

Appendix 3. Paulson’s Missouri Mindset

Contents

Part 1: Steven Paulson’s Missouri mindset	2
Part 2: Paulson’s one kingdom theology: Inerrancy and eternal law.....	4
1. The Bible is the prior miracle; it is inerrant and clear	4
2. Paulson/NALC/LCMS/LCC: The Bible is a perfect theological unity	6
3. Paulson: Lutheran hermeneutics is to hold to inerrancy and be passive	6
4. Paulson: Certainty is based on inerrancy and the preached promise	12
Part 3: Paulson: We have access to eternal law	14
1. Paulson uses the euphemisms “divine plan” and “divine limits”	14
2. Paulson: “The Law” is God’s eternal standard, <i>lex aeterna</i>	14
3. Paulson misrepresents Forde on the “essence” of law	17
4. Paulson: “The Law” is not <i>lex aeterna</i>	18
5. Paulson affirms and denies separating moral and ceremonial law	18
6. Paulson affirms and denies the Decalogue is eternal moral law	20
7. Paulson/Hopman: God’s eternal law is “written on the heart”	21
8. Paulson: The law has cracks; we accommodate exceptions	22
Part 4: Paulson affirms and denies a third use of law	23
1. Paulson uses the euphemisms “divine plan” and “divine limits”	23
2. Paulson affirms a third use of law but avoids the term “third use”	23
3. Paulson denies a third use of law	24
Part 5: Paulson: The Christian is “above the law,” “outside the law”	25
1. Paulson avoids a third use by “operates above the law,” “outside the law”	25
2. Paulson’s one kingdom theology: The Christian “cannot sin”	26
3. Paulson: Christian freedom has few practical consequences.....	26
4. Paulson has little good to say about common reason.....	28
Part 6: Paulson claims Forde says: Expect radical transformation	30
Part 7: Forde’s editors made changes in some essays which give the false impression that Forde conformed to a Missouri mindset.....	33

* * * * *

Part 1: Steven Paulson's Missouri mindset

In 1998 Steven D. Paulson became Forde's successor at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. A student and friend of Forde's, Paulson also became the main editor of the *Lutheran Quarterly's* three volume collection of Forde material.¹



Steven D. Paulson

Like Nestingen, Paulson consistently has high praise for Forde. In 1993, while still a professor of religion at Concordia College in Moorehead, Minnesota, Paulson wrote that his scholarly ambition was **to extend** Forde's theology:

- "This definition of dogma and the argument for **a new complex of ideas seeks to extend Gerhard O. Forde's thesis that theology is for proclamation** in his book of the same title: *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990)."²

Paulson is adept at spinning verbal confections and using graphic imagery for dramatic effect and shock value.³ But his "new complex of ideas" is chiefly a return to inerrancy and eternal moral law (*lex aeterna*).

Paulson and his co-editor, Mark Mattes, write an introduction in each of the Forde volumes published by *Lutheran Quarterly*. Such introductions are the natural place to present Forde as he

¹ *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); *The Preached God. Gerhard O. Forde. Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*. Eds. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); *The Essential Forde. Gerhard O. Forde. Distinguishing Law and Gospel*. Eds. Nicholas Hopman, Mark C. Mattes, and Steven D. Paulson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019).

² Steven D. Paulson, "From Scripture to Dogmatics," *Lutheran Quarterly* 7 (1993) 164-65:

"When one begins with the assertion that the church's dogma and God's dogma are the same at the crucial points which are demanded by the church's work of proclamation (not interpretation), then a different complex of ideas arises over those assumed by the old process of moving from Scripture to dogma through interpretation: **instead of interpretation of Scripture there is proclamation**, for intersubjective dialog there is the preaching office, and the truth reached is preliminary only for sight not for faith. Dogmatics is not the test of provisional church dogmas which are distinguished from God's own, but is the employment of **God's own dogma** for the purpose of true proclamation.⁸

⁸This definition of dogma and the argument for **a new complex of ideas seeks to extend Gerhard O. Forde's thesis that theology is for proclamation** in his book of the same title: *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

Its truth is pragmatic, that is, truth is assured when dogma is used in such a way that it forces or effects proclamation which drives to Christ." (164-65, footnote 169). Bolding added here and below for emphasis.

³ A few examples from Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God* 1 (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2018): "But Isaiah's ejaculation, 'Truly you are a God who hides himself. . .'(43); "So Erasmus cried out: who then would ever love God if God is found in shit?" (170); "What comes inside (from the outside) goes through the stomach and is defecated—bypassing the real problems in life, which is not the stomach" (196); "In fact, God is not the source of evil, but he truly is the one who pushes evil forward as with a shove, until it solidifies or petrifies in the human heart" (198).

understood himself and wanted to be understood. Forde called himself a “post-liberal Lutheran.”⁴ But Paulson and Mattes do not present Forde as he understood himself, as a post-liberal Lutheran. Forde wrote straightforwardly about why for him there was no going back to Lutheran orthodoxy’s claims for inerrancy and eternal law, claims which distort and undermine Luther’s own two kingdom theology.

