5:12-21 and as the working out of the antithesis between the law and the Spirit announced in Romans 7:1-6, and when therefore Adam is the subject in Romans 7:7-11 and the non-Christian seen from a Christian point of view is the subject in Romans 7:13-25, then the varieties of "law" in Romans 7:7-25 fall into place.²⁸ Because of Romans 7:1-6, the use of "law" in Romans 8:4 and 13:8-10 is best seen as based on formulations he adopted from elsewhere.²⁹ Galatians 5:14 and 6:2, in view of 3:13, 4:5, and 5:4, should be understood in a similar fashion. Romans 3:31 seems paradoxical until one notices that it is a transition to Romans 4; it picks up the point raised in Romans 3:21b and sets the theme for the next chapter that God's will in the Old Testament can only become visible where the "law" is no longer a way of earning salvation. In this sense the "law" does not contradict justification by faith but points to it (see Gal. 2:19).³⁰

It may be suggested that Paul teaches justification by faith now but then at the final judgment salvation will be by works (Rom. 2:6-11; 5:9-10; 2 Cor. 5:10).³¹ There can be no question that Paul holds to an eschatological judgment according to works (Rom. 2:6-11; 1 Cor. 3:13-15; 9:17; 2 Cor. 5:10; 9:6; Gal. 6:7-9). But there can also be no question that for Paul the eschatological judgment according to works is to be understood from the perspective of justification.³² "God's forgiving grace is that of the judge, and faith may not, before it becomes sight, lose sight of God the judge, which simply means that faith is always based only on grace, and thus justification never becomes a quality which one possesses."³³ At the same time God the judge cannot be separated from God who is grace; the righteousness of God which we receive as a gift through faith is a power active in the present calling us constantly to responsibility, and to that extent every day is the last judgment.³⁴

After Paul his doctrine of justification continues only within the so-called Deutero-Pauline literature and more as fixed formulations. Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace have you been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast." Titus 3:5-8: "He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy . . . so that

we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. The saying is sure." At the same time the word *righteousness* turns into "uprightness": "But as for you, man of God, shun all this; aim at righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness" (1 Tim. 6:11; see Eph. 4:24; 5:9; 2 Tim. 2:22; 3:16). "Nevertheless one sees in this process that the internal validity of Paul's doctrine of justification does not depend on standing in historical opposition to Judaism."³⁵

The Book of Acts, although it reports about Paul, reflects a theology of salvation history rather than Paul's doctrine of justification. Cornelius is "a devout man who feared God" (Acts 10:2), "an upright and God-fearing man" (Acts 10:22), and Peter concludes: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35). Forgiveness and grace are supplements to what our own works cannot achieve (Acts 13:38-39; 15:7-11). Paul is said to have circumcised someone who was already a Christian, Timothy (Acts 16:1-3; see Gal. 2:3!). A sermon attributed to Paul says that God "is not far from each one of us," for we are "God's offspring" (Acts 17:22-31; see 14:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:4).

Although the Letter to the Hebrews has also been associated with Paul, its doctrine of no second repentance stands in contradiction to Paul's doctrine of justification: "For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have enlightened . . . if they then commit apostasy" (Heb. 6:4-6); Esau "found no chance to repent" (see Heb. 10:26; Mark 3:28-30; 1 John 5:16-17).

The Book of James may actually have intended to correct Paul or a "misunderstood" Paul; in any case, it does not agree with Paul's doctrine of justification. Since faith means agreeing with objective facts (James 2:19), then faith alone is not enough and must be supplemented with works (James 2:24; 1:22-25).³⁶ It is not possible to say that these are simply terminological differences (i.e., that "faith" means something different in James from what it means in Paul), for James 5:19-20 ("whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way . . . will cover a multitude of sins"; see 1 Pet. 4:8) can hardly be made to fit into the Pauline doctrine of justification, no matter what the terminology.

The proper distinction between law and gospel is derived from the cross. *Crux sola est nostra theologia*.³⁷ "The crucified Jesus is the Christ" is the center which defines Paul's whole thought and thus also what he says about the law"; and his negation of the law is a direct result of the

meaning of the cross: "If justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose" (Gal. 2:21).³⁸

There is no cross in the Old Testament; we are not Jews.³⁹ In the New Testament, Paul has the only developed theology of the cross. Just as he juxtaposes law and gospel when he writes against his opponents in Galatia, so he juxtaposes wisdom and the cross in writing against his opponents in Corinth. Thus he writes, "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:22-24; see Rom. 5:6; Gal. 5:11; Phil. 2:8). The centrality of the cross, which corresponds to the centrality elsewhere in Paul of Christ, the gospel, and justification, is expressed in another famous passage: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2; see Gal. 6:14). The perfect-passive participle used here indicates an event which happened in the past but also that the one who was crucified is always present in proclamation and worship.⁴⁰ The word of the cross is the *power* of God "to us who are being saved" (1 Cor. 1:18). We carry in our bodies "the death of Jesus, so that the *life* of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (2 Cor. 4:10; see 13:4; Rom. 6:3-11; Gal. 2:19-29; 5:24; Phil. 3:9-11).

