

Forde got out of biblicism; you can, too.

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1. How it all started for Forde.

- a. **“My real seminary education began one day** when I was impelled to set off on my own search. That certain independence and reluctance to rely just on the word of my professors once again asserted itself. While attending a class on Galatians one day the question that was to occupy center stage for the rest of my theological career was posed, **the question of the relation between human ‘responsibility’ and divine election.** The professor, bless his pious heart, stretched out his arms and said, ‘Men (there were only men in those days!), there are just some things we have to learn to hold in tension!’ Something within me shouted NO! There are no doubt some things we might hold in tension, but **not this thing, not the question of human salvation!** I came to suspect that this was the real threat against the ancient tradition. I had to ask myself, ‘Was this the theology for which Luther was willing to see the church torn apart?’ Was this the position over which he argued so desperately with Erasmus? I couldn’t believe it. This touched off my quest. And that questing centering around divine election, the bondage of the human will, and being a theologian of the cross accounts for the sum and substance of my theology.”¹

2. Neither inerrancy, nor *Heilsgeschichte*, nor existentialism.

“But in the seminary it soon became apparent that **the ancient tradition was under attack.** The attack, however, was not from without but from within. It was not, that is, the inroads of criticism and liberalism, etc., that were the ultimate source of trouble. Such inroads could temporarily at least be sidestepped, accommodated, or moderated. So we read Brunner (the most used in dogmatics classes as I recall), and Sittler, and Kantonen, and Nygren, and Tillich, etc., and they assured us that all was well in the “Neo-Orthodox” camp. Yet there was, for me at least, a certain unease. The surrender of biblical inerrancy to various versions of “truth as encounter” and other **existentialist** ploys seemed to lack the bite of the older views of biblical authority. Perhaps it was that something of the offense was gone. Yet there was no way back. Older views of **biblical inerrancy** were not an offense, they were just intellectually offensive. I was looking, I think, for **something deeper and more compelling, a gospel authority that establishes itself by its own power and attractiveness, not a legal authority that simply demands submission.**

“Heilsgeschichte, then in vogue, dominated our theological classrooms. But it was at best a half-way house. It freed us from older views of authority based on biblical inerrancy but left us rather with serious questions about history. A Bible that is an authoritative mine for data to construct a historical scheme is, in the end, **only somewhat better than a Bible of texts used to “prove” dogmatic propositions.** The inchoate desire of my younger days for a more solid foundation was not satisfied.

“My own theological education began one day when I was impelled to set off on my own search. That certain independence and reluctance to rely just on the word of my professors once again asserted itself. While attending **a class on Galatians** one day the question that was to occupy center stage for the rest of my theological career was posed, the question of the relation between human “responsibility” and divine election. The professor, bless his pious heart, stretched out his arms and said, “Men (there were only men in those days!), there are just some things we have to learn **to hold in tension!**” Something within me **shouted NO!** There are no doubt some things we might hold in tension, but **not this thing, not the question of human salvation!** I came to suspect that this was the

¹ Gerhard Forde, “The One Acted Upon,” *dialog* 36 (1997) 57.

real threat against the ancient tradition. I had to ask myself, **“Was this the theology for which Luther was willing to see the church torn apart?”** Was this the position over which he argued so desperately with Erasmus? I couldn’t believe it. This touched off my quest. And that questing centering around **divine election, the bondage of the human will, and being a theologian of the cross** accounts for **the sum and substance of my theology.**

“The search for an answer to the question about Luther ushered me into a strange and exciting new world. **Modern Luther research** was just beginning to be imported from Europe. I poured (*sic*) over Luther on Galatians, read and reread Luther’s *Bondage of the Will*; I gobbled up the essays and monographs I could find on Luther’s “reformation discovery” and his theology in general (Wingren, Nygren, Prenter, Watson, Boehmer, Pauck, Rupp, etc.), as well as on related exegetical questions about the righteousness of God, justification, law and gospel, and so on.²

See further:

- a. “The theology at which I have arrived is **the result of a quest for faith. It is not really an option for me.** I do not see it, ultimately, as though it were one of many possible “expressions” of faith – even though I try to be as charitable towards those other expressions as I can. I have sought **a theology which repeatedly calls me back from the brink of unbelief by its own intrinsic power.** I believe I find this particularly in Luther’s understanding of being **a theologian of the cross.** For me that is not a matter of traditionalism or whatever pejorative charges those who like to play at such games like to hurl around. **For “beyond” or “outside” such theology, I am threatened simply by unbelief.** Which is to say, I suppose, that I simply cannot live on a “theology of glory.” If I fight adamantly in ecclesiastical circles, that is the reason.

“Second, just a note about my work itself. Upon reflection I think that Christology, both the understanding of the work of Christ in atonement and of the person of Christ, might have been highlighted a little more than was immediately evident in Professor Nestingen’s article. Perhaps as a historian he is less impressed by “systematic” theological achievements! But I have been preoccupied not only with atonement, but also with the person of Christ, and it does seem to me – or at least it is my hope – that some of my most significant contributions to theology have been in this area. This is, of course, vital to the task of being a theologian of the cross today. What I have striven for throughout is a theology which **relentlessly brings the cross and resurrection home to us, “does” it to us.** It has seemed to me that the biggest problem systematically is that theology constantly gets in the way of the cross. I have sought **a theology which gets out of the way for the cross.** Rightly or wrongly, I think some of my best work is the fruit of that search.”³

3. Back to Rome. Back to the Bible. Two authoritarian options.

- a. “If our Melancthonian based free-choice pietism has lost its substance, and if we are appalled or at least worried by the drift of the church toward cultural Protestantism, **where do we turn?** Here is where the hermeneutic will tend powerfully to influence the choice. If the kind of interpretation suggested by Lindbeck is right, there would seem basically to be **two possibilities.** The **first** and most obvious is to **turn back towards Rome.** If we are a confessing movement in the church catholic, and if, in Tillichian terms, we have pushed our protestant principle to the degree of losing our catholic substance, then the only real way to find our substance again is to go back to Rome, that

² Forde, “The One Acted Upon,” *dialog* 36 (1987) 57-58.

³ Forde, “Response to James Nestingen’s article,” *dialog* 31 (1992) 34-35.

preeminent custodian of such catholic substance. Rome has had long experience with this sort of thing. Rome knows how to grant free choice with one hand and take it back with the other!

“**The other possibility** would be the old Protestant move: **back to the Bible**, to move, perhaps, in the direction of so-called evangelical or fundamentalist Protestantism, lately dubbed fundagelicalism. If we are denominational Lutherans, basically critical of or anti-Rome, and yet fear the loss of substance, we would likely be attracted by the so-called evangelical or maybe even neo-pentacostal movements in contemporary Protestantism. They too, you might say, have a certain ability to grant freedom of choice with one hand and take it back with the other. You are free to choose Jesus, but once you do you better toe the mark! And one cannot overlook the fact that around the globe these days such movements manifest considerable vitality!

“Disenchanted Lutherans today are attracted by both possibilities....When free-choice pietism has lost its moorings in the external Word, the only way to get it back in line is by turning to **authority structures** with the clout to do it. **One can find that either in Roman-type hierarchicalism or in Biblicism.** In either case, *satis est non satis est*. The gospel and the sacraments are not enough. They never are when they don’t bring the eschatological end and new beginning. **An authority structure above and beyond the gospel must be added** – a kind of substitute eschatology to assuage our impatience!

“Do these hermeneutical alternatives define the parameters of our fate today? Are these the only possibilities available to us? I believe not. But I do think that if there is any fire left now, it will have to come **more from Luther** than our Melancthonian tinged pietism.”⁴

“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.**”⁵

4. The distinctive character of current Lutheranism.

- a. “The distinctive character of current Lutheranism, however, is largely the result of its continuing search for its own roots in the Reformation and Luther’s thought itself. Beginning in about the 1840s, when J.C.K. von Hofmann appealed to Luther in the argument over atonement, **Luther was for the first time set against Lutheran orthodoxy on a substantive doctrinal issue** (Hirsch, 1954, vol. 5, p. 427) **and the uniqueness of Luther’s own thought began to emerge as a viable alternative.** Subsequent Luther research, most notably that inspired by Karl Holl and his students as well as by

⁴ Forde, “*Satis Est? What do we do when other churches don’t agree?*” 11-12. Unpublished lecture given at the 1990 ELCA Conference of Teaching Theologians. Available at crossalone.us, under Forde.

⁵ Gerhard 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.

Swedish scholars (Carlson, 1948), thereby becomes crucial for the development and understanding of contemporary Lutheranism. Luther's understanding of the living Word, the distinction between law and gospel (Forde, 1969) and the theology of the cross continue to emerge as decisive critical factors for Lutheranism and contemporary theology in general. The way is opened thereby for a reappropriation of the anthropology (*simul iustus et peccator*) originally posited by Luther's understanding of justification, as well as an eschatologically nuanced view of **God's two-fold rule in creation (traditionally: the two kingdoms doctrine; see Hertz, 1976)** and the Christian's vocation in society and the world (Wingren [1949] 1960)."⁶

- b. "But I do think that if there is any fire left now, it will have to come more from Luther than our Melancthonian tinged pietism. Of course, many Lutherans seem to get glassy-eyed or nervous at the mention of such a prospect. But that is due, I think, to our theological Oedipus complex. We think it simply a re-pristination, perhaps, of what we already know and have reacted against. But, of course, **most of Luther was largely unknown to the Lutheran church, especially in America, until quite recently, and the most important dimensions of his theology are actually 20th century discoveries.** The phenomenon known as 'Luther's Theology' is actually a quite new thing, particularly for American Lutherans. What it means to be a theologian of the cross, for instance, was virtually unknown until 1929 when Walter von Loewenich published his book on the subject. It did not appear in English until 1976. *The Bondage of the Will* did not really emerge as an alternative to received Lutheran anthropology until mid-century. The significance of Luther's struggle with the basic letter/spirit metaphysics of medieval – and for that matter modern – catholic Christendom for hermeneutics and theological method also developed largely after the Second World War and is still unfolding. The recovery of the doctrine of vocation is due largely to 20th century Swedish Luther research. And so on. When all of this is put together with **current biblical studies, especially the recovery of New Testament eschatology, a theology with radically different – in today's terms, eschatological – shape begins to emerge.**"⁷

5. The clarity of scripture = Christ alone.

- a. "These citations from Luther and the confessional writings [LC 4:57, LC 576; Ap 13:20, *Formula of Concord, Epitome* 7:13, *Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration* 11:29] indicate that with rare exceptions infallibility language is used positively only in a gospel context. It is used to assert that the promises of God in his Word are trustworthy and that they apply to the hearers of that Word. "The question which naturally arises at this point is: What is the Word of God to which this kind of infallibility is ascribed? **A formal legalistic biblicism is clearly not what Luther and early Lutherans had in mind.** In the controversy with the peasants especially, and with other sectarians of the times as well, **such biblicism was encountered and rejected. 'Luther's ultimate authority and standard was not the book of the Bible and the canon as such but that scripture which interpreted itself and also criticized itself from its own center, from Christ and from the radically understood gospel.'**²⁷ For Luther, the authority of Scripture was Christ-centered and therefore gospel-centered. Scripture bears testimony to all the articles about Christ and is on that account to be so highly valued.²⁸ One who does not find Christ in the Scriptures engages in superfluous reading, even if he or she reads it carefully.²⁹ One should 'refer the Bible to Christ...nothing but Christ should be proclaimed.'³⁰ Luther

⁶ Forde, "Lutheranism," *Blackwell's Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, Ed. Alister McGrath (Cambridge, MA; Blackwell, 1993) 357.

