

# Appendix 1. Nestingen, Reviving Lutheran Pietism

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## Part 1: Nestingen praised Forde but remained a pietist.

**James A. Nestingen** (1945-2022) was often called the “Garrison Keillor of theology.” A popular catechist and gifted story teller with a Norwegian accent, Nestingen gained national prominence in 1991 when he was the featured Bible Study leader at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly. He ran unsuccessfully for presiding bishop of the ELCA in 2001, even pledging to be ordained into the Episcopal sacramental episcopate if elected, in spite of his previous opposition to that requirement.



James Nestingen

Nestingén was a close friend of his senior colleague at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Gerhard Forde (1929-2005). In 1974 they co-authored a confirmation book, *Free to Be*, although Nestingen was the primary author as well as the curriculum editor at Augsburg Publishing House from 1974-1976. They were often political allies in faculty and broader church conflicts. At the same time, their friendship masked basic conflicts between them.

Where they differed is on the law, revelation, the use of the Bible, and the Christian life. Forde recovered Luther’s functional definition of law which has major consequences for revelation (“the cross alone”), the proper use of Scripture, and the Christian life. Nestingen retained an older pietistic view that “the Book” is revelation, and it gives access to God’s eternal moral law.

**Forde** was a **post-liberal Lutheran**, who emphasized the necessity of Luther’s **two kingdoms** theology. **Nestingén** was a **one kingdom** theologian, calling Lutherans back to **inerrancy and eternal moral law**.

### 1. Nestingen endorses inerrancy and eternal law

In 2017 Nestingen, Steven Paulson, and Mark Mattes, on behalf of the *North American Lutheran Church* (NALC), and together with leaders from *The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (LCMS), and *The Lutheran Church – Canada* (LCC), drafted: “God’s Word Forever Shall Abide,’ a Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures.”<sup>1</sup> This Guiding Statement affirms, among other things:

- Part 1:3 [Verbal inspiration] “The apostle Paul can declare of the Scriptures that nurtured Timothy (and us as well) that ‘all Scripture is breathed out by God’ (2 Tim 3:16).”
- Part 2:3. “[The Bible as] *A perfect unity* ... b. **a perfect theological unity** . . . [the] self-evident truth that God’s revelation of Himself in the sacred Scriptures is **always perfectly consistent** with itself.”
- Part 2:4. “[The Bible] An *inerrant book* – a book that is completely reliable. . . .c. We may **not simply reduce scriptural reliability to ‘spiritual’ matters**. . . . a limitation to ‘spiritual

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<sup>1</sup> “God’s Word Forever Shall Abide,’ A Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures,” is found on the NALC website and at the back of *The Necessary Distinction. A Continuing Conversation on Law and Gospel*. Eds. Albert B. Collver III, James Arne Nestingen, and John T. Pless (St. Louis, Mo; Concordia Publishing House, 2017). The “Guiding Statement” has not been approved by the SCER. (See *The Necessary Distinction*, page 11, footnote 2.)

matters' undermines biblical authority in matters of **morality and ethics**. Therefore, we affirm **scriptural reliability in every matter of doctrine and life.**"

To be sure, Nestingen supported ordaining women. At the same time, as shown above, he endorsed inerrancy and eternal law by affirming "biblical authority in matters of **morality and ethics** . . . scriptural reliability **in every matter of doctrine and life.**"

## 2. Forde: Inerrancy is incompatible with law/gospel

Forde frequently addressed the errors of inerrancy:<sup>2</sup>

- "It is not possible to hold both these methods (inerrancy and law/gospel) today, or **to compromise between them without compromising and hence distorting the gospel.**"<sup>3</sup>
- "Paul and Matthew are at **irreconcilable odds.**"<sup>4</sup>
- "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.'"<sup>5</sup>
- "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.**"<sup>6</sup>
- "For over two hundred years now it [the verbal inspiration of scripture] 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.**"<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See *The Basics of Post-liberal Lutheranism*, pp. 24-28 for a collection of representative Forde quotes against inerrancy from 1969-2004.

<sup>3</sup> 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) 68.

<sup>4</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*. Eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 2:447.

<sup>5</sup> Forde, "Radical Lutheranism," *Lutheran Quarterly* 11 (1987) 12-13.

<sup>6</sup> Forde, "The One Acted Upon," *dialog* 36 (1997) 57-58.

<sup>7</sup> Forde, "Law and Gospel," *Theological Perspectives*, 56.

- “To mistake a **post-liberal Lutheran** for a hard-line conservative confessionalist or orthodoxist ... is seriously to misread the situation. A postliberal 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.**”<sup>8</sup>

## Part 2: Nestingen uses the Bible as the prior miracle

### 1. Nestingen claims *The Bondage of the Will* is a defense of Biblicism

In 2004 Nestingen wrote that Luther responded to Erasmus by asserting authority of the Bible; it is “God’s own word, God’s speech,” a euphemism for inerrancy. Nestingen:

- “So when Luther *took* up the hermeneutical argument Erasmus made against him, he did not begin with a theory of language, be it significative or performative. Rather, he began with the assumption common to **the church’s treatment of Scripture**, now radicalized by his own apocalyptic hope: **it is God’s own Word, God’s speech.**”<sup>9</sup>

But this is not Luther’s argument. To the contrary Luther wrote: “God and the Scriptures are two different things, as different as Creator and creature.”<sup>10</sup> Luther dared to stress the distance between God and Scripture, as Oberman states:

- ““That **this motto [*sola scriptura*]** had fallen into disuse would be no loss from Luther’s point of view. He started from a different and, in fact, contradictory principle, which was to be ignored in the Protestant longing for a ‘paper pope’: **‘God and the Scriptures are two different things, as different as Creator and creature.’**<sup>2</sup> **This historically innovative principle** forms the surprising basis of his response to Erasmus, in which we can also find a **new and critical point of departure for present-day theology**. It is this principle that distinguishes Luther from the biblicism of his own and later eras.”<sup>11</sup>
- “*The Bondage of the Will* of the year 1525 is directed against the most important representatives of the Renaissance north of the Alps—but not only against them and their followers then and now. **It is aimed equally at the fundamentalists, who have taken up the cause of the Reformation and promoted it under the motto of *sola scriptura*.**”<sup>12</sup>

Because Nestingen’s claim that for Luther the Bible is “God’s own Word, God’s speech” is made in the introduction to Forde’s book, *The Captivation of the Will*, is it fair to say that Forde agreed with Nestingen on Luther’s argument in *The Bondage of the Will*?

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<sup>8</sup> Forde, “The Catholic Impasse: Reflections on Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Today,” *Promoting Unity. Themes in Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue*. Eds. H. George Anderson & James R. Crumley Jr. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989) 72.

<sup>9</sup> Nestingen, “Introduction,” in Forde, *The Captivation of the Will. Luther vs. Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage*. Ed. Steven Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 16.

<sup>10</sup> LW 33:25. See also “Take Christ out of the Scriptures and what will you have left in them?” LW 33:26.

<sup>11</sup> Heiko Oberman, *Luther. Man Between God and the Devil*. Trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 221. Internal footnote #2: LW 33:25.

<sup>12</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 225.

By 2004 Forde was so ill with Parkinson's that "his" book, *The Captivation of the Will*, was a collaborative project with Steven Paulson. As ill as Forde was, he wrote a two-and-a-half-page "Postscript" to the book criticizing biblicism and eternal law. Forde:

- "The work of theology is **not for making inferences from the law**, but for a proclamation that is all about Christ."<sup>13</sup>
- "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.**"<sup>14</sup>

Note that Nestingen reflects the view of Lutheran orthodoxy and Lutheran pietism on the inerrancy of Scripture. It gives access to eternal law. But Forde, a leader in the Luther Renaissance, recovered Luther's own theology over against later Lutheran orthodoxy and Lutheran pietism. Forde: "The work of theology is **not for making inferences from the law**, but for a proclamation that is all about Christ."