This *power* and this *life* are manifestly not power and life according to the standards of worldly wisdom. There is a "foolishness" about them. Preaching the gospel cannot be by human wisdom, for it is precisely in our foolishness from the world's viewpoint that the power of the cross, which is God's power, can be effective through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 1:17, 19, 24-25; 2:3-5, 13). The same point is made by Paul about signs (miracles); the cross is a stumbling block to any worldly understanding of signs, for it is in the weakness of the cross that God is strong (1 Cor. 1:22-29). When we are weak, we share Christ's weakness, but precisely in this weakness is God's power (2 Cor. 1:4-6; 4:10-11; 11:30; 12:7-10; 13:2-4; Phil. 3:10).⁴¹

To be sure, the cross, precisely because it is "weakness" in this world of flesh, continues (*sub contrario*) as before to be involved with sin, sickness, ambiguity, and death. Christians continue (*simul*) to sin (Rom. 6:12-13 [in spite of 6:14, 16-18; 7:5-6]; 8:10-13; 13:14; 1 Cor. 3:3; Gal. 5:17), become sick (1 Cor. 11:30), face ambiguity (Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 13:9, 12; 2 Cor. 4:7; 11:14!), and die (1 Cor. 11:30; 1 Thess. 4:13). Although Christ's death and resurrection have taken place (Rom. 4:25;

8:33-34; 14:9; 1 Cor. 15:3-6; 1 Thess. 4:14), we have joined him only in his death, not in his resurrection (Rom. 6:3-8; 1 Cor. 15:52; Phil. 3:9-11; cf. Col. 2:12-13; 3:1, 7-10); we shall surely join him in his resurrection, but at the Parousia.

In Ephesians 2:16 and Colossians 1:20 and 2:14 the cross has become the "means of reconciliation."⁴² The word is lacking in the Pastorals. In Hebrews 12:2 the cross is exemplary, as it is in Mark 8:34 (par. Matt. 10:38; Luke 14:27; John 15:12-13). In Acts 3:17 and 13:27-28 the cross is a miscarriage of justice, caused by the fact that the Jews were ignorant of the Old Testament; in Acts 2:23 and 4:28 the meaning of the cross is that it is part of predestined salvation history. In John the death on the cross is the "departure" to another sphere of existence (John 13:1; 14:3). To be lifted up on the cross is to be exalted into heavenly glory (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32-34), and whoever believes in this exalted one has eternal life; he will participate in the heavenly glory (John 14:1-3). The "hour" of being glorified means being lifted up, exalted on the cross (John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:31-32); the Father has appointed this "hour" of glorification (John 12:27-28; 18:11; 19-11; see 8:28).⁴³

Sola cruce leads necessarily to *sola fide*.⁴⁴ Since life in the power of the cross is "foolishness" and "weakness," we live by the *certainty* of faith, not by *securitas*. We have no guarantees as the world reckons guarantees; all experience, including the experience of faith itself, is ambiguous. The *certainty* of faith based upon God's faithfulness to his promise stands over against a *securitas* based on faith or any other experience. Not even the canon within the canon can be the canon for us unless "the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel" (Augsburg Confession, V).⁴⁵ The *testimonium internum Spiritus sancti* has traditionally been a Calvinist proprium; the Lutheran stress has been on *faith* effected by the Holy Spirit *in the gospel*.

The word *faith* is used in many ways in the New Testament, and it must in each case have its meaning not only in the immediate context but also in the total context of the author's theology. Paul does use the word to mean *fides quae* (Rom. 10:8-9; 1 Cor. 15:11; Gal. 1:23; 6:10) and virtue (1 Cor. 13:13 [formula?]; 1 Thess. 1:3). But he also uses the word to mean a state of faith and "having faith in" (Rom. 4:20; 14:22; 1 Cor. 2:5; 16:13; 2 Cor. 1:24; 13:5; Gal. 2:20; 1 Thess. 3:2, 5-7; Philem. 6). What he means by this usage is shown by the contrast he draws between law and faith (Rom. 3:22, 28, 31; 4:14; Gal. 2:19-20; 3:12, 23, 25), sin

and faith (Rom. 3:25; 14:23), and works and faith (Rom. 3:20-22, 27; 2-6; 9:32; Gal. 2:16; see Rom. 9:11-12; 11:6), a contrast identical to the contrast noted earlier between law and gospel.