⁷ Forde, "*Satis est*: What do we do when other churches don't agree?" (12-13).

can even go so far as to say: **'If adversaries use scripture against Christ, then we put Christ against the scriptures.'**³¹ **The Word of God therefore is ultimately Christ and the proclamation of the gospel.**"⁸

- b. "The insistence that scripture interprets itself is simply the hermeneutical correlate of justification by faith alone."⁹
- c. Luther: "Take Christ out of the Scriptures and what will you find left in them?"¹⁰

6. Scripture interprets itself = justification by faith alone.

- a. "The insistence that **scripture interprets itself** is simply the hermeneutical correlate of **justification by faith alone.**"¹¹
- b. "This principle [scripture interprets itself] can and has been interpreted in a rather simplistic sense, to wit, that the obscure passages are to be interpreted by the clearer ones. But that is rather the argument that goes with quite another principle, that of **the perspicuity of scripture. Is this not more a principle of the Reformed?**"¹²
- c. "The importance of the language of **justification to the scriptures** thus goes a long way in dispelling facile arguments from the 'variety of images' in **scripture**. The scripture is not simply a cafeteria of religious options from which to pick and choose depending upon how you happen to 'feel' on a given day. **The scriptural evidence is that justification language is not merely topical. It is central and relevant,** that is, it lifts us out of the merely topical, our transient 'feeling,' and brings us face to face with the question of what is always, everywhere, and finally true. It confronts us with the fact that there is an ultimate judge before whom the question of justice, righteousness, is decisive."¹³

7. The Canon.

- a. "What is the Word of God to which this kind of infallibility is ascribed? **A formal legalistic biblicism is clearly not what Luther and early Lutherans had in mind.** In the controversy with the peasants

⁸ Forde, "Infallibility Language and the Early Lutheran Tradition," *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VI*. Eds. Paul C. Empie, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978) 120-37, here 129. Footnotes in the text as follows (Fn): Fn 27: P. Althaus, *Theology*, 336; Fn 28: *WA 32:56, 21-27 Sermons*, 1530; Fn 29: *WA 51:4, 8. Sermons* 1545; Fn 30: *WA 16:113, 5-9. Sermons on Exodus*. 1524-1527; Fn 31: *WA 39/1:47, 19-20; LW 34:112. Theses on Faith and Law*, 1535.

⁹ Forde, "Authority in the Church," *A More Radical Gospel. Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism*. Eds. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 66. See also Forde, "Scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpres: Reflections on the Question of Scripture and Tradition," *A More Radical Gospel: "Sui ipsius interpres* [scripture interprets itself] is simply the hermeneutical correlate of justification by faith alone" (72). Forde's editors have changed Forde's text at this point (as printed in *A More Radical Gospel*) by adding a sentence that breaks the logic of Forde's argument. See Forde's original, uncorrupted text online at crossalone.us, under Forde, titled "Forde's editors have tampered with his text - 2."

¹⁰ *Luther's Works* 33:26.

¹¹ Forde, "Authority in the Church: The Lutheran Reformation," *A More Radical Gospel*, 66.

¹² Forde, "Authority in the Church: The Lutheran Reformation," *A More Radical Gospel*, 65.

¹³ Forde, *Justification by Faith. A Matter of Death and life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982) 84.

especially, and with other sectarians of the times as well, **such biblicism was encountered and rejected. 'Luther's ultimate authority and standard was not the book of the Bible and the canon as such but that scripture which interpreted itself and also criticized itself from its own center, from Christ and from the radically understood gospel.'**²⁷One should 'refer the Bible to Christ...nothing but Christ should be proclaimed.'³⁰ Luther can even go so far as to say: **'If adversaries use scripture against Christ, then we put Christ against the scriptures.'**³¹ The Word of God therefore is ultimately Christ and the proclamation of the gospel."¹⁴

8. Inerrancy – retreating from the world.

a. "This is the source of what we might call the inner and outer aspects of Lutheranism's crisis. The attempt to combine two incompatible views means that internally it has always had to battle its fundamental scepticism, **its uncertainty about the basis for its faith.** So in its practice it 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. A will which supposedly begins in a state of freedom ends in captivity. The message becomes a perverted mirror image of itself: 'Yes, you are free, but you jolly well had better choose to believe in justification by faith alone or you will go to hell. The Bible says so! And then you had better show your thanks by your sanctification.'¹⁵

b. "First of all, it [the verbal inspiration method] has the obvious advantage of being **exceedingly simply (sic) and readily understandable.** It follows the lines of a simple logical syllogism: The Word of God is true, scripture is the Word of God, therefore scripture is true. It is **the easiest** and most convenient doctrine in the world with which to operate.

"Secondly, the method has the advantage of intending to place men under direct authority of scripture. There can be no doubt, certainly, that this was the aim of the method. It was believed that by submitting wholly and without question to scripture in this fashion one was **placing oneself directly under the authority of the Word of God and that one was being obedient to it.** And no doubt it is this which many still find so persuasive about this method. Those who hold it find it impossible, apparently, to see how anyone can question the truth of any part of scripture and still be submitting to its authority. This to them would be placing man and his intellect *over* scripture, and this would lead inevitably to a kind of 'take your pick' theology in which man believes only what he wants to believe. To be obedient to the Word of God means to accept scripture as it stands without question. And this position is uncompromising....

"Now what about its disadvantages? Here I would say to begin with that its strength is its greatest weakness. The belief that by accepting scripture in this uncompromising fashion one is placing oneself *under* the authority of God's Word is in fact open to serious question. For when all is said and done, the *a priori* belief that **this is the way it must be in order for scripture to be the Word of God is nowhere established in scripture itself, and it is a human construction;** it is a human idea about what the term 'Word of God' must mean....For if I say, 'If the Bible contains errors I cannot believe,' I am in effect saying to God that **unless he provides me with the kind of guarantee which I expect and want, I cannot believe.** Then I am in a very dangerous position because **I am dictating to God the conditions under which I will believe.** It is dangerous because it might just be that God has

¹⁴ Forde, "Infallibility Language and the Early Lutheran Tradition," *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VI*, 129. Internal footnote 27: P. Althaus, *Theology*, 336.

¹⁵ Forde, "Radical Lutheranism," *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (1987) 12-13.

not *in fact* provided us with that kind of guarantee....The fact is that *I do not know a priori* what the Word of God is. I don't know beforehand what God is going to say or how; I can only listen and then try to form some confession as to what it is after I have heard it.

"Second, the verbal inspiration theory has the increasingly obvious difficulty that it is unable to deal with facts gained both by research into the Bible and the world around us. For over two hundred years now it has demonstrated its **inability to cope with truths established by scientific and historical research**. In the face of the mounting knowledge of the world, **the verbal inspiration method has had no constructive counsel to give, but can only advise one to retreat from the world** and refuse to face those things which one finds uncomfortable. One does not need to go outside the Bible itself to show the inability of this method to cope with the facts. Clearly the belief that there are no mistakes of any sort in scripture simply is not true. The many discrepancies *within* the Bible itself – where the Bible disagrees with itself – demonstrate this fact."¹⁶

- c. "On the 'right,' conservatives and reactionaries insist that we are safe only if everything is, so to speak, set in stone. We are protected from the erosions of time only by **an inerrant scripture, infallible secondary discourse**."¹⁷
- d. "For Luther the gospel was something so special that in the final analysis it could **not really be contained in books at all**, but something which had to be proclaimed by the living voice (cf. *WA* 12:259, Sermons on I Peter). 'And it, **the gospel, really is not what you find in the books and what is contained in the letters**, but rather a spoken declaration and living Word--- a voice which resounds, is publicly proclaimed and everywhere heard....Therefore if one would ask what the gospel is, the sophists of the higher schools would answer: it is a book which teaches a good thing. They do not know what it is because they do not understand it. Gospel means good message.' Luther could even go so far as to say that it was **a great deterioration and limitation of the Spirit that books had to be written about the gospel** because it is something which by its very nature must be preached."¹⁸
- e. "The surrender of **biblical inerrancy** to various versions of "truth as encounter" and other **existentialist** ploys seemed to lack the bite of the older views of biblical authority. Perhaps it was that something of the offense was gone. Yet there was no way back. Older views of **biblical inerrancy** were not an offense, they were just **intellectually offensive**."¹⁹
- f. **What about Mark 1:15?** The Bible says: "Repent and believe in the gospel." Does that mean that Forde was wrong? Does that mean that salvation is mostly God's doing but partly ours as well?

Forde writes: "**“We have to do something, don't we?”** – that is the pious sounding cry. Rather than face the question of death and life, we hope to get by with a little something! As Luther remarked, this kind of semi-Pelagianism is **worse** than full-blown Pelagianism."²⁰

¹⁶ Forde, "Law and Gospel as the Methodological Principle of Theology," *Theological Perspectives: A Discussion of Contemporary Issues in Theology by Members of the Religion Department at Luther College* (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1964) 56.