## 2. Nestingen: The "clarity" of Scripture means the Bible is simple and clear

Nesting on Luther's thesis of the clarity of Scripture:

- "But **the clarity of Scripture** is not a human project. It is Christocentric. 'Christ is the Lord of Scripture,' Luther writes, then asking, 'Take Christ out of Scripture and what do you have left?' To be sure, there are books like Esther, a story of heroism in the face of power, or the letter of James, moral instruction with a passing formulaic reference, in which Christ Jesus is not clearly set forth. But **in the light of the books always given primacy in the church, the whole of the Scripture's message becomes transparently clear.** For this reason, it does not require the services of an interpreter but, instead, interprets all attempts at interpretation."<sup>15</sup>

If "clarity" is based on "the books always given primacy," then what about the Gospel of Matthew? It is given primacy, yet as Forde notes: "Paul and Matthew are at irreconcilable odds."<sup>16</sup> Matt 5:17-20: "You can keep the law," conflicts with Paul: "You cannot keep the law" [Romans 7:13, 10:4-5; Gal. 3:11]. There are other such conflicts. The Book of Hebrews against second repentance (6:4-6; 10:26; 12:17) conflicts with Paul. James 1-2 contradicts Romans 4-7. The problem is that refusing to see difficulties in Scripture does not make them go away.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast, Forde on Luther's thesis of the clarity of Scripture:

- "**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,

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<sup>13</sup> Forde, *The Captivation of the Will*, 77; *Lutheran Quarterly* 19 (2005) 77. *The Essential Forde*. Gerhard O. Forde. *Distinguishing Law and Gospel*. Eds. Nicholas Hopman, Mark C. Mattes, and Steven D. Paulson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019) 124.

<sup>14</sup> Forde, *The Captivation of the Will*, 79. *Lutheran Quarterly* 19 (2005) 78. *The Essential Forde*, 125.

<sup>15</sup> Nestingen, "Luther and Erasmus," *The Captivation of the Will*, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:447.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph A. Burgess, "Lutheran Interpretation of Scripture," *The Bible in the Churches. How Various Christians Interpret the Scriptures*, Third Edition (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998) 101-28; Burgess, "Confessional Propria in Relation to New Testament Texts," *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*. Eds. John Reuman, Samuel H. Nafzger, and Harold H. Ditmanson. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) 253-67.

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.’**<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> “One who does not find Christ in the Scriptures engages in superfluous reading, even if he or she reads it carefully.<sup>29</sup> One should ‘refer the Bible to Christ...nothing but Christ should be proclaimed.’<sup>30</sup> Luther can even go so far as to say: **‘If adversaries use scripture against Christ, then we put Christ against the scriptures.’**<sup>31</sup> **The Word of God therefore is ultimately Christ and the proclamation of the gospel.’**<sup>18</sup>

New Testament scholar and ecumenist Inge Lønning explains the difference between Luther and later Lutheran orthodoxy on “the clarity of Scripture”:

- **“Everything in the universe of Luther’s Reformation stands or falls with the thesis of the clarity of Holy Scripture. . . . The function of the thesis of the clarity of Scripture, however, is only properly recognized when the essential content has been somewhat correctly determined. For Luther it is not a question, as is later the case with Orthodox dogmatists, of the quality of transparency (*perspicuitas*) which statements in Scripture should in a specific way have. Rather, the expression *claritas scripturae* should be understood quite unambiguously from the contrast between light and darkness and the imagery associated with these two concepts . . . . Holy Scripture henceforth is presented as the pure proclamation of Christ and only this.”**<sup>19</sup>

### 3. Nestingen misinterprets Luther’s axiom: “Scripture interprets itself”

Nestingén:

- **“But in the light of the books always given primacy in the church, the whole of the Scripture’s message becomes transparently clear. For this reason, it does not require the services of an interpreter but, instead, interprets all attempts at interpretation.”**<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Forde, “Infallibility Language and the Early Lutheran Tradition,” *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue* 6. Eds. Paul C. Empie, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978) 120-37, here 129. Internal footnotes as follows: #27: P. Althaus, *Theology*, p.336; #28: WA 32:56, 21-27. *Sermons* 1530; #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.

<sup>19</sup> Inge Lønning, “No Other Gospel: Luther’s Concept of the ‘Middle of Scripture’ in Its Significance for Ecumenical Communion and Christian Confessions Today,” *Luther’s Ecumenical Significance*. Eds. Peter Manns and Harding Meyer (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 233-34.

<sup>20</sup> Nestingen, “Luther and Erasmus,” *The Captivation of the Will*, 17.

But Baptists, Roman Catholics, and others earnestly study the Bible, and they are not thereby converted to being Lutheran. As Oswald Bayer notes: "One is not kept from interpreting just because he is being interpreted at the same time."<sup>21</sup> Forde writes:

- "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?**"<sup>22</sup>
- "The fact that scripture is to be understood as self-interpreting in no way means therefore that the interpreter has nothing to do. On the contrary, it makes the task of interpreting much more demanding and exacting."<sup>23</sup>
- "The insistence that scripture interprets itself is simply **the hermeneutical correlate of justification by faith alone.**"<sup>24</sup>

Nestingen's claim that Scripture "does not require the services of an interpreter" fosters the illusion that biblical texts are plain, simple, and clear. In fact, all exegesis (interpretation) is theological, and there is no exegesis without presuppositions. Again Forde: "Every interpretation is, in fact, a covert if not an overt soteriology."<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. Nestingen uses the Bible as the prior miracle

Nestingen uses the Bible as the prior miracle, prior to the scandals of particularity and holiness/sin, making revelation in the cross and resurrection merely derivative. Nestingen:

- "As Luther understood it, it was **the biblical message** of Christ's justifying act – the gospel – that had driven him to this point."<sup>26</sup>
- "Luther had pitched **the prior authority of Scripture** against the hierarchical ranking of authorities encapsulating all of life."<sup>27</sup>
- "But in the light of Christ's death and resurrection, in the light of the overwhelming clarity of the books always given primacy in the church, **the whole of the Scripture message** becomes transparently clear."<sup>28</sup>
- "Rather, he [Luther] thought dialectically, working out of distinctions that he found to be demanded for the relationship between **the biblical message** and the particular situation in which he was implicated."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology. A Contemporary Interpretation*. Translated by Thomas A. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 69.

<sup>22</sup> Forde, "Authority in the Church," *A More Radical Gospel*. Gerhard O. Forde. *Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism*. Eds. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 65.

<sup>23</sup> Forde, "Scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpres," *A More Radical Gospel*, 74.

<sup>24</sup> Forde, "Authority in the Church," *A More Radical Gospel*, 66.

<sup>25</sup> Forde, "Law and Gospel in Luther's Hermeneutic," *Interpretation* 37 (1983) 243.

<sup>26</sup> Nestingen, *The Captivation of the Will*, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Nestingen, *The Captivation of the Will*, 11.

<sup>28</sup> Nestingen, *The Captivation of the Will*, 17.

<sup>29</sup> Nestingen, "The Two Kingdoms Distinction: An Analysis with Suggestion," *Word & World* 19 (1999) 269.



- “Luther’s own steadfast insistence on **the priority of the biblical word**, along with other historical factors, limited the authority he exercised in the emergence of the Luther tradition during the sixteenth century.”<sup>30</sup>
- “A reformation worthy of the name was above all a matter of restoration of **the biblical message**, with the theology of the church being retooled accordingly.”<sup>31</sup>
- “If the God preached in **the biblical word** acts as declared in actual fact, then situational or characterological differences are, in the end, irrelevant.”<sup>32</sup>

## 5. Nestingen revives Lutheran pietism’s use of the Bible

Nestingen uses the Bible as Lutheran Orthodoxy and Lutheran Pietism have done. For him “the Book” as a whole is revelation, and the clarity of Scripture is the perspicuity (transparency) of its texts.