Faith is an empowered faith, for it is in the gospel which is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16); it is not an abstract faith, a mere assent. The righteousness of God that is ours as a gift through faith cannot be separated from the God who gives, who is effective, and who is also God the judge; thus the righteousness of God is "a power active in the present calling us constantly to responsibility."⁴⁶ Thus there is an "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5), "obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ" (2 Cor. 9:13), "faith active in love" (Gal. 5:6), and therefore the "work of faith" (1 Thess. 1:3; see 1:8; 3:6; 5:8; Gal. 5:22; 1 Cor. 13:13). Nevertheless, faith is faith in the cross, which is foolishness and weakness and not "sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). There can be grades of faith (Rom. 12:3), lacks in faith (1 Thess. 3:10), and weakness in faith (Rom. 14:1; see Phil. 2:12-13; 3:12-14).

Once again literature in the Pauline trajectory echoes Paul, but in a formulaic fashion (Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5). Faith has become the faith, "*fides quae*" (Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 1:4; 3:9; 4:1; 6:20-21; 2 Tim. 1:7; Titus 1:1, 4; see 1 John 5:4-5) and a virtue (Col. 1:4; 1 Tim. 1:5, 14; 15; 4:12; 6:11; 2 Tim. 1:3; 2:22; Titus 2:2; see Rev. 2:19). Although faith and works are listed together in the same verse in Hebrews 6:1, they are not set in opposition; faith is another work, assent, as it is in Hebrews 11:6 (see Heb. 4:2; 10:26; 11:27), and has become a virtue allied closely with hope (Heb. 10:22; 11:1; see Rom. 4:18-20). In James faith is not even a work and is useless without works (James 2:14-26); its testing produces steadfastness (James 1:2-3).

In Mark man does his part, Jesus does the rest: "I believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24; see 2:5; 4:40; 5:34, 36; 6:6; 10:52; 11:22-23). Matthew has the same pattern: "According to your faith be it done to you" (Matt. 9:28-29; see 8:10, 13; 15:28; 17:20); so does Luke: "Your faith has made you well" (Luke 17:19; see 17:6). In John faith is a curious mixture. Faith may begin with signs (John 11:45-48) and may be based, at least to some degree, on "earthly things" (John 3:12). Yet faith in Jesus (John 5:38, 46; 8:45-46; 10:37-38; 4:11), his word (John 2:22), and his works (John 10:38; 14:11), as well as in the doctrine (*fides quae*) about Jesus (John 11:27). He who believes in Jesus has life (John 3:15; 24; 11:26), and to believe in Jesus means to depart this world in order to participate in Jesus' heavenly glory (John 14:1-3). The believer is at this point, however, still in the world and endangered by the evil one

(John 17:15); he is exhorted to good works (John 5:29; 6:28-29) and given a new law (John 13:34; 15:12, 17), although the old law has not been rejected (John 1:45; 3:14; 5:39, 46; 1:17 must be understood in this context). Nevertheless it is God who causes men to hear (be born) (John 1:13; 8:47; 18:37; see 6:44, 65), it is Jesus who has chosen them out of this world (John 1:12, 15, 19; 17:14), and it is by the Spirit that one is born (John 3:5-6).

Is there sometimes the need to preach against the text? In what possible sense can one say that every text contains law and gospel? These questions apply first of all to the Old Testament. "Not only the law, but all Old Testament prophecy and all the institutions of Jewish religion are reinterpreted in the light of Paul's vision of Jesus as the righteousness of God. . . . Justification thus provides perspective for a comprehensive hermeneutics of the Old Testament."⁴⁷ We can use the Old Testament because we reinterpret it. In the second place these questions apply to the New Testament. Not every text in the New Testament can be taken as it stands. Where the text, after being carefully examined, does not stand for *sola gratia*, something radical must take place. The text must be either reinterpreted or preached against or omitted. This has important implications for what is usually understood by expository preaching.

Do we find the propria in the Scripture or do we bring them to the Scripture? The decision for justification by grace through faith in the cross of Jesus Christ is a gift; it "cannot be settled by the historian according to the results of his investigations but only by the believer who is led by the Spirit and listens obediently to the Scripture."⁴⁸ Furthermore we cannot wait for the historian to decide and for the historians to come to a consensus.

Is it possible to describe this position as triumphalism or arrogance? This question is asked with a kind of uncomprehending astonishment. For those who stand at the foot of the cross, whose lives are centered in the cross, all triumphalism and arrogance are impossible.⁴⁹

NOTES

1. D. Martin *Luthers Werke*, Deutsche Bible (Weimar, 1906-61), 7: 344 (hereafter cited as WA, DB). See *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-), 35: 394-95 (hereafter cited as LW).