Forde’s importance begins with his recovery of Luther’s answer to the question: What is revelation? Luther: “The cross alone,” in contrast to the common Protestant answer: “The Book.” Forde: “The recovery of the **eschatological act character of revelation** is quite **necessary** for the proper understanding of the gospel.”⁵

Forde’s recovery of revelation as “the cross alone” led to a **functional definition of law** over against Lutheran orthodoxy’s material definition of law as *lex aeterna*. Forde:

- “The Reformation’s insistence on justification by faith as an **eschatological event** brought with it a reassertion of the **functional understanding of law**. . . The distinction between law and gospel and **the doctrine of the uses of law** are of **primary importance** because they contain virtually everything we want to say about the Christian life.”⁶
- “Law is a *general* term for describing the nature of man’s existence in this age. It is the command which man meets in society, demanding order, and it is also the judgment of his way of life which drives him to the cross. It is defined in a general sense as that which afflicts the conscience. **Nothing material is said about the content of law** as such; that, apparently, may depend upon concrete circumstances. Since law is defined in this general way, **no great point is made about a distinction between a natural or a revealed law.**”⁷
- “This eschatological understanding of law necessitates a **fundamental reorientation** at a number of crucial points. First, of course, it means that **the orthodox concept of law is displaced**. Law cannot be understood as a *lex aeterna* in the sense that the orthodox held—an eternal standard which governs the system.”⁸

Forde drafted the blueprints for a fundamental reorientation of law and Gospel based on his Luther research and modern Biblical scholarship. As a major leader in the Twentieth Century Luther Renaissance, Forde helped build a firm foundation for Twenty First Century Lutheranism.

But Paulson does not engage Forde on basic questions: What is revelation? What is law? Why not inerrancy? Why are the two kingdoms a **necessary consequence** of the Gospel? Notably Paulson’s 2011 book, *Lutheran Theology*, has six inconsequential footnotes to Forde.⁹

The *Lutheran Quarterly*’s third Forde volume, *The Essential Forde*, includes four chapters from Forde’s first book, *The Law-Gospel Debate*. But Paulson and his co-editors Mattes and Nicholas Hopman omit

⁴ Forde, “The Catholic Impasse: Reflections on Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Today,” *Promoting Unity*. Eds. H. George Anderson & James R. Crumley Jr. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989) 67-77; Forde, “Lutheran Ecumenism: With Whom and How Much?” *Lutheran Quarterly* 17 (2003) 453-55; *A More Radical Gospel*, 171-88.

⁵ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969) 217.

⁶ Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*. Eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 2:415.

⁷ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 194.

⁸ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 195.

⁹ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology* (London: T & T Clark International, 2011).

Forde's last two chapters on why law-gospel rightly understood **necessarily** leads to two uses of law, two kingdoms, and how to think theologically. Forde:

- "Perhaps this [discussion of Barth] gives deeper insight into the complexity of the debate over law and gospel. It leads to basic questions about how one thinks theologically—questions to which I shall return **in the two final chapters.**"¹⁰

In those two final chapters Forde shows the distinctiveness of Luther's **two kingdom** theology over against Lutheran orthodoxy's **one kingdom** theology (inerrancy, eternal law, and the third use of law).

Forde wrote: "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.**"¹¹ Forde took a firm, uncompromising stance, yet Paulson ignores Forde and endorses inerrancy.

It could be said that Forde got out of Biblicism, but Paulson did not. This can be seen even in the title of Paulson's three-volume theology, *Luther's Outlaw God*.¹² The title implies that "The Law" is central, primary; Christ is out-law, secondary. This reflects Paulson's Missouri mindset: One kingdom, an inerrant Bible, and God's eternal law.

Part 2: Paulson's one kingdom theology: Inerrancy and eternal law

Despite what Paulson claims, there is no "clear," "simple," "plain," understanding of historical materials, including Scripture. To claim or even infer such is a trick of the Evil One. Nevertheless, Paulson affirms inerrancy:

1. The Bible is the prior miracle; it is inerrant and clear

- **2003:** "Scripture cannot be understood as dogmatic content *about* God and humans, but as the Word from God. That reversal of directions assumes that **Scripture is clear** and is in no need of especially endowed interpreters, thus **removing subjectivism** in either its individual or collective forms."¹³ [To the contrary, see Forde from 1995 in the box on page 10 below.]
- **2003.** "At this point a person could fruitfully consider Luther's two kinds of clarity (external and internal) as he discusses them in *Bondage of the Will*. And one could also take up **the Orthodox Lutherans** who distinguished 'obscurity in the object contemplated and that which lies in the subject contemplating it.' As **Quenstedt** put it, **'The words of the Testament are in themselves very perspicuous**, but are variously interpreted; because many neglecting the literal and proper sense, studiously seek a foreign one...because of the

¹⁰ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 170.