For Luther, “the cross alone is our theology,” and the clarity of Scripture is the proclamation of Christ and only this. Forde:

- “One should ‘refer the Bible to Christ...nothing but Christ should be proclaimed.’<sup>30</sup> **Luther can even go so far as to say: ‘If adversaries use scripture against Christ, then we put Christ against the scriptures.’**<sup>31</sup> The Word of God therefore is ultimately Christ and the proclamation of the gospel.”<sup>33</sup>

## Part 3: Nestingen: The Bible gives access to eternal moral law

Nestingen has long promoted eternal moral law although he has done so covertly, under euphemisms and circumlocutions.

### 1. 1995: Nestingen conceals “eternal law” in the euphemism “the law’s continuance”

Nestingen writes:

- “But **the other, quieter dimension of the law’s continuance** grows out of its capacity to signify. . . .The law signifies the restoration of the defining relationship of life: the first commandment, with the second and the third, in relation to God; the remaining commandments, in relation to the neighbor and the earth. These are the relationships of redemption, the hope of faith. **Consequently, Luther insists, they are eternal: they can never end.** ‘The decalogue is eternal, in its reality, however, not as law, because in the future those things which the law demand will be realized.’”<sup>34</sup>

But the law does not have “two dimensions;” it has “two uses.” The phrase, “the law’s continuance,” is a deceptive way of saying the law continues. Nestingen claims the law reveals the shape of heaven to come; “[Relationships] are eternal; they can never end.”

<sup>30</sup> Nestingen, “The Two Kingdoms Distinction,” *Word & World* 19 (1999) 272.

<sup>31</sup> Nestingen, *The Captivation of the Will*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Nestingen, *The Captivation of the Will*, 18.

<sup>33</sup> Forde, “Infallibility Language and the Early Lutheran Tradition,” *L/RC* 6, 129. See footnote 18 above.

<sup>34</sup> Nestingen, “The End of the End: The Role of Apocalyptic in the Lutheran Reform,” *Word & World* 15 (1995) 200-201.

This claim that the law continues is incompatible with Luther's two kingdom theology.

## 2. 1999: Nestingen conceals "eternal law" in the euphemism "narrow sense"

In his essay, "The Two Kingdoms Distinction: An Analysis with Suggestion," Nestingen writes:

- "As short as it is, the word law is as **complex** and fraught with overtones as another three-letter beauty, sex. Basically, Luther uses 'law' in a **wide sense and a narrow one**, the first to speak of a force in human experience that sets limits or confronts the self, the second to speak of various codes, such as **the ten commandments**."<sup>35</sup>

The terms "wide" and "narrow" are not equivalent to Luther's two uses of law. Nestingen claims that Luther has an "apocalyptic, **relational** way of thinking."<sup>36</sup> His phrase, '**relational** way of thinking' echoes his 1995 claim that "[**relationships**] **are eternal: they can never end**." His "apocalyptic, relational way of thinking" is a way of throwing eternal law out the front door and sneaking it in the back door. Relationships can never end. This is God's eternal law. In this pietistic mindset divorce is not an option.

## 3. 2017: Nestingen conceals "eternal law" in the euphemism "the shape of life"

In 2017 in support of the joint NALC/LCC/LCMS' "Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures," Nestingen rejects one form of eternal law while promoting another. He rejects an Augustinian *lex aeterna* but affirms Lutheran orthodoxy's *lex aeterna*:

- "[The law's] significance continues, in fact, Luther will say for all eternity.<sup>13</sup> As my longtime friend and colleague Gerhard Forde pointed out, this is the key to understanding Luther's statements on the eternal quality of the law. The Law is not eternal in the sense of Augustine's *lex aeterna* doctrine—then it would displace the Gospel. But it is eternal in the eschatological sense. Its significance points ahead of itself to **the shape of life God intends for the creation and the new creation**. The significance of the Law is that **it points ahead to the shape of life** when God completes what He has begun in Christ Jesus."<sup>37</sup>

"[Internal footnote 13: 3:40-41, WA 39.1, 354. See also 2:47, 348.]"<sup>38</sup>

Nestingén implies that Forde was merely against one form of *lex aeterna*, but he was not opposed to the *lex aeterna* of Lutheran orthodoxy and Lutheran pietism. Forde:

- "Of course, the orthodoxy of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was not exactly that of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The orthodoxy of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, variously called Biblicism, Supernaturalism, or Repristination Theology, arose out of the religious awakenings of the time and was a reaction to the erosion of the traditional theology by the Enlightenment. It was inspired by different conditions and used a somewhat different methodology, but the end result was the

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<sup>35</sup> Nestingen, "The Two Kingdoms Distinction," *Word & World* 19 (1999) 270. Fn 5.

<sup>36</sup> Nestingen, "The Two Kingdoms Distinction," *Word & World* 19 (1999) 273.

<sup>37</sup> Nestingen, *The Necessary Distinction*, 175.

<sup>38</sup> Nestingen's first citation in his footnote 13 is "3:40-41," a likely typo. He probably means 4:40-41: "For Christ came to save what was lost (Matt 18:11), and to restore everything, as Peter states (Acts 3:21). Therefore, the law is not eliminated by Christ, but restored, so that Adam might become such as he was and even better." The second text referred to is 2:47: "Only the decalogue is eternal—as such, that is, not as law."

same as the orthodoxy of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This is especially true in the areas of our concern here, **the doctrine of law and gospel** and the doctrine of the atonement.”<sup>39</sup>

Nestingen, however, claims that Luther was against *lex aeterna* as a “hierarchical order from top to bottom,”<sup>40</sup> because Luther was “trained to think more from the bottom, in terms of what was right in front of him.”<sup>41</sup> In short, a “top-down” eternal law is bad, but a “bottom up” eternal law (the Decalogue), allegedly affirmed by Luther, is good. But this is to falsify Luther and Forde.

#### 4. 2017: Nestingen conceals “eternal law” in the euphemism “eschatological”

When Nestingen writes: “[The Law] is eternal in the eschatological sense,” he uses the word “eschatological” to mean “extends beyond.” Recall his phrase “the law’s continuance.” He claims that the law continues; it gives sight into divine structures of this world and the next. The law is revelation; it enables us to know God’s eternal design, the moral superstructure that governs heaven and earth. Nestingen claims Forde agrees with him:

- **“As my longtime friend and colleague Gerhard Forde pointed out**, this is the key to understanding Luther’s statements on the eternal quality of the law. The law is not eternal in the sense of Augustine’s *lex aeterna* doctrine – then it would displace the Gospel. **But it is eternal in the eschatological sense.** Its significance points ahead of itself to **the shape of life God intends** for the creation and the new creation.”<sup>42</sup>

Forde pointed out this out? That’s a deceptive claim. Did Forde privately say the opposite of what he wrote? Where is the evidence? There is a particular arrogance in making this claim and then saying in effect: “I am above giving evidence. Just trust me.”

Nestingen’s claim is a falsification of Forde. Forde consistently wrote that law is of this world, natural, and changing. Forde:

**“Law belongs to earth, not to heaven.** It is natural, not supernatural. It is a servant, not a master.

This 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 law.**”<sup>43</sup>

It is important to see where Nestingen makes this false claim about Forde. He makes it in the book, *The Necessary Distinction*, the report of the dialogue between the NALC, LCMS, and the LCC. Nestingen is implicitly claiming that Forde, despite what he wrote, really believed that law is eternal in that it reveals God’s divine design for this world and the next. This is a way of claiming Forde would support the claims for inerrancy and eternal law in “Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures.”