2. WA, DB 7: 384. See LW 35: 396-97.

3. WA, DB 7: 384. See LW 35: 398.

4. WA, DB 7: 404. See LW 35: 399.
5. *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Tischreden (Weimar, 1912–21), 5, no. 5443 (hereafter cited as WA, TR). See LW 54: 424.
6. Stephen Neill, *Jesus through Many Eyes: Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 72–73.
7. See Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 48, 75–76. As a consequence, what Paul writes is so localized that it is no longer possible to draw any conclusions or even to distinguish truth from error!
8. *Ibid.*, p. vi.
9. WA, TR 2, no. 2383.
10. *Urgemus Christum contra scripturam*. WA, DB 39: 1, 47. See WA, DB 40: 1, 458–59.
11. WA, DB 7: 384. See LW 35: 396.
12. See Gerhard Friedrich, “*Evangelion*,” in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1935), 2: 729.
13. See Peter Stuhlmacher, *Das paulinische Evangelium: I Vorgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), pp. 90, 106–8.
14. The “kingdom” is a popular proposal today for the “center,” but like “gospel,” “kingdom” means many differing things in the New Testament. To be sure, some deal with these differences by redefining “kingdom” in terms of justification, Jesus is Lord, and the like.
15. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, p. 130.
16. With the diamond analogy and similar devices that equate the themes of the New Testament, the “center” is lost. It is assumed that the “center” is all, so that in a fundamentalistic fashion the historical canon is the “center.”
17. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, pp. 127, 131–33. By implication, Bornkamm and Käsemann. In logic this is called poisoning the well.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 130–32.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 73, 76.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 75–76.
21. Ernst Käsemann, *An die Römer, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 8a (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1974), p. 254.
22. Wilhelm Dantine, *Justification of the Ungodly*, trans. Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritsch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), pp. 138–39. Inge Lønning, “*Kanon im Kanon*: Zum dogmatischen Grundlagenproblem des neutestamentlichen Kanons, Forschungen zur Geschichte und Lehre des Protestantismus 43 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1972), p. 272. See, e.g., Augsburg Confession, XXVIII. 52; Smalcald Articles II.1, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 89, 292.
23. Warren A. Quanbeck, “Justification and Baptism in the New Testament,” *Lutheran World* 8 (1961): 12.
24. Hermann Diem, *Was Heisst Schriftgemäss?* (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1958), p. 74; Lønning, “*Kanon im Kanon*,” p. 156.
25. WA, DB 36: 9.
26. Apology, IV.5, in *Book of Concord*, p. 108.
27. Günther Klein, “Rechtfertigung: I. Im NT,” in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3d ed., vol. 5 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1961), cols. 825–26.
28. Käsemann, *An die Römer*, pp. 182–202.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 207, 345–46.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 97–98.
31. It should be noted, however, that Paul writes not only of salvation coming at the end but also of salvation as a present activity (1 Cor. 1:18; 15:2; 2 Cor. 2:15; 6:2; see Rom. 10:10).
32. Käsemann, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–53.
33. Rudolf Bultmann, *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther*, Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), p. 146.
34. Käsemann, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
35. Klein, “Rechtfertigung,” col. 827.
36. *Ibid.*, cols. 827–28.
37. WA, DB 5: 176. See “*Crux Christi unica est eruditio verborum dei, Theologica syncerissima*”; WA, DB 5: 217.
38. Walter Gutbrod, “*Nomos*,” in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1942), 4: 1063.
39. Often the cross is reduced to every *thlipsis* or to the general idea of suffering. For example a “cross” can be said to be any trouble or difficulty. As a consequence the radicality of the cross of Jesus Christ is lost. We will of necessity have ideas about the cross, but it is also necessary to keep in mind that we start from the “meta-event” of the cross, not from ideas or combinations of ideas about it.
40. Johannes Schneider, “*Stauroō*,” in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1964), 7: 582.
41. The rhetorical irony in 1 Cor. 4:10 should be noted. Rom. 5:6 refers to the non-Christian, as the exact parallel in Rom. 5:8 indicates.
42. Schneider, “*Stauroō*,” p. 576.
43. Georg Bertram, “*Hypsoō*,” in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969), 8: 608–9. Peter Stuhlmacher, *Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), p. 196, holds that “glory” in John is the same as “justification” in Paul.
44. It might be asked if any one of the five Lutheran “*solas*” is superior to the others. But they are all equal and all really mean the same thing.
45. *Book of Concord*, p. 31.
46. Käsemann, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
47. Quanbeck, “Justification and Baptism in the New Testament,” p. 13.
48. Ernst Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, Studies in Biblical Theology 41, trans. W. J. Montague (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 223.
49. Some may reject the position held in this essay by calling it “hyper-Paulinism,” but they are left with these questions: What is their alternative? Will it be relativism? Or will it simply be the historical canon and therefore a kind of fundamentalism? Or John? Or James? Or Matthew? Or Luke? Or will it be a hollow vessel labeled “Jesus” or “kingdom”? Or will it be an abstract idea, such as “grace”? Or will the “church” decide, so that Christology is made subordinate to ecclesiology?