¹⁷ Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 85.

¹⁸ Forde, "Law and Gospel as the Methodological Principle of Theology," *Theological Perspectives*, 63.

¹⁹ Forde, "The One Acted Upon," *dialog* 36 (1997) 57-58.

²⁰ Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 142. See also Forde: "It is interesting – and significant – that Luther could see much more validity in out-right Pelagianism than he could in semi-Pelagianism of the so-called Christian humanists. At least, he said, the Pelagians believed that man could and should apply himself with his *whole*

Luther knew that one could use a text like Mark 1:15 against Christ, that is, in favor of saying salvation is 99% what Christ does and 1% what we do – repent and believe.

As Luther points out again and again, infants have faith, which is no surprise because in baptism God snatches us in spite of ourselves.²¹

- g. “The gospels had to be written to tell the truth about Jesus in the light of the cross and the resurrection. They had to be written to preserve the delicate dialectic between continuity and discontinuity. We may indeed argue as to **the relative success each of the Gospels achieves in this sensitive enterprise**, but it is essential for proclamation today to understand this if one is going to preach significantly on the Gospels. On the one hand, the life and teachings are of no significance apart from the death and resurrection. Indeed, they had to be transformed in the light of the cross and resurrection. This fact is usually the most difficult, especially for the literalists among us. **We must reckon with the fact that the words and teachings of the earthly Jesus in all probability could not have been handed on as he gave them even if those very words had been preserved.** The death and resurrection had intervened and it would be untrue to what God was doing to hand on anything about Jesus apart from that fact.”²²

9. The law and gospel method.

- a. [Forde on the advantages of the law and gospel method over inerrancy.]

“**First, God’s Word is not confused with the words of men**, and through the law and the gospel men are placed under its authority more surely than they are in the verbal inspiration method. God’s Word is seen as a living Word and men are called to a living faith. **Second**, this method is not embarrassed by human advancements in science, history or other disciplines. This method recognizes that the **Biblical writers were men of a particular time, limited by the knowledge of**

being to the pursuit of salvation, where the semi-Pelagians seem to think it could be gained for a pittance – exercising that **little bit of ability supposedly left in man**,” in Forde, *Where God Meets Man* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972) 51.

Luther: “These friends of ours, however, though they believe and teach the same, make dupes of us with deceptive words and a false pretense, as if they dissented from the Pelagians, though this is the last thing they do; so that if you go by their hypocrisy, they seem to be the bitterest foes of the Pelagians, while if you look at the facts and their real opinion, they themselves are Pelagians double-dyed” (LW 33:268).

- ²¹ See Luther: “[E]ven if infants did not believe – which, however, is not the case, as we have proved – still their Baptism would be valid and no one should rebaptize them...” Large Catechism, Baptism, #55, *Book of Concord*, Tappert, 443; Kolb/Wengert 463.

In baptism the infant receives the Holy Spirit (SC, Baptism #10, BC Tappert, 349; Kolb/Wengert 359), who, of course, cannot be quantified as if the infant only receives a portion of the Holy Spirit or a kick-start. Nor, again of course, does baptism depend on a “decision” made by the infant. Some also misunderstand the metaphor “gift” (e.g., Romans 3:24) to imply that what God does in baptism is a “gift” that has to be “accepted” even though the context (Romans 3:19-23) does not allow such a misunderstanding.

“[W]hat a great and excellent thing Baptism is, which **snatches us** from the jaws of the devil...” LC, Baptism, #83; BC, Tappert, 446; Kolb/Wengert 466.

“I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him” Small Catechism, Creed, Third Article, #6; BC, Tappert, 345; Kolb/Wengert 355.

See John 6:44: “No one comes to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” And John 1:17, 6:65, Eph 1:4.

- ²² Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 84-85.

their time. It is concerned only to maintain that we share the same basic faith as those ancients did regardless of a difference in worldly-views and thought forms. **Thirdly,** this method can allow the biblical exegete the freedom he needs in **using whatever method is practical in getting at the meaning of the text.**"²³

- b. **"Precisely the proper distinction between law and gospel limits and humanizes the law."**²⁴
- c. "The Word of God impinges on us as law and as gospel. This means first that it takes up residence in human discourse in the form of propositions, i.e. as literal word, in the form of law, subject to the canons of human discourse. But the ultimate purpose of the letter or law is not to call attention to itself, but to point to another who is its end and *telos*. That is to say that the important question (*a la* Ebeling) is not merely what the words signify, perhaps infallibly, but what they do and how they do it. The important question for Luther, is how the words are used. Indeed, one must say that **the purpose of the letter, the law, is to 'destroy all confidence in the flesh,'** all attempts to base faith on human forms of legitimation. The law kills the 'old Adam' according to the flesh so that the new person may be raised in the Spirit. The gospel heard through the power of the Spirit is precisely that word of liberation from God which frees from the tyranny of the law, i.e. from dependence on 'the flesh' and its forms of legitimation (which bind us to the tyranny of the law). **The gospel is therefore the true and ultimate Word of God** which authorizes itself and stands above all human forms of legitimation."²⁵
- d. "Every interpretation [of scripture] is, in fact, a covert if not an overt soteriology."²⁶

10. Letter and Spirit.

- a. "God's eschatological kingdom is humanity's tomorrow. The law must function first and foremost to cut off every other possibility. Only thus will we be reborn into the world God creates. The **'letter,'** the story of God's struggle with his people, our story under the law, must work to end every attempt to escape, every form of self-justification according to our schemes and projects, in order to place us before the God of time to wait and to hope. **The killing function of the law makes us historical beings.** It cuts off every form of escape: metaphysical, religious, or psychological. That is its chief 'use.' Only when that happens, will other uses open up as well, for only when the law kills in that fashion will we receive this world back as a gift. Only when we cease to use law as an escape for the self **will we begin to see what law is for here as well.** The possibility of a *Christian* life opens up."²⁷
- b. "It is that fundamental understanding of the scriptures and use of the language which stands behind the Reformation. It is not just a matter of certain formulas, not even *sola fide!* It can readily be seen that the very use of language itself is shaped by the metaphor of death and life, not by the legal metaphor. **The distinction between law and gospel in proper communication of the word is simply a further application of this language.** The fact that the letter kills but the Spirit gives life, Luther says explicitly, can be said in other words: The law kills, but the grace of God gives life."¹¹ **The letter-**

²³ Forde, "Law and Gospel as the Methodological Principle of Theology," *Theological Perspectives*, 66.

²⁴ Forde, "Forensic Justification and the Law in Lutheran Theology," *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, 301.

²⁵ Forde, "Infallibility Language and The Early Lutheran Tradition," *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VI*, 135-36.

²⁶ Forde, "Law and Gospel in Luther's Hermeneutic," *Interpretation* 37 (1983) 243.

²⁷ Forde, "Justification," *Christian Dogmatics*, Eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 2:420.

spirit problem, so vexing in the tradition, issues in the law-gospel dialectic fundamental to preaching and communicating the word. Not just what the word *means* is important but what the word *does*. And what does it do? It kills and makes alive. That is what lies behind the law-gospel language, not merely the legal metaphor, but the theology of the cross.”²⁸

- c. “As law (letter which kills) and gospel (spirit which gives life) the text sets its own agenda. The text gains thereby the ‘autonomy’ interpreters who know nothing of preaching so vainly seek. **When ‘rightly’ applied, the distinction between law and gospel makes it impossible for us to change the text into our own story (allegory).** Rather the sacred text is at work to change us, incorporate us into its story: the story with a future, not ‘the soul’s death.’ The ‘killing’ function of the law cuts off every ‘metaphysical’ escape, every defense mechanism against the text, every self-justification, in order to save, to put us back in time before the God of time, **to make us historical beings, to wait and to hope.**”²⁹
- d. “Of what significance for us today is it that God led the children of Israel out of Egypt? We were neither there nor are we Israelites. So to be made more universal the story could be translated into a story about the exodus from vice to virtue, ‘the flesh-pots of Egypt’ to ‘the promised land’ of morality and piety....The literal story is a ‘front’ for **a more ‘spiritual’ internal** and eternal story. So does one move from letter to spirit, from the mere sensible and temporal history to the intelligible and eternal truth. The move from letter to spirit is an interpretative move. The gap between then and now is bridged, so to speak, by translating the literal history into some kind of eternal ‘spiritual’ truth.

“The secret of allegory is that it translated the text into ‘another’ story, a kind of ‘other-speak.’ **It is the ancient version of making the text ‘relevant.’**...To say that the written code, the letter kills means only that it is inadequate and must be translated into more enlightening ‘spiritual’ truth. To avoid death in the land of appearances one must be apprised of such spiritual truth.

“The Reformation, particularly in Luther’s case, presented a drastic break with this tradition. Luther took the passage at face value! He saw at long last that **the passage was about ministry, not interpretation in the abstract.** The passage is not concerned only with what letter and spirit mean, but what they do. The letter kills, and the Spirit gives life. **The literal text, the long history of God’s struggle with his people culminating in the cross and resurrection** is not killing because it is mere appearance, an inadequate signifier, but because it is deadly for the sinner. The literal history, that is, means one thing for the sinner: death, the end of the way of those who have succumbed to the temptation to be as gods. The purpose of the proclamation is not to present the hearer with one more option, but to put the old to death and to raise up the new in the Spirit. The ultimate purpose of the proclamation is to raise the dead.”³⁰

- e. “The spiritualist or the mystic is fully as dependent upon words—external words—as anyone else. There is, and can be, no such thing as a wordless spiritualism or mysticism. The spiritualists and the mystics fill the sound waves and books with their own chattering and scribbling as well. Thus the

²⁸ Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life*, 15-16. Internal footnote 11: LW 39:183.

²⁹ Forde, “Law and Gospel in Luther’s Hermeneutic,” *Interpretation* 37 (1983) 249.