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<sup>39</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1969) 9.

<sup>40</sup> Nestingen, “Speaking of the End of the Law,” *The Necessary Distinction*, 170.

<sup>41</sup> Nestingen, *The Necessary Distinction*, 171.

<sup>42</sup> Nestingen, *The Necessary Distinction*, 175.

<sup>43</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1972) 111.

## Part 4: Nestingen, Holger Sonntag, and the NALC

### 1. Holger Sonntag and eternal moral law

Holger Sonntag is an LCMS Lutheran who translated Luther's Antinomian Disputations and published them under the title: *Solus Decalogus Est Aeternus: Only the Decalogue is Eternal*. For Sonntag "the Book" is revelation; it gives us eternal moral law. Sonntag writes in the Preface:

- "The title of this book is a direct quote from Luther's response in the 34<sup>th</sup> argument of the first disputation (WA 39.1413.17, see page 128): "Only the Decalogue is eternal;" it casts light on **the eschatological validity of the moral law** frequently emphasized by Luther in the disputations at hand."<sup>44</sup>

Lutheran inerrantists and biblicists claim this sentence in Luther provides proof that he held to eternal moral law, as Sonntag writes, "the eschatological validity of the moral law."

### 2. Nestingen agrees with Sonntag: The Decalogue is eternal moral law

Nestingen's "[The law] is eternal in the eschatological sense" is like Sonntag's "the eschatological validity of the moral law." Both mean the Decalogue is eternal moral law. Both claim this is Luther's meaning. For Nestingen, as in the LCMS, law remains the basic structure of the system.

- Nestingen's phrase, "**the law's continuance**," is a way of saying the law continues. It transcends the eschaton by revealing the divine structure of this world and the next.
- Nestingen's claim that "relationships are eternal; they can never end," shows he presupposes the law as a "**neutral essence**," that is revelatory. He is pointing not to Christ alone but to Christ and the law as a moral superstructure.
- Nestingen's claim that the law "points ahead of itself to the shape of life God intends for the creation and the new creation,"<sup>45</sup> is a way of claiming revelation is "the Book," rather than "the cross alone."

### 3. Nestingen and the NALC/LCMS/LCC: The Bible gives us eternal moral law

The drive for eternal moral law was a motivating factor for the NALC/LCMS/LCC's "Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures." The Preface to *The Necessary Distinction*, written by **James Nestingen**, John Pless and Albert Colver III, states:

- "In our conversations together, we have recognized that the significance of the Law/Gospel distinction is downplayed, questioned, and rejected by some within American Lutheranism. **Others have misused the distinction to promote an allegedly more liberated sexual ethic.**"<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Holger Sonntag, *Solus Decalogus Est Aeternus. Martin Luther's Complete Antinomian Theses and Disputations*. Edited and translated by Holger Sonntag (Minneapolis: Luther Press, 2008) 7.

<sup>45</sup> Nestingen, *The Necessary Distinction*, 175.

<sup>46</sup> *The Necessary Distinction*, 9-10. The Preface is signed by James Nestingen, John Pless, and Albert Collver III.

The “Guiding Statement” asserts that the Bible is:

- Part 2.4. *An inerrant book.* c. “We may not simply reduce scriptural reliability to ‘spiritual’ matters. . . . So also a limitation to ‘spiritual matters’ undermines **biblical authority in matters of morality and ethics.** Therefore, **we affirm scriptural reliability in every matter of doctrine and life.**”<sup>47</sup>

#### 4. Against Forde, Nestingen affirms inerrancy and eternal law

Nestingen was a gifted story-teller, at home in the biblicism of Lutheran pietism. In contrast, Forde, a leader in the Twentieth Century Luther Renaissance, strove to recover Luther’s own theology, which differs significantly from inerrancy and biblicism and provides a surer foundation for Twenty-First Century Lutheranism. Forde:

- “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 skepticism, 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.”<sup>48</sup>

Although Forde wrote the quote above in 1987, it accurately describes the 2017 “Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures” of the NALC/LCMS/LCC.

#### Part 5: If the Decalogue is eternal moral law, what about the following?

- If the Decalogue “points to the shape of the new creation,” what about the woman who married seven times (Matt 22:22-33, Mk 12:13-17, Luke 20:27-40)? If “relationships are eternal,” as Nestingen claims, whose wife will she be in heaven?
- What about the Third Commandment? The Sabbath is Saturday, yet over three hundred years the early church changed to worshipping on Sunday. How dare the church change God’s law.
- If the Ten Commandments are eternal law (Exodus 20:1-17, Deuteronomy 5:6-21), are the twelve commandments in Deuteronomy 27:9-26 also eternal law?
- If the Decalogue is eternal law, what about similar codes, like the Code of Hammurabi?

#### Part 6: Forde on law in Luther

Forde’s recovered Luther’s functional view of law over against Lutheran orthodoxy and Lutheran pietism’s view of inerrancy and eternal moral law (*lex aeterna*).

##### 1. Forde recovers Luther’s functional view of law

Below are a few representative Forde quotes on Luther’s functional view of law. Many more are found in “The Basics of Post-liberal Lutheranism.”

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<sup>47</sup> The NALC/LCMS/LCC’s “Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures,” Part 2. 4. *An inerrant book.* c.

<sup>48</sup> Forde, “Radical Lutheranism,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (Spring, 1987) 12-13.

- “The Reformation’s insistence upon justification by faith as an **eschatological event** brought with it a reassertion of the **functional understanding of law**. Luther especially insisted that law must be clearly distinguished from gospel and the proper ‘uses’ of the law carefully explained. The distinction between law and gospel and the doctrine of the uses of law are of **primary importance** because they contain the key to virtually everything we want to say subsequently about the Christian life.”<sup>49</sup>
- “[T]he Christian [does not have] some special epistemological advantages over the non-Christian when it comes to ‘knowledge’ of the law. It is precisely faith, however, which tells the believer that this is not so. **Faith tells him that law is something he has in common with the rest of mankind**. To be sure, **the Christian also has the laws of the Bible, but even these as laws are available to the non-Christian, to say nothing of non-Christian parallels of biblical law.**”<sup>50</sup>
- “What the Christian is given is a faith that clarifies for him the nature of his existence under the law in this age. Faith tells him that the ‘naturalness’ of the law means that **he does not have access to the will of God in the form of some eternal law of being**, but rather that in common with the rest of mankind **he must use his reason** in the context of his situation to work out the **best practical solutions to his problems.**”<sup>51</sup>
- “Law belongs to earth, not to heaven. **It is natural, not supernatural**. It is a servant, not a master. 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.**”<sup>52</sup>

## 2. Forde: Law is a power of this world, not an eternal ideal

Below are a few Forde quotes on Lutheran orthodoxy’s claims for *lex aeterna*.<sup>53</sup>

- “Thus Lutheranism has attempted to foster a theology which preserves the eschatological dialectic of the two ages. **This, in sum, is what the distinction between law and gospel is really about**. It means that for the Lutheran one cannot theologize in terms of a one-membered, eternal, ontological scheme, one must instead learn to think in terms of two ages and the fact that **the Christ event itself can be the only point of transition between the two ages**. All attempts to think in terms of **the *lex aeterna* of orthodoxy**, the historical process of Hofmann, the practical religion of Ritschl, or an undialectical theology of the new age must be rejected.”<sup>54</sup>
- “This eschatological understanding of law necessitates a fundamental reorientation at a number of crucial points. First, of course, is it means that **the orthodox concept of law is**

<sup>49</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:415.

<sup>50</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 211.

<sup>51</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 211-12.

<sup>52</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 111.

<sup>53</sup> More Forde quotes on law can be found in *The Basics of Post-liberal Lutheranism*, 29-33, 47-52.

<sup>54</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 214.