¹¹ 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) 67.

¹² Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God. Hiddenness, Evil, and Predestination 1; Luther's Outlaw God. Hidden in the Cross 2* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019); *Luther's Outlaw God. Sacraments and God's Attack on the Promise 3* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021).

¹³ Paulson, "Lutheran Assertions Regarding Scripture," *Lutheran Quarterly* 17 (2003) 380; *Justification is for Preaching*. Ed. Virgil Thompson (Eugene Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012) 225.

perverseness or imbecility of men. **The obscurity which lies in the subject must not be transferred to the object'!**"¹⁴

- **2007: The 'letter' of scripture** does not primarily refer to a 'spiritual' meaning behind the text but **is an inseparable embodiment of spiritual activity** that remakes the human anew – calls forth trust in God."¹⁵ [**"An inseparable embodiment of spiritual activity" is a euphemism for inerrancy.**]
- **2013.** ". . . [T]he ELCA lost track of the original source of Scripture, which is the **inerrancy in the letters** that come through an **inerrant Holy Spirit**. . . [T]he Word who is Jesus Christ, who became incarnate to dwell among us, is not some abstract word above the concrete, specific, **written words of Scripture**."¹⁶
- **2017.** The NALC/LCMS/LCC's "Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures." Part 2: What kind of Book is the Bible? 4. **An Inerrant book** – a book that is completely reliable. c. We may not simply reduce scriptural reliability to 'spiritual' matters. To do so is to invite a Gnostic sort of faith that not only questions the Bible's truthfulness in such matters as creation, but in the whole of redemption as well So also, a limitation of biblical reliability to 'spiritual matters' undermines **biblical authority in matters of morality and ethics**. Therefore, **we affirm scriptural reliability in every matter of doctrine and life**."¹⁷ [**Nestingen, Mattes, and Paulson represented the NALC on the dialogue committee and adopted this "Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures."**]
- **2018.** "The **written word of Scripture** is not obscure—as **Erasmus** had hoped it would be, full of possible interpretations over which one can exercise free choices. Instead, it is **perspicuous—clear, plain, obvious, unmistakable**—thus not hidden but revealed. In God there are many things hidden—as Scripture (and experience) says plainly, such as 'Of that day no one knows but the Father' (Mark 13:32). But **Scripture itself is** not God hidden in majesty; it is **God revealed—plainly**."¹⁸
- **2018:** "When Luther says the external 'pertains to the ministry of the word,' he is referring to the preaching office, or public fountain. He makes it doubly clear that **Scripture's written words** are 'brought forth into the **clearest light** and proclaimed to the whole world (*sic*)."¹⁹ [**It is not "Scripture's written words" that are brought forth into clearest light, but Christ himself who is brought forth into clearest light.**]

¹⁴ Paulson, "Lutheran Assertions Regarding Scripture," *Lutheran Quarterly* 17 (2003) 385; *Justification is for Preaching*, 225.

¹⁵ Mattes and Paulson, "Introduction," *The Preached God*. Gerhard O. Forde, 6-7.

¹⁶ Paulson, "Scripture, Enthusiasm, and the ELCA," *LOGIA* 22 (2013) 53.

¹⁷ "God's Word Forever Shall Abide. 'A Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures,'" by the NALC, LCMS, and LCC (Lutheran Church Canada). 2017. The 'Guiding Statement' is found 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: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).

¹⁸ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 1:97.

¹⁹ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 1:99.

- **2018.** "So Scripture is not perforated with God's hiddenness and dark obscurity; it is **clear from beginning to end**—though God retains his hiddenness apart from Scripture."²⁰
- **2019.** "**Scripture is clear** and God's revelation is the most certain word, not the uncertain absoluteness of God's being."²¹