³⁰ Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 152-158, here 153-54.

only question is: What words shall they be? Shall they be words which describe **esoteric experiences or shall they be the Word of God who suffered and died and yet rose for us.**"³¹

11. Historical criticism.

- a. "A definite discontinuity appears between the Jesus who preached and the Jesus who was preached in the New Testament. That is quite clear even without critical historical study. The discontinuity is most obvious in the Synoptic Gospels, but as we shall see, it is also evident in the writings of St. Paul, the earliest and most prolific New Testament author. **Historical criticism of the Gospels, particularly form criticism, did not invent the discontinuity;** it has served only to make this discontinuity inescapable for systematic theology. In whatever manner one may seek to settle the endless debates about Jesus' historical self-understanding, systematic theology has to reckon with the probability that the 'historical Jesus' did not, at least openly and explicitly, apply titles of divine majesty like Christ and Lord to himself. The application was made explicitly in the subsequent proclamation of the postresurrection church. So a discontinuity between the Jesus who preached and the Jesus who is preached has become inescapable."³²
- b. "So the question comes back to us again: Who do you say that I am? Why bother to speak of Jesus to others? In other words, when we turn to speak to others, we have to make the move from the implicit claim of Jesus' own preaching to explicit confession and proclamation of him. There is, then, on the formal level, **a necessary discontinuity between Jesus' own preaching and our preaching of him.** We are called upon to make explicit what was implicit in him. **We cannot simply repeat his words as though they were ours. Christology is our problem, not his.**"³³
- c. "From this perspective one might well ask why there is **so much religious fury directed at historical criticism.** Will we be ashamed of the one we find thereby? To be sure, the historical critical method is not theologically neutral; ambiguity surrounds its usage. It is highly questionable when used to establish continuity with 'the real Jesus' who is supposed no longer to be an offense or a threat. But resistance to the method can also be due to the stake we have in the titles that similarly protect from that offense. The controversy is about titles: 'Who do you say that I am?' The inclination of both sides in the debate is to seek titles that will protect them from the 'me and my words.' Being a theologian of the cross is the only way to escape both errors and to use the historical critical method properly. **Historical critical investigation uncovers a discontinuity** that prevents every move but the drive to proclamation. **The Scriptures cannot be used as a protection from the word of the cross and its circumstances.**"³⁴
- d. "Conservative Christology seeks to trace explicit 'proof' for the 'divinity' of Jesus directly back to the teaching of **an inerrant scripture.** There is direct continuity between the Christology of Jesus thus uncovered and **their own.** Today such a Christology can maintain itself only by ignoring **the**

³¹ Forde, "When the Old Gods Fail: Martin Luther's Critique of Mysticism," *Piety, Politics, and Ethics: Reformation Studies in Honor of George Wolfgang Forell*. Ed. Carter Lindberg (Kirksville, MO: The Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, Ind., 1984) 25.

³² Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 61.

³³ Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 64-65.

³⁴ Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 68.

development of careful historical investigation of the Scripture and the problematics that gave rise to that historical work.”³⁵

- e. “Systematic theology as secondary discourse is problematic in that it consists of abstractions that can **neither be avoided nor removed.**”³⁶
- f. “In preparing to do the text, the proclaimer should inquire not only about what the text meant (exegesis). There must be such inquiry, indeed. **It is an indispensable step toward the proclamation.** There can be no detour around it, and the result of such inquiry should no doubt find its way into the sermon. But exegesis is mostly presupposition for proclamation, not proclamation itself.”³⁷

12. Certainty.

- a. “(8) Why this Lutheran insistence on the sole criterion, **justification by faith alone in the sole Mediator?** Because only such faith can be the **assured faith (*certitudo*) that the sinner requires. *Certitudo* is not a psychological category, i.e., a kind of feeling.** What produces such *certitudo* is solely faith in Christ, in contrast to *securitas*, i.e., a false faith based on any person or thing other than faith alone in the sole Mediator. By this Lutherans discern what is or is not abuse or error. The question of *securitas* is **not for Lutherans basically a matter of spirituality. It is intrinsic to the working of the gospel.** Here ‘gospel’ is not a vague, general concept, but **salvation solely by faith in Christ** (SA 2:1:5; BS 145; BC 292). Where this gospel is not proclaimed and the sacraments are not celebrated according to this gospel, Lutherans ask whether abuse or error have crept in (cf. CA 7; BS 61; BC 32). As we examine such a topic as the ‘saints and Mary,’ it is crucial that Lutherans see how this criterion functions.”³⁸
- b. Forde on verbal inerrancy: “Faith, in the confines of this method, consists of the knowledge of, assent to, and trust in the truths set down in Holy Scripture. This is the traditional three-fold definition of faith found in the Orthodox fathers. Faith is *notitia*, knowledge; *assensus*, assent; *fiducia*, trust. This means that one first gains knowledge of the things which pertain to salvation, i.e., one learns the truths; secondly, one is persuaded to assent to them intellectually; and ultimately one may learn to trust in them. How does this come about? It comes about finally of course through the work of the Holy Spirit. But one should notice that **first one is persuaded intellectually to accept the truth of everything in scripture**, and one may be aided in this by such things as the proofs from prophecy and from miracle, the antiquity of scripture, etc., and then only *afterwards* is one led to trust in them. In other words, **the doctrine of scripture is first established, and then everything else follows. When one has finally learned to trust the doctrines thus established the method reaches its goal.**”³⁹

³⁵ Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 70.

³⁶ Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 100.

³⁷ Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 155-56.

³⁸ “Lutheran Reflections,” *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII*. Eds. H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford, Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992) 127-28.

³⁹ Forde, “Law and Gospel as the Methodological Principle of Theology,” *Theological Perspectives*, 54-55.

“Faith, then, arises out of the hearing of the gospel proclamation when the law has destroyed all confidence in self. **The only possible basis for faith is the hearing of the gospel. Faith can ask for no surer basis than this.**”⁴⁰

- c. “The scriptures do indeed contain statements which appear universalist. But like the ‘I desire not the death of the sinner’ discussed above they are misused if taken as abstract general statements or ideas about God. If one interprets scripture in that fashion, one will then have to find some way to cope with other statements as well that seem to indicate different ideas about God—the possibility, for instance, of being cast into the ‘outer darkness’ where there is ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ The point is that ideas afford no real comfort when one’s ultimate destiny is at stake. **Searching for a ‘general consensus’ in scripture or counting passages for or against an idea is no protection for the ‘conscience.’ One is not saved by a scriptural consensus.** The smallest hint or just one passage is enough to shatter confidence and to raise the specter of being lost.”⁴¹
- d. “We are saved by faith alone, and faith comes from hearing. To be saved in this sense is truly to be rescued from the net of necessity and law by a spontaneous joy in God. Everything is now raised to a different plane, an absolutely new future opens up. **Faith is being grasped by that promise, by that future.**”⁴²
- e. “The theologian of the cross is aware of a quite different sort of **concreteness and objectivity**: that of **the quite alien and external word** that puts the old subject to death to raise up the new. Perhaps one can say that it is only in death and the promise of new life that we come up against that which is truly and irreducible ‘from without.’ And only so is it **truly ‘objective.’**”⁴³

13. The *totus/totus* begets the beginnings of honesty.

- a. “Faith, however, born of the imputation of **total righteousness, begets the beginnings of honesty** as well. Such faith sees the truth of the human condition, the reality and **totality of human sin**, and has no need to indulge in fictions.”⁴⁴
- b. “**If you lose your ‘virtue,’ what will protect you then?** Luther’s advice in such situations was: ‘Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe even more boldly.’ The point is not to go out and find some sins to commit. The point is rather not to be deceived by the glitter of ideals, of sanctity and piety, by the quest for the Holy Grail. **Christ and Christ alone has dealt with sin and saves sinners.**”⁴⁵
- c. “We can best attack the problem by asking whether in Luther ... it is possible to discover any distinctive ideas about sanctification or Christian growth. **The *simul***, it is to be recalled, was posited precisely to counter the idea that justification is to be synthesized with ideas of progress according to law. The justifying act unmasks and exposes all our pretense about becoming virtuous persons, by the very fact that it is an unconditional divine imputation to be received only by faith. To be

⁴⁰ Forde, “Law and Gospel as the Methodological Principle of Theology,” *Theological Perspectives*, 63.

⁴¹ Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 34.

⁴² Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 141.

⁴³ Forde, “The Catholic Impasse,” *Promoting Unity. Themes in Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue*, 76.

⁴⁴ Forde, “Christian Life,” *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:434.

⁴⁵ Forde, “Christian Life,” *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:438.

justified by God's act means to become a sinner at the same time. The totality of justification un.masks the totality of being a sinner. Thus the *simul iustus et peccator* as total states would seem to militate against any talk of progress in sanctification.... There are many utterances of Luther's which reject all ideas of progress. Sanctification must simply be included in justification because the latter is a total state. Sanctification is simply to believe the divine imputation and with it the *totus peccator*⁴⁶

- d. "Thus Luther, when he was struggling with both the existential and the systematic aspects of the problem came to the conclusion that all the schemes of movement from sin to righteousness, all thinking exclusively in terms of that legal or moral metaphor, had to be abandoned if grace and justification are to have any reality at all. In the place of all such schemes, in the place of the conditional thinking that always traps us, we must put **the absolute simultaneity of sin and righteousness**. When God acts upon us with his grace, with his justifying deed, his pronouncement, **we become *simul iustus et peccator***, simultaneously righteous and sinner.... Grace is the divine pronouncement itself, the morning star, the flash of lightning exploding in our darkness which reveals all truth *simultaneously*, the truth about God and the truth about us."⁴⁷
- e. "'For if justification is by the law, Christ died to no avail (Gal 2:21).' When the divine judge speaks his unconditional word, all the world must simply be silent and listen! If we can begin to wrap our minds around that perhaps we can be grasped by the radicality, the audaciousness, the explosiveness of the confessional point. **When God imputes righteousness he makes us sinners at the same time**. He makes it quite plain that we do not have righteousness in ourselves and never will. By declaring us righteous unilaterally, unconditionally for Christ's sake, he at the same time un.masks sin and unfaith. By forgiving sin, sin is revealed and attacked at the root in its *totality*; our unfaith, rebellion, and blindness, our unwillingness to move out of the legal prison, our refusal of life. God's justification, you see, is fully as opposed to human righteousness and pretense as it is to human unrighteousness. It cuts both ways, both at the ungodly and the super-godly. The battle is not against sin merely as 'moral' fault but against sin as 'spiritual' fault, against our supposed 'intrinsic righteousness,' pretense and hypocrisy, our supposed movement and progress, our substitution of fiction for truth. **The totality of the justifying act reveals the totality of sin.**"⁴⁸

"The person is 'transported' to use a modern idiom, taken away from sin when the radical nature of the justifying act **sets the totally just (*totus iustus*) over against the complete sinner (*totus peccator*)....**"⁴⁹

14. The two kingdoms doctrine strips us of our mythologies.

- a. "[The two kingdoms doctrine's] great contribution to the problem of social ethics is exactly to **strip men of their mythologies**. For the very fact that it insists that whatever other Kingdom there is, **the eschatological one comes solely and absolutely by God's power alone** means that the only real task for men is to repent, to turn around and take care of this world as best they know how – without myth, but with **reason, love and justice; to be pragmatic**: to solve problems concretely.