**displaced. Law cannot be understood as a *lex aeterna* in the sense that the orthodox held—an eternal standard which governs the system.”<sup>55</sup>**

- “The history of the idea of the ‘**third use of the law**’ offers little encouragement for its use in a truly evangelical ethic. **It has its roots ultimately in the orthodox concept of the *lex aeterna*** and has hardly served any other purpose than to impose a new kind of legalism.”<sup>56</sup>

## **Part 7: Forde on “Only the decalogue is eternal . . . not as law”**

In *The Law-Gospel Debate*, Forde shows how for Luther the law does not have eternal status as law. Rather, we have the Christ event alone and leave the rest to him. Forde:

- **Law is not a *lex aeterna*.** Forde credits Lauri Haikola with discovering “the law” as the area of major difference between Luther and later Lutheran orthodoxy. Forde: “In later Lutheran orthodoxy law was understood as an eternal, objective order, a *lex aeterna*, which described the ideal to which human life might aspire.”<sup>57</sup>
- **Law is that which attacks and accuses man in his self-sufficiency.** “This means that law, for Luther, cannot be *identified* with any set of propositions or prescriptions, **be it the decalogue or any other code.**”<sup>58</sup>
- **Law, sin, and death are all connected.** “**Law** is a power which threatens man because of **sin**, and remains a power until **death.**”<sup>59</sup>
- **Law eternally discloses sin.** “Luther states in his theses [2:45-47] ... that **the law remains to all eternity because it discloses sin** and must be fulfilled.”<sup>60</sup>
- **Law ‘written on our hearts’ means it is impossible to escape in this life.** “. . . [T]he law is ‘written on our hearts’ and **not on a theory about the eternal will of God.** The persistence of the law is due to the fact that it is utterly impossible for man to escape it in this life.”<sup>61</sup>
- **Law is never a neutral essence.** “As long as sin remains, the law will *always* accuse; it will never be a neutral ‘essence.’”<sup>62</sup>
- **The empty or quiescent law.** “The distinction Luther makes here is **not between the essence and the office of the law**, but between an empty or quiescent law and an accusing law written in man’s heart or mind. Only the angels and saints in heaven, he says, know the law as empty (*vacua*), because in them it is fulfilled. **Eschatologically, therefore, the law ceases** because it is empty (*vacua*)—no longer active.”<sup>63</sup>
- **The Latin term “res” refers to the reality of the new creature/the new creation.** “In another instance Luther argued that the law in the sense of the decalogue can be said to be

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<sup>55</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 195.

<sup>56</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 226.

<sup>57</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 176.

<sup>58</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 177.

<sup>59</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 179.

<sup>60</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 181.

<sup>61</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 182-83.

<sup>62</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 183.

<sup>63</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 183.

eternal, but only because the reality, the *res*, which is its fulfillment, is eternal. In this case the Antinomians had held that the law, like circumcision, is abolished at a point in time. Luther replied that circumcision, like baptism, is temporal, **'but only the decalogue is eternal, in its reality, however, not as law, because in the future life those things which the law demands will be realized.'** The decalogue remains eternally in the sense that the reality demanded remains, but *not as law*. Here the distinction is between reality (*res*) and law, but not between the essence of law and the office of law. **The term 'law' applies only to the "office," and not to the *res*."**

- **The law has no eternal status as law.** "The point seems to be that **Luther did not want to grant eternal status to the law as law.** Instead, **he defined law in its existential sense as that which accuses.** . . . The law ends (the accusation becomes powerless) when the new situation, the *res* to which the law points eschatologically, breaks in. When the law no longer accuses, it is emptied of its power and becomes what Luther called a *lex vacua*. The fulfillment of the law is the end of the law, and **an entirely new situation obtains:** man lives under the gospel. By faith man participates in the new situation under the gospel even though he still lives in this age and hears the voice of the law."<sup>64</sup>
- **The key distinction is not between the essence and office of law.** "Here the distinction is between reality (*res*) and law, but not between the essence of law and the office of law. **The term 'law' applies only to the "office," and not to the *res*.** The point seems to be that Luther did not want to grant eternal status to the law as law. Instead, **he defined law in its existential sense as that which accuses.** . . ."<sup>65</sup>
- **The difference is subtle but decisive for one's whole theology.** "But is not this really the same as the distinction between essence and office or, at the most, only a quibbling about words? **The difference, no doubt, is a subtle one, but still it is exceedingly important, for it reflects one's whole theological approach and thus affects one's entire system.**"<sup>66</sup>
- **Two ways of defining law lead to two different theological systems.** "The theological systems which result from these **two ways of defining law** are also quite different. In the first instance, law 'in its essence' remains the basic structure of the system. . . . In the second instance there is a decisive break. The law comes to its *end* in the eschatological event, the *res* which the law demands breaks in and brings the law to an end. This means that in place of a one-membered eternal scheme, a two-membered dialectical scheme governs the system. Only by participation in the eschatological event does the law come to its end for the believer. **This gives the terminology of the system a basically different thrust, even though that terminology may in many instances be the same.**"<sup>67</sup>

**Conclusion. The two ways of defining law lead to two different theologies:**

The Latin term "*res*" means the fulfillment, the new creature, the new creation.

1) **Lutheran orthodoxy, Lutheran pietism.**

Law 'in its essence' remains the basic structure of the system.

<sup>64</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 183-84.

<sup>65</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 184.

<sup>66</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 184.

<sup>67</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 185.



The law reveals the “*res*” the divine structure, a neutral essence.  
Faith gives special sight into the moral superstructure of earth and heaven.  
**One kingdom theology.**

2) **Luther and Post-liberal Lutheranism.**

“The term ‘law’ applies only to the “office” of law and not to the *res*.”  
Christ alone is the “*res*” and the only point of transition between this world and the next.  
Faith does not give sight into a divine moral superstructure.

**Two kingdoms theology.**

## 1. Luther/Forde: We have only the Christ event, not “the law’s continuance”

Forde:

- “Thus Lutheranism has attempted to foster a theology which preserves **the eschatological dialectic of the two ages**. This, in sum, is what **the distinction between law and gospel is really about**. It means that for the Lutheran one cannot theologize in terms of a one-membered, eternal, ontological scheme, one must instead learn to think in terms of two ages and the fact that **the Christ event itself can be the only point of transition between these two ages**. All attempts to think in terms of the *lex aeterna* of orthodoxy . . . must be rejected.”

“The Lutheran also realizes that theology can only work with the ‘systems’ or the thought forms of this world. He insists, though that ‘working with the thought forms of this world’ be *strictly* adhered to—that is, that these be recognized as the thought forms of *this* world and **not of some other world. For the promise of the new age is given in Christ only to faith, not to ‘sight’**; this is so because the Christ event makes it so. The Christ event is the bearer of absolute judgment and absolute grace; indeed, it is one only because it is also the other.”<sup>68</sup>

- “Christ became the *end* of the old form, and he now offers to faith **the promise of a new ‘content.’ But because of the nature of Christ’s appearance in this world**, faith enjoins man to live for the time being where he is and to become **a proper steward** of the form of this age.”<sup>69</sup>
- “Man’s thinking and acting in this life remain an acting and a thinking in this age, under **the eschatological limit**. The fact that it is also total grace means that man can be content to allow his acting and **thinking to remain as it is, totally in this age; he can trust in Christ entirely for the gift of the new age.**”<sup>70</sup>
- “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.**”<sup>71</sup>

## 2. Luther and Forde reflect Paul

God’s future kingdom is totally beyond our minds, our categories, and our expectations:

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<sup>68</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 213-14.

<sup>69</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 214-15.

<sup>70</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 224.

<sup>71</sup> Forde, *The Captivation of the Will*, 79.

- “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of anyone, what God has prepared for those who love him” (I Corinthians 2:9-10).
- “An eternal weight of glory beyond all comprehension” (2 Cor 4:17).
- “Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap” (Luke 6:38).