⁴⁶ Forde, "Christian Life," *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:430-31.

⁴⁷ Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life*, 29.

⁴⁸ Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life*, 31.

⁴⁹ Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life*, 54.

“The eschatological vision makes it clear that **the secular is our sacred task**. It tears the mask from our pretensions and bids us become human beings. That, I think, is the real significance of Luther’s resistance to the Peasant’s Revolt, whatever we may think of his final action. He saw quite clearly that if one is to apply this principle, then there could be **absolutely no exceptions**. Not even those who undertake revolutions for the sake of so-called ‘Christian principles’ can be excepted. Nobody, Prince, Peasant, Preacher, President or what have you, carries out a revolution or a political program in the name of Christ. That is so first of all because **Luther categorically refused to allow Christ to become a club with which to beat anyone (a ‘New Law’ as he called it)**, and secondly because revolutions and political programs can be carried through only in the name of humanity without appeal to either myth or religion. Luther means that quite radically. **You don’t need Christ, or even the Bible, necessarily, to tell you what to do in social matters. You have a reason, use it!**”⁵⁰

- b. “Precisely because the declaration is unconditional we are turned around to go into the world of the neighbor to carry out our calling as Christians. The works of the Christian are to be done in the world, but not as conditions for salvation. **The persistent and nagging debate about the two kingdoms** among Lutherans **arises mostly out of reluctance to be radical enough**. Precisely because the gospel gives the Kingdom of God unconditionally to faith, this world opens up and is given back as the place to serve the other. Will it be so given? That depends, of course. It is not a static affair. To the degree that one is grasped and set free by the unconditional gospel, to that degree one can be turned from the sort of life created by the self (and its supposed free but actually bound will) to the world of the neighbor. **To the degree that the theological use of law comes to an end in Christ, to that degree a political use of the law for others becomes a possibility.**”⁵¹
- c. “Does justification by faith alone spell the end to the human quest for justice? By no means! We establish the law! But if justification proceeds by way of negation it demands **a distinction for the time being** between what can be seen as God’s **two ways** of fostering justice: **the way of the law and the way of the gospel**....Here the controversial and variously interpreted ‘Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms’ comes into view.”⁵²
- d. “The only way to combat the devil, in Luther’s view, the only way to put down and conquer within us that pull either to give in to the world or to desert it, is through the faith and hope inspired by the promise of that world ‘to come.’ When hope is created in the future that God has in store, we begin to see this world as God’s creation. We see this world as the place where we must **fight the battle**. We see for the first time the monstrous tyranny of the devil and with our eyes wide open and our hearts full of hope we **enter the battle**. We see that besides the world to come God also has another world—this world—where we are **desperately needed**. We see that it is time to get to work for ‘the night is far spent....’

“God’s two kingdoms

“Luther called this **the doctrine of the two kingdoms**. The idea is that God has two kingdoms, not just one, and that if one is to get the business of living in this world right, one must note carefully both how they are to be distinguished and how they are to be related....

⁵⁰ Forde, “The Revolt and the Wedding: An Essay on Social Ethics in the Perspective of Luther’s Theology,” in *The Reformation and the Revolution* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota: Augustana College Press, 1970) 85-86.

⁵¹ Forde, “Radical Lutheranism,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (1987) 5-18, here 16-17.

⁵² Forde, “The Viability of Luther Today. A North American Perspective,” *Word & World* 7 (1987) 26.

“Luther considered a **careful distinction** between the world to come (God’s kingdom of grace) and this world (God’s creation or kingdom under law) essential to faith. Without the kind of distinctions we have been outlining above, Reformation faith—indeed faith in the gospel as such—simply collapses. If God’s kingdom does not come **by grace alone** then all is under the tyranny of law. At the same time the relationship between the two kingdoms must be noted carefully. The kingdom to come does not separate men from this world or teach them to despise it, it rather opens up the world to them as the place in which to express the joy and hope of their faith. It is **faith alone** that enables us to *see* the world as *God’s* other kingdom....Faith gives back to us the world we lost through sin.”⁵³

e. “First of all, Luther’s understanding of freedom through the gospel of Jesus Christ in fact gives us an entirely new world, the world of the neighbor. It is a sheer gift. It is what Luther called the world of the ‘outer man.’ **The world of the neighbor, the ‘outer world’ or the left-hand rule of God,** is never just completely ‘there’ like the physical, empirical world. It is a world given back to faith....For every possibility that one might turn inward on one’s own projects is excluded by the fact that Christ is the end of the law. All the space in the ‘inner world,’ the conscience, is occupied by Christ. **There is no room for a self that wants to feed only on its own self.** One is turned inside out. The law cannot get in there anymore. It can only be turned back to the world where it belongs, to be used to do what it is supposed to: take care of people and not tyrannize them.”⁵⁴

f. “The question of the relationship of **the two kingdoms** is really the macrocosm of what we have already seen in the microcosm of the relationships between **law and gospel**, and between justification and sanctification. The attempt to synthesize law with gospel is disastrous. Likewise the attempt to synthesize the rule or kingship of Christ with that of this age and its ambitions will be disastrous and ultimately destructive. **In the microcosm of individual piety it produces either despair or presumption.** It drives to self-destruction: either despair over self and failure or pride in the ability of the self to deny itself and come as close as possible to suicide without actually committing it. In the macrocosm it produces tyranny, oppression, imperialism, genocide, and murder. One or another of the world’s false eschatologies is enforced and sanctified with the name of Christ and the gospel.”⁵⁵

“We should not forget that the church too could gain the whole world only to lose its soul. It has happened before; it can happen again. **The church exists to prophesy before the world that ‘there is a river, the streams whereof make glad the City of God,’** that there is a Kingdom in which peace will reign and justice be done freely and spontaneously because God is in charge. When I go to church, I do not expect to hear the same thing I hear on television or read in the newspapers. I want to hear something about why I should bother. I want to hear something, that is, to counter those unconditional anxieties eating away at my heart and that of the entire human enterprise.”⁵⁶

⁵³ Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 100-102.

⁵⁴ Forde, “Called to Freedom,” *The Preached God*. Gerhard O. Forde. *Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*. Eds. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 367-68.

⁵⁵ Forde, “Justification and This World,” *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:455-460, here 456.

⁵⁶ Forde, “God’s rights. The logic of moralism vs. the eschato-logic of the Gospel,” *Lutheran Partners* (March/April 1986) 17.

15. Law is to be understood in a functional rather than material sense.

- a. "Throughout this *locus* 'law' is to be taken in a **functional** rather than a material sense. 'The law' in this sense is demand, that voice which 'accuses,' **as the reformers put it**, arising from anywhere and everywhere, insisting that we do our duty and fulfill our being. Anything which does that exercises the function or 'office' of the law. Law is not a specifiable set of propositions, but is **one way communication functions** when we are alienated, estranged, and bound. This understanding transcends the usual kind of argument, as when, for instance, it is maintained that 'law' should be understood as 'Torah,' a gracious gift in the covenant rather than a harsh imposition, or when it is said that Paul misunderstood the law. Such exegetical considerations, important in their own right, are not decisive for the question at hand. It makes no difference at the outset, therefore, whether 'the law' involved is biblical, the natural law, the law of being, the law of Christ, or the faces of starving children on the television screen. It is the way the communication functions, its 'use,' that matters. The assumption we fallen humans make is that the law is the way, that we can be saved by response to a demand, by 'the works of the law.' We assume we can end the voice by acceding to its demands."⁵⁷
- b. "Now, one must be careful here to avoid misunderstanding. For Luther the term law does not mean merely the *laws* of the Bible, nor does gospel refer merely to the promises. **Law for him means a way of hearing the Word of God.** That is, you can hear the entire Bible and all preaching, and for that matter all of what happens in the world, as law. What this means is that apart from faith everything you encounter in life can be a threat to you; it can disturb and frighten and lead to doubt and despair. Even the words 'Jesus died for your sins' may not be very comforting, but may actually be the worst kind of law because you may only be revolted by it. Law, or living under the law, means a kind of existence in which everything turns on you and you are threatened and can only ask yourself, 'What shall I do?' Everywhere God is hidden behind the mask of his wrath. Even in nature, in the thunderstorm or the disaster or in the mere rustling of the leaves on a dark night one may be frightened and reminded that he is alone and lost. And until this is really brought home to one, he will not hear the gospel. He may hear the words of the gospel, but he will not *really* hear it as though it is meant for him. The law, then, must first do its work. One must learn that he is utterly lost before he can really hear the gospel because the gospel is heard only by those who have given up the attempt to do something for themselves."⁵⁸
- c. "Does one appeal to 'conscience' in preaching? No doubt, as Luther often said, one would preach in vain if there were no conscience. But one must preach, perhaps we can say, as though conscience were the empty house of Jesus' parable, now occupied by seven more demons. One must not preach in such fashion as to solidify their tenure in the house. One assumes indeed that people live and suffer 'under the law,' but that **what they are suffering from is the misuse of the law**, the assumption that law, in conjunction with conscience, *is* the way. Many today like to say that we do not need, therefore, to preach 'the law,' but only the gospel. That is a mistake. **The 'law' that must be preached is the absolute offense of the unconditional gospel**, the 'letter' which kills, so the spirit can make new – the kind of law which destroys the illusions about law as the way and thus drives the demons from the house."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Forde, "Justification," *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:400.