## Part 8: Forde: The Lutheran Confessions hold a functional view of law

Forde shows that the Lutheran Confessions hold a functional view of law:

- “The preface to *The Book of Concord* speaks of the ‘Word of God’ as being ‘pure, infallible, and unalterable.’<sup>18</sup> There is some debate among Lutherans as well as among Reformation scholars, however, as to whether Luther and the early Lutherans consistently attributed **formal infallibility to the Holy Scriptures as such. The majority are inclined to view that they did not.**<sup>19</sup> Luther’s writings abound, of course, with references to the inspiration of Holy Scriptures and to the authorship, words, phrases, thoughts, and sometimes even linguistic irregularities being the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup> However, what one is to infer from that as far as **formal infallibility is concerned, especially in light of passages which seem to indicate otherwise,** is a debatable question. In any case for our purposes here I think it is correct to say that early Lutheran theology refrained, especially because of its battle with ‘left wing’ factions in the Reformation, from using scriptural infallibility as a formalistic principle in the derivation of Christian dogma or ethical practice.<sup>21</sup> **That was a development which occurred in later Lutheranism.** For the most part infallibility language seemed to be applied to the Word of God in its function as gospel in order to back up the trustworthiness of the promises of God.”<sup>72</sup>
- “Thus the Lutheran insistence on a **functional** understanding of law. The Lutheran Confessional writings often speak of law in this sense. “. . .[T]he law always accuses and terrifies consciences.”<sup>29</sup> “. . . [T]he law was given by God first of all to restrain sins. . . . However, the chief **function** or power of the law is to make original sin manifest and show man to what utter depths his nature has fallen and how corrupt it has become”<sup>30</sup> Especially **articles 5 and 6 of the Formula of Concord** concern themselves with the **functional** understanding of law and gospel. Both the Epitome and the Solid Declaration speak of the ‘office’ of the law and define it **functionally** over against sin.

‘Everything that preaches about our sin and the wrath of God, no matter how or when it happens, is the proclamation of the law. On the other hand, the Gospel is a proclamation that shows and gives nothing but grace and forgiveness in Christ. At the same time it is true and right that the apostles and the preachers of the Gospel, just as Christ himself did, confirm the proclamation of the law and being with the law in the case of those who as yet neither know their sins nor are terrified by the wrath of God, as he says in John 16:8: ‘The Holy Spirit will convince the world of sin because they do not believe in me.’ In fact, where is there a more earnest and terrible revelation and preaching of God’s wrath over sin than the passion and death of Christ, his own Son? But as long as all this proclaims the wrath of God and terrifies man, it is not yet the Gospel nor Christ’s own proclamation, but it is Moses and the law pronounced on the unconverted.’<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Forde, “Infallibility Language and the Early Lutheran Tradition,” *Lutheran and Catholics in Dialogue* 6, 127-28.

“This passage is especially interesting because it demonstrates that **not content but function decides what law or the office of law is**. Everything, no matter how or when it is done, attacks, accuses, and exposes sin in ‘Moses’ and performs the office of law. Even, indeed especially, the passion and death of Christ, which would hardly be accounted as law according to content, nevertheless **functions** as law as long as it proclaims wrath and terrifies. Here it can clearly be seen that ‘law’ designates **a function** of the word of God.”<sup>73</sup>

## Part 9: Nestingen’s “one kingdom” theology. Joyful obedience, eternal law

The two ways of defining law yield conflicting views of the spontaneity of the Christian life.

### 1. For Nestingen “spontaneity” means joyful obedience to God’s eternal law

Faith changes one’s attitude about eternal law. Nestingen:

- “Classical, confessional Lutheranism insists on the proper distinction of Law and Gospel. Christ is the end of the Law. He takes on the accusations of **the Law** as they sound in the conscience and silences them in the forgiveness of sins. With this, He sends His Spirit to work in the heart, creating a new, **freedom-borne obedience** that turns to the neighbor in joy and service. In the grip of the Gospel, **believers do joyfully without the Law what the Law requires.**”<sup>74</sup>
- “Christ puts an end to the law’s idiosyncratic function in this age, its accusation, through the forgiveness of sin and in the creation of the new self that gladly goes about **the keeping of the law.**”<sup>75</sup>
- “The end of the law is an event of faith. Eternally, in conditions of everyday life, the demands that grow out of creaturely limits and obligations continue in effect. But to faith the demands are no longer demands – caught up in relation to God and the neighbor, **the requirements of relationship are no longer impositions but simply strophes in the rhythms of love.**”<sup>76</sup>

### 2. For Nestingen biblical law does not change; it is *lex aeterna*

While Nestingen acknowledges that cultural standards vary, he claims the Bible gives believers sight into God’s eternal moral law for this world and the next:

- “[Pro-GLBTQ ELCAers] dismiss as unclear biblical passages that produced a two-thousand-year-old, all but universal consensus concerning homosexual practice. This consensus continues to hold with force among Roman Catholics, the Orthodox, and most Protestant Churches, and **because it is biblical, isn’t subject to change.**”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Forde, “Forensic Justification and Law in Lutheran Theology,” *Justification by Faith. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 7*. Eds. H. Geroge Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 294-95. Internal footnotes: #29: Ap 4:38; BS 167; BC 112. #30: SA 3,2:1, 4; BS 435-36; BC 303. #31 FC SD 5:12; BS 955-56; BC 560; WA 15:228.

<sup>74</sup> Nestingen, *The Necessary Distinction*, 183.

<sup>75</sup> Nestingen, “The End of the End,” *Word & World* 15 (1995) 200.

<sup>76</sup> Nestingen, “The End of the End,” *Word & World* 15 (1995) 198.

<sup>77</sup> Nestingen, “Joining the Unchurched,” Essay posted on the WordAlone and Core websites.

- “Standards do vary in different cultures of the world as people attempt to come to terms with **the relationships that define them**. There is something provisional about these standards – **they can and should change**, a fact that has to be respected. **But the church has its own way of thinking**. . . . Having examined the Lutheran heritage, in its early writings and its authoritative interpretation, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion drawn by Wolfhart Pannenberg from **the biblical evidence**.”<sup>78</sup>

### 3. Nestingen is inconsistent about distinguishing moral from ceremonial law

- “Luther is convinced, over and against the medieval tradition, that the whole law has come to a terminus in Christ. **He explicitly rejects the tradition which excepted the moral law**, confining termination to the ceremonial and judicial law of Israel.”<sup>79</sup>
- “We may not simply reduce scriptural reliability to ‘spiritual’ matters. . . . a limitation to ‘spiritual matters’ undermines **biblical authority in matters of morality and ethics**. Therefore, **we affirm scriptural reliability in every matter of doctrine and life**.”<sup>80</sup>

### 4. Nestingen nods to “two kingdoms” but operates with one

To be sure, Nestingen pays lip service to the two kingdoms, but for him it is always **God’s law, not common reason**, that is primary in God’s left-hand kingdom. Because Nestingen promotes eternal law using euphemisms, his own theology remains a one-kingdom theology. Nestingen:

- “There are certain inherent human characteristics present by creation, that distinguish humanity from the other creatures of the earth, such as reason and freedom of the will. These powers function in the context of **God’s all-embracing law**, also inherent to the creation, promoting **obedience** or turning in the fall toward **disobedience**.”<sup>81</sup>
- “**The law signifies, setting out what God requires in terms of human behavior and attitudes**. But the actor in these words is neither the church nor the pious individual seeking to fulfill what the law signifies; the actor, the ultimate speaker, is God, constraining, demanding, confronting, accusing, taking on rebellious creatures seeking above all to be their own gods, especially religiously.”<sup>82</sup>
- “In issues where reason can claim purchase, there has to be some room for give and take—even a little hypocrisy is not necessarily so bad. But in **matters addressed by God’s law**, as reasonable as his law may be, the reasoning of sinners is not necessarily determinative.”<sup>83</sup>
- “The freedom rightly celebrated in American public life is political. It is freedom of choice, the freedom of self-determination. **The freedom of the gospel is freedom from choice**,

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<sup>78</sup> Nestingen, “Is there a law? The Lutheran Reformation and Homosexual Practice,” *Christian Sexuality. Normative and Pastoral Practices*. Edited by Russell E. Saltzman (Delhi, New York: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 2003) 32, 37.