⁵⁸ Forde, "Law and Gospel as the Methodological Principle of Theology," *Theological Perspectives*, 62-63.

⁵⁹ Forde, "Justification," *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:424.

16. We have no access to eternal law.

- a. **“Precisely, the proper distinction between law and gospel limits and humanizes the law.”**⁶⁰
- b. “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,⁶¹ we must write our own decalogue to fit the times.”⁶²
- c. “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 Melancthon’s theological constructions.”⁶³
- d. **“... 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...”⁶⁴
- e. “The line between this world and the next is drawn by God’s grace. This establishes the world as a place under the law in which man can live, work, and hope.... Hope in the world to come creates the faith and patience to live in this world; it gives this world back to us by relieving us of the burden of our restless quests. Freedom from the world makes us **free for it**....

“This is what it means to say that whereas the kingdom to come is a kingdom of grace the kingdom of this world is a kingdom of law.... **Law belongs to earth, not to heaven. It is natural, not supernatural**....

“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. Once cured of religious and mythological ambitions, they can be put to work as they ought: taking care of men. For in the final analysis, all man’s vocations are to be enlisted in the battle against the devil.”⁶⁵

⁶⁰ 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, Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985) 301.

⁶¹ 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).

⁶² Gerhard Forde, “*Lex Semper Accusat?* Nineteenth-Century Roots of Our Current Dilemma,” *dialog* 9 (1970) 274; “*Lex semper accusat?*” *A More Radical Gospel*, 49; and “*Lex semper accusat?*” 49; *The Essential Forde. Distinguishing Law and Gospel*. Eds. Nicholas Hopman, Mark C. Mattes, and Steven D. Paulson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019) 193.

⁶³ Forde, “Justification and This World,” *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:448.

⁶⁴ Forde, “Luther and the *Usus Pauli*,” *dialog* 32 (1993) 278.

⁶⁵ Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 110-11.

- f. “As the discussion grinds on I have become more and more convinced that the root problem is the failure to take adequate account of the eschatological nature and structure of the Christian Faith. Amid all the talk of change, especially in exegesis, there is one exegetical development of major theological import in the 19th and 20th centuries that has been consistently ignored by ecumenical theology: the recovery of the eschatological nature of the New Testament and what this means for the structure of Christian theology itself. To take this into account would mean some radical shifting of the questions and issues. The easy assumption that all changes since the 16th century have been advantageous to ecumenical consensus-building would come under serious question. **For the fact is that the catholic theology of the west going all the way back to the gnostic crisis was built on an ontological *lex aeterna* [eternal law] rather than on an eschatological two-age base.** This is a problem which we all share. The Reformation with the jarring dialectics consequent upon justification by faith alone: *simul iustus et peccator*; distinction between law and gospel; two kingdoms; hidden and revealed God; and on and on, is the first dawning of the eschatological sunrise. But as history amply demonstrates, it is always in danger of being obscured by ontological clouds. The full and glaring light of the Reformation has never [been] particularly welcome, even among evangelicals. The recovery of the eschatological outlook and structure of the New Testament message is one area at least where ecumenical convergence may well have become more difficult rather than easier. Is it not strange that Pope John Paul II has already registered his reserve about these matters specifically with regard to Luther. On June 22, in an ecumenical prayer service in the Roman Catholic cathedral in Paderborn, Germany he said, “Fundamental problems about Luther’s views on faith, scriptures, tradition, and the church have not yet been sufficiently clarified.”⁶⁶ But that, of course, is not the difficulty. It is rather that Luther’s views have been made quite clear. Just that is the problem!”⁶⁶
- g. “Is the law eternal? It could be and will be if Christ is not preached so as to end it for us....To the degree that the theological use of the law comes to an end in Christ, to that degree **a political use of the law for others becomes a possibility.** If somehow this could be grasped, perhaps we could cease the silly debates about whether the church’s mission is proclamation *or* development, personal salvation *or* social justice, etc., and get on with the business of taking care of this world and the neighbor as lovingly, wisely, and **pragmatically** as our gifts enable.”⁶⁷

17. Ceremonial law, moral law. You can’t have one without the other.

- a. “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 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

⁶⁶ Gerhard Forde, “Ecclesiastical Dodgeball? A Review Essay.” *Lehrverurteilungen im Gespräch: die ersten offiziellen Stellungnahmen aus den evangelischen Kirchen in Deutschland*. Herausgegeben von der Geschäftsstelle der Arnoldshainer Konferenz (AKD), dem Kirchenamt der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) und dem Lutherischen Kirchenamt der Vereinigten Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Deutschlands (VELKD). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1993. Internal footnote 6: *Lutheran World Information* 14/92 (July 18, 1996) 4.

⁶⁷ Forde, “Radical Lutheranism. Lutheran Identity in America,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (1987) 5-18, here 17.

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!

“Both the early and late Luther attacked the idea that Christ is the **end of the ritual law but not the whole law**. In both the early (1519) and later (1531-36) Galatians lectures he pounded away on this issue whenever he got a chance.¹³ ...The presupposition for **true freedom**, for Luther, is that **Christ is the end of the law in its entirety**.”⁶⁸

- b. “Covert antinomianism, seen in this light, comes in many different forms. 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 *function* 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.”⁶⁹
- c. “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**....[T]he tradition for the most part had to indulge in what was strictly forbidden by both Matthew and Paul: tampering with the content of the law 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 moral law**. Indeed, it seems that in most instances, ruptures of the ceremonial law are more serious than those of the 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? ...Who is to decide? The outcome of such confusion was, in general, that natural law became the arbiter....Natural law became the structural backbone of the theological system, displacing eschatology.”⁷⁰
- d. “Of late it seems that attention has shifted mostly to the question of Paul’s regard for the Law in relation to the Judaism of his day....Once the radicality of the Pauline gospel is jettisoned, one can only expect to see moves to enhance the status of the law. Where eschatology fails, one can only expect reversions to tropology....

“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**

⁶⁸ Forde, “Called to Freedom,” Presidential Address to the International Congress for Luther Research, 1993, *The Preached God*, 259-60. Internal footnote 13: For the 1519 Commentary see LW 27:188, 223, 230, 248, 256-57, 264-65, 287, 358; For the 1521-36 Commentary, see LW 26:122, 130, 156-57, 180, 181, 202, 203, 330, 333, 446-47; LW 27:139, 161.

⁶⁹ Forde, “Fake Theology: Reflections on Antinomianism Past and Present,” *dialog* 22 (1983) 249.

⁷⁰ Forde, “Justification and This World,” *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:447.

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 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.’”⁷¹

18. You can’t infer God’s will from the law.

- a. “The issue is exposed when one comes up against the *deus absconditus*. Erasmus does not really know what kind of a trap he is in. The fallacy of his whole argument is that he is left **to infer what God must be like merely from the law**, while the Holy Spirit is out making assertions apart from the law concerning the Father’s only Son, Jesus Christ. In the middle of the argument Luther breaks out in the confession, ‘**He sent his Son to save us.**’ That is the heart and soul of his entire argument. The work of theology is **not for making inferences from the law**, but for a proclamation that is all about Christ.

“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.**”⁷²

- b. “What are we to do about God not preached? **Nothing.** We are to leave the not-preached God alone and pay attention to the God clothed and displayed in the Word.”⁷³

19. A theology seduced by nomism.

- a. “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.”⁷⁴

- b. “Nomism is ill-equipped to counter antinomianism with evangelical weapons, because it has already compromised the eschatological gospel. Hence it can fight only from the position of law and charge its opponent with the sin and heresy of antinomianism. The victory of nomism over antinomism in the church is therefore hardly cause for celebration. True opposition can be launched only from the position of a faith which has been grasped by the eschatological justification. If justification exposes sin and upholds the law against sin at the same as it grants fulfillment, one cannot speak of a

⁷¹ Forde, “Luther and the *Usus Pauli*,” *dialog* 32 (1993) 277-78.

⁷² Forde, “Postscript to the Captivation of the Will,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 19 (2005) 77, 78. Forde, *The Captivation of the Will. Luther vs. Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage*. Ed. Steven Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 77, 79.

⁷³ Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 27.

⁷⁴ Forde, “Fake Theology: Reflections on Antinomians Past and Present,” *dialog* 22 (1983) 246-51, here 247.

temporal or spatial end to law in *this* age. The end is eschatological: anticipated in faith and given in full only at the Parousia. **The remedy for antinomianism is not nomistic but eschatological.**⁷⁵

20. Don't be fooled by a semi-Pelagian twist on Romans 3:24.

Romans 3:24: "[T]hey are justified by his **grace as a gift....**"

This verse is used by some to justify a **semi-Pelagian** view of salvation: To be saved, the gift of faith must be received by responding in faith. Thus salvation depends on the believer's response. Forde on why this is wrong:

- a. "The assertion of "justification *by faith*" in the sixteenth-century Reformation can be understood only if it is clearly seen as **a complete break with 'justification *by grace*,**' viewed according to the synthesis we have been describing, as a complete break with the attempt to view justification as a movement according to a given standard or law, either natural or revealed. For the reformers, **justification is "solely" a divine act.** It is a divine judgment. It is an imputation. It is unconditional. All legal and moral schemes are shattered. Such justification comes neither at the beginning nor at the end of a movement; rather, it establishes an entirely new situation. Since righteousness comes by imputation only, **it is absolutely not a movement on our part, either with or without the aid of what was previously termed "grace."** The judgment can be heard and grasped only by faith. Indeed, the judgment creates and calls forth the faith that hears and grasps it. One will mistake the reformation point if one does not see that justification "by faith" is in the first instance precisely a polemic *against* justification "*by grace*" according to the medieval scheme. Grace would have to be completely redefined before the word could be safely used in a reformation sense.⁷⁷⁷⁶

[Footnote 7] ⁷"The recent penchant for combining grace and faith into the formula "justification by grace through faith" is perhaps understandable given certain modern developments, but (in spite of words suggesting such a formula in the Augsburg Confession IV) it is strictly speaking at best redundant and at worst compounding a felony. When one misses the complete interdependence of grace and faith (grace *is* the gift of faith; faith alone lets grace *be* grace), **one turns faith into a "subjective response" and can only then cover one's tracks by saying, "Of course, it comes by grace!"** *Faith* then simply takes the place once occupied by "works" or "merit" in the medieval system and all the problems repeat themselves. Given such misunderstanding it is clear that one cannot use the formula "justification by faith" today without careful work of reclamation."⁷⁷

- b. "Either the gospel must be preached in radical fashion, or it is best left alone altogether."¹⁵

[Footnote 15] ¹⁵"Luther maintained that semi-Pelagianism was much worse than outright Pelagianism! *Bondage of the Will*, p. 292."

21. No third use of the law.

- a. "The debate about the 'third use' of the law shifts the argument to the other pole of the eschatological dialectic. If the former controversy [antinomianism/nomism] was about the use of

⁷⁵ Forde, "Justification and This World," *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:448-49.

⁷⁶ Forde, "Justification," *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:407.

⁷⁷ Forde, "Justification," *Christian Dogmatics* 2:407, 423, footnote 7.

law *before* faith, this letter is about use of law *after* the eschatological event. The question is whether one can or should speak of a 'third' use of the law in addition to the political use (to restrain evil) and the theological use (to convict of sin): a use of the law by the reborn Christian *as* Christian, in which law functions as a 'guide to the Christian life.' One can see immediately that **the issue is still the eschatological one: What difference does the eschatological event make vis-à-vis the law?**⁷⁸

- b. "From the eschatological perspective the legitimate concerns badly expressed in the idea of a third use of the law can be sorted out. **First**, one who has been grasped by the eschatological vision looks on law differently from one who has not. **But that is not to say that one sees a 'third' use.** What one sees is precisely the difference between law and gospel, so that **law can be established in its first two uses** this side of the eschaton. Before that vision or when it fades, law is misused as a way of salvation, a means of escape. One does not know the difference between law and gospel.
- "Second**, one grasped by the eschatological vision will recognize the continuing need for the law. **But this too does not mean a third use.** Rather, just because of 'rebirth' in faith, one will see how much one is a sinner and will be until the end. One will see that one is not yet a 'Christian.' One will see precisely that one has **no particular advantages over those who are not yet reborn.** One will see one's solidarity with the rest of the human race and wait in hope until the end, leaving the heroics and pretensions to spiritual athletes."⁷⁹
- c. "Formula of Concord (Article VI) vacillates on the issue. On the one hand, it speaks of a third use of the law to be applied to the regenerate, but then it goes on to say it is necessary because regeneration is incomplete in this life. **It is an attempt to have it both ways and thus threatens only to obscure the issue.**"⁸⁰
- d. "When the end is given we no longer *need* to be antinomians. This, it seems to me was Luther's point in all his writings on the matter. **Because the end is given we can enter gladly into life under law** for the time being, to care for the world, for others, and do battle with sin and the devil."⁸¹
- e. "All of this raises the inevitable question about whether there is not a more 'positive' use of the law in Lutheran theology. Here it should be remembered that Lutherans do speak of the 'civil use' of the law, **the so-called first use.** But that use, too, it should be noted, was **a use restricted to 'this age.'** In its civil use the law restrains evil and establishes order for the care of human society. **God uses the law** in this sense to hold the world in readiness for the gospel and keep it from collapsing into the chaos which threatens it. Under **the civil use of law** it is quite possible to speak of the goodness and 'civil righteousness' of human activity even though it does not reach beyond this age. If this use of the law is overextended, however, if one begins to take the law into one's own hands in order to bring in one's own version of the kingdom, tyranny results and resistance must be mounted. **Precisely the proper distinction between law and gospel limits and humanizes the law.** The

⁷⁸ Forde, "Justification and This World," *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:449-52, here 449.

⁷⁹ Forde, "Justification and This World," *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:450.

⁸⁰ Forde, "Justification and This World," *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:460, fn.3.

⁸¹ Forde, "Fake Theology: Reflections on Antinomianism Past and Present," *dialog* 22 (1983) 251.

purpose of the law in its civil use is to take care of the world and of human beings, not to tyrannize them.”⁸²

- f. “Law is to be used for political purposes, i.e., for taking care of people here on earth in as good, loving, and just manner as can be managed. **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.**”⁸³

22. Natural law: You can't live with it; you can't live without it.

- a. “Unable to rhyme Matt. 5:17-18 with Rom. 10:4, the dogmatic tradition has experienced nothing but trouble over the law. When one does not see that ‘heaven and earth’ *do* ‘pass away’ in the eschatological fulfillment anticipated and grasped by faith, and that just such fulfillment *is* the end and the goal, **Paul and Matthew are at irreconcilable odds**. Unable to grasp this fulfillment as end, the tradition for the most part had to indulge in what was strictly forbidden by both Matthew and Paul: tampering with the content of the law 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 moral law**. Indeed, it seems that in most instances, ruptures of the ceremonial law are more serious than those of the 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.

“Where the gospel of justification by faith is not comprehended in its **full eschatological sense**, as bringing end and new beginning, death and new life, there will be trouble with the law. **Where the gospel is not grasped, the law will not be grasped either**. The important point is faith: that Christ is the end of the law so that everyone who has *faith* may be justified—faith experienced as new life from death.

“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.

“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

⁸² Forde, “Forensic Justification and the Law in Lutheran Theology,” *Justification by Faith. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, 300-301. See also Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 110-12.

⁸³ Forde, “The Viability of Luther Today: A North American Perspective,” *Word & World* 7 (1987) 27.

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."⁸⁴

- b. "The rejection of monastic vows, and with them the quest for one's own holiness, meant for Luther a new understanding of and love for God's commandments. What God commands takes us into the natural, created world. Here the proper place of 'natural law' is to be found. By natural law most seem to mean 'supernatural' law, a law built into the universe which, if followed, leads to eternal bliss, a kind of built-in permanent escape mechanism. Revealed law is then something like the completion, the clarification of what has been dimmed by the fall, the final extension of the escape ladder. **That is not what Luther meant by it, even when he compared and often identified the commandments of God with 'natural law.'** He meant precisely *natural* and not supernatural law. The commandments of God do not command anything contrary to life, anything supernatural or superhuman, but rather what anyone who properly consults his or her **reason** would have to acknowledge as good and right—exemplified, say, by the golden rule."⁸⁵

23. There are no levers here.

- a. "**First** of all, if justification proceeds by way of negation, then the judgment is indeed universal and **all causes are relativized**. This flows from the **very nature of the gospel** and cannot be compromised.

"**Secondly**, for Luther's theology, it seems to me that the only way from such universal negation back to the concrete is the way of freedom....The Kingdom of God indeed comes by God's power alone, and thus one is turned back into the world for the time being to serve the neighbor....If we are to remain true to the gospel, we must realize that **there are no levers here**. If the movement is not one of freedom, all is lost. Moralists, social reformers, ideologues, revolutionaries, and even just plain zealous religious people may no doubt find this frustrating and maddening, but it is of **the very essence of the matter**. Whenever a cause is exempted from the negation, so as to exert a pressure which destroys this freedom, we come to a serious parting of the ways.

"**Thirdly**, I believe it can be argued that **justification by faith alone** itself and **the freedom it creates**, drives to utter concreteness in praxis. Luther's view of the concrete vocation of the Christian proposes just such concreteness. If the negation is complete, one is in the first instance **set free from the tyranny of all universalisms and absolutisms** and placed back in time to become a **truly historical being**, to wait and hope for the coming of the promised Kingdom."⁸⁶

When Forde writes in the previous post:

1. "... all causes are relativized" and "... there are no levers here," this means:
- (a) There is no "revealed" or "natural" law except the basic content of the law: love and care for the neighbor. Forde: "**What the law enjoins is love of and service to the neighbor. That is its fundamental and ineradicable content.**"⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Forde, "Justification and This World," *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:447.

⁸⁵ Forde, "Justification and This World," *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:454-56.

⁸⁶ Forde, "The Viability of Luther Today: A North American Perspective," *Word & World* 7 (1987) 29.

⁸⁷ Forde, "Law and Sexual Behavior," *Lutheran Quarterly* 9 (1995) 18.

(b) There is no third use of the law, no particular revealed law(s) for the Christian, nor can one see through any “natural law” to discern divine intention.

2. The bottom line: “This flows from the very nature of the gospel and cannot be compromised.”

This means that any and every attempt to counter antinomism by bringing back “revealed” or “natural” law, **even “evangelical counsels,”** to settle ethical issues, contradicts the gospel (Galatians 5:1).

24. We live gladly under the law for the time being.

- a. “When the end is given we no longer *need* to be antinomians. This, it seems to me was Luther’s point in all his writings on the matter. Because the end is given **we can enter gladly into life under law** for the time being, to care for the world, for others, and do battle with sin and the devil.”⁸⁸
- b. “**Precisely, the proper distinction between law and gospel limits and humanizes the law.**”⁸⁹
- c. “**Law belongs to earth, not to heaven. It is natural, not supernatural....**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.”⁹⁰

25. Reason – you are free to use your head in the battles of life.

- a. “Law is to be used for political purposes, i.e., for taking care of people here on earth in as good, loving, and just manner as can be managed. **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.**”⁹¹
- b. “For Luther, law is natural in the sense that it was built into the creation, simply a statement of the minimal requirements of daily life, a faithful and practical consideration of what works and preserves human society against the wiles of the devil. **Faith frees you to use your head in the battle.**”⁹²
- c. “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.**

⁸⁸ Forde, “Fake Theology: Reflections on Antinomianism Past and Present,” *dialog* 22 (1983) 251.

⁸⁹ Forde, “Forensic Justification and the Law in Lutheran Theology,” *Justification by Faith. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, 301.

⁹⁰ Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 110-11.

⁹¹ Forde, “The Viability of Luther Today,” *Word & World* 7 (1987) 27.

⁹² Forde, “Luther’s ‘Ethics,’” *A More Radical Gospel*, 154.