<sup>79</sup> Nestingen, “The End of the End,” *Word & World* 15 (1995) 199.

<sup>80</sup> NALC/LCMS/LCC’s “A Guiding Statement and the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures,” Part 2.4.c. Nestingen, Mattes, and Paulson represented the NALC on the drafting committee for this statement.

<sup>81</sup> Nestingen, *The Captivation of the Will*, 15.

<sup>82</sup> Nestingen, *The Captivation of the Will*, 7.

<sup>83</sup> Nestingen, “Seeking a Biblical and Confessional Future,” 79.

freedom to enter **irretrievably** into the **defining relationships** of everyday life in service to the neighbor."<sup>84</sup>

- "Rather, he [Luther] thought dialectically, working out of distinctions that he found to be **demanded for the relationship** between **the biblical message** and the particular situation in which he was implicated."<sup>85</sup>
- "From the beginning, where he says the whole purpose of Christian theology is to learn to ignore the law, Luther repeatedly insists that the law has no place in the life of the believer."<sup>86</sup>

A one-kingdom theology offers security because one has access to God's divine law through the Bible. This belief, however, is a form of spiritual pride. Forde:

- "The old being can be coddled in more ways than one. It may also have a penchant for legalism, for seeking **security in the law**, and using the Word of God as **a means to dominate**. In such cases the authority that people seem to hanker after usually means just **the authority to dominate**. Under the guise of putting oneself under the Word of God, **one puts oneself in the position of using it to control and dominate**. It calls to mind one of those passages in Luther's *Freedom of the Christian* where he speaks of pastors who like to use the Word of God as rods with which to beat people. That must go."<sup>87</sup>

## 5. Note the absence of Forde's scholarship in Nestingen's theology

- Nestingen shows no awareness of Forde's recovery of Luther's functional view of law.
- Nestingen never mentions *lex aeterna* in Lutheran orthodoxy and pietism.
- Contrary to Forde, Nestingen presumes we have access to eternal law.
- Nestingen never acknowledges that Forde refers to himself as a post-liberal Lutheran.
- Nestingen never mentions why Forde says inerrancy is incompatible with law/gospel.

## Part 10: Forde and two kingdoms. Freedom, common reason, forgiveness

### 1. Spontaneity and down-to-earth freedom

Forde quotes:

- "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.**"<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Nestingen, "The Lutheran Reformation and Homosexual Practice," *Christian Sexuality*, 35.

<sup>85</sup> Nestingen, "The Two Kingdoms Distinction," *Word & World* 19 (1999) 269.

<sup>86</sup> Nestingen, "The End of the End," *Word & World* 15 (1995) 199.

<sup>87</sup> Forde, "The Authority of Scripture," from a panel presentation at Luther Seminary, April 24, 1984. Transcribed by Bradley Jenson.

<sup>88</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 141.

- **“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.”<sup>89</sup>

## 2. Two Kingdoms. Common reason is primary in God’s left-hand kingdom

Forde quotes:

- “What the Christian is given is a faith that clarifies for him the nature of his existence under the law in this age. Faith tells him that the ‘naturalness’ of the law means that he does not have access to the will of God in the form of some eternal law of being, but rather that **in common with the rest of mankind he must use his reason** in the context of his situation to work out the best practical solutions to his problems.”<sup>90</sup>
- “[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.

“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**

<sup>89</sup> Forde, “The Viability of Luther Today: A North American Perspective,” *Word & World* 7 (1987) 29.

<sup>90</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 211-12.

**the Bible, necessarily, to tell you what to do in social matters. You have a reason, use it!"<sup>91</sup>**

- "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.**

"The second thing that needs to be said is that **the fundamental concern of the civil use of the law is for the care of the social order.** The purpose of laws regulating sexual behavior is to foster healthy, joyous, and socially fruitful relationships and to guard against the social destruction that results from aberrant sexual behavior. The struggle to establish an order within which sexual behavior can be beneficial to society has been a long and arduous one . . . . When there are no controls on or boundaries to sexual activity, sex dominates both religion and social life. Sex is then a means of exercising power and establishing dominance. Advocates for relaxing the traditional Judeo-Christian stand against homosexual behavior often like to argue that such behavior was common and accepted in ancient societies. But a moment's reflection ought to be sufficient to reveal that such arguments can hardly be advantageous to their cause. Ancients, it seems, were simply not concerned about gender. Boys, women, slaves, could all equally be objects of desire. What was important was to dominate, to penetrate rather than be penetrated. Such considerations ought in any case to be sufficient to waken us to the realization that **the civil order itself hangs in the balance in this discussion.** It is really not sufficient just to lay claim to a little compassion or to muse a bit about 'what harm does it do?' **What is being harmed is the very social order itself. And that is the concern of the civil use of the law.**

"If genital sexual relations between people of the same gender are to be approved and/or blessed, the only way that could be done would be to bring them within something akin (at least) to the estate of marriage. **Can this be done in terms consonant with our understanding of the uses of the law? The thesis of this paper is that it cannot.**"<sup>92</sup>

- "The gospel as the unconditional promise of the kingdom **humanizes and naturalizes the law.** No doubt we can say even that it "contextualizes" the law—as long as we realize that the gospel does this and not just the passage of time or historical expediency. The distinction between **the two kingdoms** or kinds of rule is made precisely to foster such **humanization.**"<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Forde, "The Revolt and the Wedding: An Essay on Social Ethics in the Perspective of Luther's Theology," *The Reformation and the Revolution* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota: Augustana College Press, 1970) 85-86.

<sup>92</sup> Forde, "Law and Sexual Behavior," *LQ* 9 (1995) 8-9, 12; *The Essential Forde, Gerhard O. Forde. Distinguishing Law and Gospel.* Eds. Nicholas Hopman, Mark C. Mattes, and Steven D. Paulson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019) 155-56, 159. See also Donald H. Juel, "Homosexuality and Church Tradition," *Word & World* 10 (1990) 166-69.

<sup>93</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:459.

### 3. Moral law/ceremonial law: You can't have one without the other

Forde quotes:

- "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 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!"<sup>94</sup>
- "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? ... 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."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Forde, "Called to Freedom," (Presidential Address to the International Congress for Luther Research, 1993), *The Preached God. Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*. Gerhard O. Forde. Eds. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans) 259.

<sup>95</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:447.



#### 4. The Christian calling: To be stewards of law in this world

Forde quotes:

- “The gospel means that man’s entire hope is given in Jesus Christ; because of this, man can live in faith in this world and apply himself to being **a proper steward of God’s law.**”<sup>96</sup>
- “But because of the nature of Christ’s appearance in this world, faith enjoins man to live for the time being where he is and to become **a proper steward** of the form of this age.”<sup>97</sup>
- “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, we must write our own decalogue to fit the times.”<sup>98</sup>
- “It is too much (or perhaps too little?) to say, I think, that **respect for law** must be the political religion of the nation. That seems to imply that law is an absolute before which we must all unquestionably bow. It would be better to say that **care for the proper use of the law must be our constant and never-ending concern in this world.** For we are not called merely to be law-abiding, but to take care of this world, and **law must be tailored to assist in that task.**”<sup>99</sup>
- “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.**”<sup>100</sup>
- “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.**”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 211.