“The fundamental concern of the civil use of the law is for the care of the social order . . . What the law enjoins is love of and service to the neighbor. That is its fundamental and ineradicable content.”⁹³

26. Free from pietistic self-preoccupation.

- a. “First of all, Luther’s understanding of **freedom** through the gospel of Jesus Christ in fact gives us an entirely new world, the world of the neighbor. It is a sheer gift. It is what Luther called the world of the ‘outer man.’ **The world of the neighbor, the ‘outer world’ or the left-hand rule of God,** is never just completely ‘there’ like the physical, empirical world. It is a world given back to faith...For every possibility that one might turn inward on one’s own projects is excluded by the fact that Christ is the end of the law. All the space in the ‘inner world,’ the conscience, is occupied by Christ. **There is no room for a self that wants to feed only on its own self.** One is turned inside out. The law cannot get in there anymore. It can only be turned back to the world where it belongs, to be used to do what it is supposed to: take care of people and not tyrannize them.”⁹⁴
- b. “**First** of all, if justification proceeds by way of negation, then the judgment is indeed universal and **all causes are relativized.** This flows from the **very nature of the gospel** and cannot be compromised...**Secondly,** for Luther’s theology, it seems to me that the only way from such universal negation back to the concrete is **the way of freedom**....The Kingdom of God indeed comes by God’s power alone, and thus one is turned back into the world for the time being to serve the neighbor....If we are to remain true to the gospel, we must realize that **there are no levers here.** If the movement is not one of **freedom,** all is lost. Moralists, social reformers, ideologues, revolutionaries, and even just plain zealous religious people may no doubt find this frustrating and maddening, but it is of the **very essence** of the matter. Whenever a cause is exempted from the negation, so as to exert a pressure which destroys this freedom, we come to a serious parting of the ways. **Thirdly,** I believe it can be argued that **justification by faith alone** itself and **the freedom it creates,** drives to utter concreteness in praxis. Luther’s view of the concrete vocation of the Christian proposes just such concreteness. If the negation is complete, one is in the first instance **set free from the tyranny of all universalisms and absolutisms** and placed back in time **to become a truly historical being,** to wait and hope for the coming of the promised Kingdom.”⁹⁵

27. The hiddenness of the Christian life.

- a. “The teachings of Jesus and the injunctions in the Epistles must be viewed in the same light. They are posed from the eschatological perspective. They have to do with what one who is slain and made alive by the eschatological word does and is to do. One cannot expect that such teachings will be generally understood or approved by the children ‘of this age.’ That is not because Christians are so much the paragons of virtue that the world scoffs at their strictness and rigor – that Christians try to be perfect examples of that virtue which the world generally approves but does not want to be ‘too serious’ about. It is rather because **the Christian life will be hidden from this world and inexplicable to it.** Sometimes – perhaps most of the time – the Christian life will appear to follow quite ordinary, unspectacular courses, no doubt too ordinary for the world. But sometimes it **will**

⁹³ Forde, “Law and Sexual Behavior,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 9 (1995) 8-9, 18. *The Essential Forde*, 155-56, 165.

⁹⁴ Forde, “Called to Freedom,” *A More Radical Gospel*, 367-68.

⁹⁵ Forde, “The Viability of Luther Today: A North American Perspective,” *Word & World* 7 (1987) 29.

appear to go quite contrary to what the world would deem wise, prudent, or even **ethical**. Why should costly ointment be wasted on Jesus? Would it not be better to sell it and give it to the poor? Should not Jesus' disciples fast like everyone else? Why should one prefer the company of whores and sinners to polite society? **Why should a Christian participate in an assassination plot** [Bonhoeffer]? The Christian life is tuned to the eschatological vision, not to the virtues and heroics of this world. It has become something of a platitude among religious people that the Sermon on the Mount sets forth the sort of ideal life the world might aspire to and admire. On the contrary, the Sermon on the Mount is one of the most antireligious documents ever written, because of its eschatological perspective....The religious and the virtuous are not on the list and in all likelihood would not wish to be. Indeed, **the attempt to break the hiddenness is precisely the dangerous thing....The goodness or Christianness of one's life should be hidden even from oneself.**"⁹⁶

"To begin with, to state the obvious, if we are justified *sola fide* (and here the *sola* is most important) any attempt so **to describe or prescribe what is necessary for Christian existence** and the object with which such existence has to do as to make it accessible or given other than to **faith alone** is a mistake."⁹⁷

28. Sacraments save.

- a. "But what are sacraments for? They are for salvation. 'To put it most simply, **the power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of Baptism is to save.**'⁴ Every Christian, Luther avers, ought to have at least some brief elementary instruction concerning sacraments because without them no one can be a Christian.⁵ But how is it that sacraments save or make Christians? Do we not have the Word? Do we not have faith? Is it not more important, as some today would like to put it, to have Jesus as 'your personal savior,' or some such? What is so saving about the sacraments?

"The answer lies in the relation between the internal and the external, the inner and the outer, in the life of faith. We do indeed have the Word, and it is a saving Word. **But the Word includes the sacraments precisely to save us.** Where an attempt is made to drive a wedge between the Word and the sacraments, disaster waits. The problem arises, we might say, because in the state of sin and bondage, we are all turned inward upon ourselves (*curvatus in se*). Without the sacraments, the words go inside us. They become an internal matter. As we like to say, we 'internalize' the words. Once inside we begin to wonder what happened to them. We have an incurable tendency to feed on our own innards. We begin to wonder whether we really have taken the words seriously, whether we are really have accepted Jesus as our 'personal Savior,' whatever that is supposed to mean. I may hear the words 'Your sins are forgiven,' but then wonder whether it could be really me that is meant, or whether it is even relevant to my needs. We become a prey to **adverbial theology. Do we really, sincerely, truly, personally, believe? Do we live abundantly, joyously, affirmatively? Do we think positively, praise gratefully, respond generously?** What do I do if I just do not see all those marvelous things happening that the preacher is always on about? I get caught in the marvelous hot-air balloon syndrome, dragged along in a game I can only lose. **The self is a bottomless pit, a black hole, endlessly sucking everything within and crushing it.** The internal self constantly defeats and swallows up the words.

"In John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* this temptation of the inner self is called **the Slough of Despond**, the first obstacle Christian encounters and falls into on his way to the Celestial City....

⁹⁶ Forde, "Justification and Sanctification," *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:440-401.

⁹⁷ Forde, "Justification by Faith Alone: The Article by which the Church Stands or Falls?" *dialog* 27 (1988) 264.

“Sundered from the sacraments, that is, the spoken word can go awry and fail to reach its goal. ‘Help’ must come from the outside, from a more irreducibly external word. Sacraments provide the ‘Help’ that Bunyan, no doubt, would hardly have recognized. They will not let the Word be swallowed up in our internality. They remain always external, from without. They guarantee the character of the Word as what Luther could call an ‘alien’ Word, a Word from without, from out there in the world of things and bodies.

“**Sacraments save** because they save the Word from disappearing into the inner life.”⁹⁸

- b. “To conclude here, thirdly, just a word is in order about the question of ‘real presence’ that has so plagued the understanding of the supper. This question too can be more adequately handled through the conceptuality of testament. Jan Lindhardt has attempted this in intriguing fashion.⁶ Briefly, the bread and the wine hold a place equivalent to the piece of paper called a person’s ‘last will and testament.’ **The piece of paper ‘really’ is the last will and testament, just as are the bread and wine.** They are not mere symbols, just as the piece of paper as such is not the entire inheritance, the estate and all its goods. Still, without the piece of paper, the inheritance would not be an inheritance. It would not exist as such. So it is with the last will and treatment of Jesus. **The bread and the wine really are the testament** and they mediate the body and blood because without them there would be no body and blood. Thus the body and blood are given ‘in, with, and under’ the bread and the wine. In Luther’s terms the literary figure at work here is *synecdoche*: the part in reality ‘stands in’ for the whole, not merely in a symbolic or representational sense—in which case the body and blood would ‘really’ exist somewhere else. The presence of our Lord’s body and blood ‘in, with, and under’ the bread and the wine is real because it is given to us as the inheritance he has bequeathed to us. **It is the New Testament.**”⁹⁹

29. The office of ministry is simply *ministry*; it constitutes nothing.

- a. “The office of ministry is God’s idea, not ours. But how or when was the office instituted? **It is always a temptation here to look for some particular instance in ‘holy history’** or perhaps for a crucial moment in the life of Jesus when something like an act of institution is supposed to have taken place. So many, particularly Roman Catholics, have looked to Matt. 16:18: ‘You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.’ Others may seek different instances for an ‘institution,’ or at least an indication that Jesus must have had church and ministry in mind. But if, subsequently, historical investigation calls talk of the church and ministry by Jesus himself into question, we appear to be on shaky ground.

“The confession [Articles 5 and 14 of the Augsburg Confession], however, avoids this impasse. **Divine institution** is not **identified** with an isolated moment or act, even of Jesus, but rather **with the giving of the gospel and the sacraments.** The gospel and the sacraments were given when God went public in Jesus. God thereby instituted the office.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 158-64, here 158-60. Internal footnotes #4: Large Catechism, Baptism, 4:24, BC (Tappert, 439; Kolb/Wengert 459). Footnote #5: Large Catechism, Baptism, 4:1 BC (Tappert, 436; Kolb/Wengert 456).

⁹⁹ Forde, “The Lord’s Supper as the Testament of Jesus,” *Word & World* 17 (1997) 9; *The Preached God*, 150-151; *The Essential Forde*, 275. Internal footnote #6: “See the important discussion by Jan Lindhardt in *Martin Luther: Knowledge and Mediation in the Renaissance* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1986) 193-203.

¹⁰⁰ Forde, “The Ordained Ministry,” *Called & Ordained. Lutheran Perspectives on the Office of the Ministry*. Eds. Todd Nichol and Marc Kolden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 117-136, here 124.

“Before we leave the subject of the ordained public office we must enter something of a caveat. Increasingly one hears the claim advanced by those involved in ecumenical dialogues that the ordained public office is ‘**constitutive**’ of the church. To be faithful to the confessional view one must be quite clear that **the office constitutes nothing**. Christ is the head of the church and as the sheer giver of all good constitutes the church. The office is constituted by this sheer act of divine giving, not vice versa. The office is simply *ministry*: service inspired by the divine deed. To say more than that is to confuse the giving and the gift. The delivery of the gift, and, indeed, even a ‘delivery boy’ is quite necessary, but it does not constitute anything.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Forde, “The Ordained Ministry,” *Called & Ordained*, 132-33.