<sup>97</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 214-15.

<sup>98</sup> 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 *Sachenspiegel* for the Jews” (LW 35:167).

<sup>99</sup> Forde, “*Lex semper accusat?* Nineteenth-Century Roots of Our Current Dilemma,” *dialog* 9 (1970) 274; *A More Radical Gospel*. Gerhard O. Forde. *Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism*. Eds. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 49; *The Essential Forde*, 193.

<sup>100</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 111.

<sup>101</sup> Forde, “The Viability of Luther Today: A North American Perspective,” *Word & World* 7 (1987) 27.

## 5. Hiddenness of God, law, and the Christian life

Forde quotes:

- **God:** "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.**"<sup>102</sup>
- **Law:** "Law remains, in view of its potentially changing appearance, in a certain sense **hidden**. Its **content** will depend upon the concrete situation in creation at a given time; man cannot have it in the form of eternal principles in advance of any concrete situation."
- **The Christian life:** "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 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.**"<sup>103</sup>

### Part 11: Three caveats about "spontaneity"

#### 1. Spontaneity is not instinct but freedom to think and do

On occasion Forde described the spontaneity of the Christian life by the analogy of "running to pick up a hurt child."<sup>104</sup> This illustration can be misunderstood to mean that in the face of human need, **what is to be done is obvious and a matter of instinct**. That is not what the spontaneity of the Christian life is about. Rather the point of this illustration is freedom to think and do what is needed to restrain evil, as Forde writes:

- "Good works are works done in faith, the faith which has simply gotten over looking at itself and its "progress" and begun to look at the neighbor. . . . If there is such a thing as growth in

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<sup>102</sup> Forde, "Postscript to the Captivation of the Will," *LQ* 19 (2005) 78; Forde, *The Captivation of the Will*, 79; *The Essential Forde*, 125.

<sup>103</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:440-41.

<sup>104</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:441. *Justification by Faith. A Matter of Death and Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 54-55.

the Christian life, it is growth in that sort of thing—growth in grace, in forgetting oneself, in being grasped by the fact that **in the end we can be saved only by grace alone.**"<sup>105</sup>

- "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."<sup>106</sup>

## 2. Spontaneity is not about feeling joy; it's about being set free

Forde writes: "The insistence that only those works are truly good that are done **spontaneously and joyously** out of faith, hope, and love belongs to the very heart and soul of Luther's Reformation."<sup>107</sup>

This claim can be misunderstood in several ways. It does not mean that the Christian feels or is given "spontaneity and joy," and has a pure motivation. There is no pure motivation. It also does not mean that "feelings of spontaneity and joy," or the absence of such feelings, are evidence of God working, or not working, within us. The Christian is always *totus/totus*. Rather, spontaneity means we are free to be men and women in this world at this time because we have been "snatched from the jaws of the Devil and made God's own."<sup>108</sup>

Ebeling on faith gives freedom for works in all their brokenness:

- "Firstly, it is usual to regard the relation between faith and works—and for that we can now also say, between what God does and what man does---in the first instance a relationship between power and performance. Faith is supposed to give the power for works. This way of speaking requires to be very critically examined. The basic relation of faith and works is not the communication of power for works, but the communication of **freedom** for them---that is, **freedom to do the works in their limitedness as works and therefore also in the limitedness of the powers that are at our disposal for them.** Just as faith too does not, though it is easy to misunderstand it so, primarily receive the revelation of what is to be done; but **faith gives the freedom** to perceive the right, because faith assigns works to their due place."<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Forde, *Justification by Faith. A Matter of Death and Life*, 55.

<sup>106</sup> Forde, "Called to Freedom," *A More Radical Gospel*, 367-68.

<sup>107</sup> Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997) 109.

<sup>108</sup> Large Catechism, *Part 4, Baptism; Book of Concord* (Tappert) 446:83; (Kolb/Wengert) 466:83.

<sup>109</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, "The Necessity of the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," *Word & Faith* (London: SCM Press, 1963) 404.

### 3. All works, even our best works, are limited and broken, as is our reason

Talk of “good works” and “works that are truly good”<sup>110</sup> may incorrectly imply that we can judge which works are “truly good” and that we can judge good and evil in an ultimate sense. But we cannot, as Forde writes:

- “Apart from his revelation in Christ, God is hidden. We have, ultimately no means for penetrating that hiddenness. We don’t really even have a basis for making an absolute separation between evil and good. Many things we think are good turn out to be evil in the end and *vice versa*.”<sup>111</sup>

And Paul in 1 Cor 4:4: “I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.”

## Part 12: Forde: No compromise is possible between inerrancy and law/gospel

Forde quotes:

- “How are we to evaluate this method (scriptural inerrancy)? What are some of its advantages and disadvantages? First of all, it 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.**”<sup>112</sup>
- “For when all is said and done, the *a priori* belief that scripture must be **inerrant** in order 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. . . . And the belief that by this method I am placing myself *under* the Word of God may in fact be only an illusion. 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 just might be that God has not *in fact* provided us with that kind of guarantee.”<sup>113</sup>
- “We are fighting for **the restoration of the gospel**. It must be made absolutely clear here that it is *not* dedication to historical-critical research, it is *not* dedication to science or any other human endeavor which decides the matter. It is purely and simply dedication to the gospel. . . . **It is not possible to hold both these methods [inerrancy vs law/gospel] today, or to compromise between them without compromising and hence distorting the gospel.**

“I have been around colleges and universities now long enough to know how strong this faith [based on the inerrancy of scripture] is in the majority of cases. Usually it simply withers and dies, for when a child has drummed into him over and over again that if it can be shown that there are errors in scripture then his faith is groundless, he is doomed. When we allow someone to continue in this assumption, we are in fact only pushing him out on a limb and inviting

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<sup>110</sup> Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 109.

<sup>111</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 30.

<sup>112</sup> Forde, “Law and Gospel,” *Theological Perspectives*, 55.

<sup>113</sup> Forde, “Law and Gospel,” *Theological Perspectives*, 55-56.

someone to saw it off. By this method we produce nervous and timid Christians who can maintain their faith only by cutting themselves off from the world. As far as I can see, it is absolutely imperative that we operate today with **a method which enables us to face the world and to enter into a meaningful conversation with it.** In this, it seems to me, **the law-gospel method** offers much more fruitful possibilities without sacrificing any of the essentials of the faith.”<sup>114</sup>

- **“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.”<sup>115</sup>
- “John Henry Cardinal Newman voiced a common Catholic complaint when he called Protestantism a great abstraction divorced from the actual flow of history. Perhaps there is some truth to that if one has in mind a Protestantism that hides behind the inerrancy of scripture and seeks only to reprimarize the past. But the real question is what constitutes or guarantees true concreteness and ‘objectivity’ in the church. Can claims made about the institution do it? **A post-liberal Lutheran** is not likely to find such claims attractive or convincing. What attracts, however, is simply **the power of the gospel proclaimed as the word of the cross.** The theologian of the cross is quite 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 irreducibly ‘from without.’ And only so is it truly ‘objective.’”
- “Thus Lutheranism has attempted to foster a theology which preserves the eschatological dialectic of the two ages. **This, in sum, is what the distinction between law and gospel is really about.** It means that for the Lutheran one cannot theologize in terms of a one-membered, eternal, ontological scheme, one must instead learn to think in terms of **two ages** and the fact that **the Christ event itself can be the only point of transition between these two ages.**”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Forde, “Law and Gospel,” *Theological Perspectives*, 68.

<sup>115</sup> Forde, “The Catholic Impasse: Reflections on Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Today,” *Promoting Unity. Themes in Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue*. Eds. H. George Anderson & James R. Crumley Jr. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989) 72. Bolding added here and below for emphasis.

<sup>116</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 213-14.