2. Paulson/NALC/LCMS/LCC: The Bible is a perfect theological unity

- **1993:** "The preacher's creativity in proclamation is not in identifying schools of thought in Scripture or adjudicating conflicts of interpretation, but in **re-discovering the unity of Scripture** and by resisting the human tendency to obscure. It is our universal, human resistance to eschatological clarity, even *within* Scripture's pages, that requires creative use of historical knowledge of Bible and church, the preacher's personal insight, and social awareness so that others may hear God's own Word when preachers preach. **Once the clear and united message of Scripture** is uttered, the preacher is forced to rely on the promise of the Holy Spirit to divide the Word properly into law and gospel in the conscience of believers."²² [In other words: Just preach the text. Conflicts within Scripture will be sorted out in the eschaton.]
- **2003.** "The proclamation of this written text of God's dealings with his people . . . is the way that a *writing* has such divine, original and final power."²³
- **2017: The NALC/LCMS/LCC's** "Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures, Part 2: What Kind of Book is the Bible? **3. A Perfect Unity.** b. Lutheran theology also acknowledges that there are no conflicting or contradictory conceptions of God and His ways with humanity, but rather **a perfect theological unity.** . . ." [Nestingen, Mattes, and Paulson represented the NALC on the dialogue committee and adopted this Guiding Statement.]

3. Paulson: Lutheran hermeneutics is to hold to inerrancy and be passive

There is no proclamation without interpretation. Even a translation is an interpretation. Thus, it is a kind of self-deception to think that only other traditions use hermeneutics, but we Lutherans do not. Paulson:

- **1993:** "*Sola scriptura* is precisely faith's audacity in asserting that God has established a preaching office whose true proclamation **assumes the authority of God's own dogma** which is sufficient for the task at hand and without error for faith."²⁴ [The phrase "God's own dogma" is a euphemism for inerrancy.]
- **2003:** "**Law and gospel is thus not a method of preaching or interpretation,** but the way that God authors you as unmistakable sinner in yourself; then outside yourself, in Christ,

²⁰ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 1:100.

²¹ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 2:318.

²² Paulson, "From Scripture to Dogmatics," *Lutheran Quarterly* 7 (1993) 167.

²³ Paulson, "Lutheran Assertions Regarding Scripture," *Lutheran Quarterly* 17 (2003) 383; *Justification is for Preaching*, 228.

²⁴ Paulson, "From Scripture to Dogmatics," *Lutheran Quarterly* 7 (1993) 165.

God authors you as pure saint."²⁵ [If "law and gospel" is not a "not a *method* of preaching or interpretation," then it is a euphemism for inerrancy, a way of saying we Lutherans have something that is not hermeneutics.]

- **2003:** "The present preoccupation with moral casuistry as a way of determining the Bible's authority, perhaps especially in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, namely 'What does the Bible demand or allow on this particular issue?' is a system of this sickness in the church, not the cause. One step beneath this symptom lies a deeper, 'systemic' theological problem, **the preoccupation with method**, just as was once the case with the church's development of rules concerning proper allegorical method. Today when we realize that the historical-critical method did not deliver an independent means of rising above denomination and private opinion, we occupy ourselves with fights between old critical and new cultural-linguistic versions of establishing some meaning or authority from Scripture....**Scripture is one and alone, Scripture is clear, Scripture interprets itself, and all of this happens not in the realm of ideas, but for you** in the living word of proclamation with both offices: law and gospel. The proclamation of this written text of God's dealings with his people, proclaimed to actual sinners in the present so that, as Christ says to his preachers, 'he who hear you hears me,' is the way that **a writing has such divine, original and final power.**"²⁶ [In other words, we don't need law/gospel or historical criticism because we have something that is not hermeneutics. We just preach the Bible; it is our final authority.]
- **2007:** "Forde points out that **our hermeneutics – unlike all contemporary approaches to hermeneutics** – must enable us to be rendered **passive** before God. Are we being exegeted by the Scriptures – do we allow them to scrutinize our lives and give us God's promise? The authority of Scripture lies in its power to find, expose, and establish the being of its hearer."²⁷ [Forde does not propose a non-hermeneutical approach to Scripture. He affirms the importance of the law/gospel method and historical criticism.]

Luther

- "If the opponents use Scripture against Christ, then we use Christ against Scripture."²⁸
- "What does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even though St. Peter or Paul taught it; again, what preaches Christ would be apostolic, even though Judas, Annas, Pilate and Herod did it."²⁹
- "God and the Scriptures are two different things, as different as Creator and creature. . . . Take Christ out of the Scriptures, and what will you have left in them?"³⁰

²⁵ Paulson, "Lutheran Assertions Regarding Scripture," *Lutheran Quarterly* 17 (2003) 381-82; *Justification is for Preaching*, 226.

²⁶ Paulson, "Lutheran Assertions Regarding Scripture," *Lutheran Quarterly* 17 (2003) 383; *Justification is for Preaching*, 228.

²⁷ Mattes and Paulson, "Introduction," *The Preached God*. Gerhard O. Forde, 25.

²⁸ WA DB 39: 1, 47.

²⁹ LW 35: 396.

³⁰ LW 33: 25, 26.

Bayer

- “For when I read and hear Scripture, then I note that these stories talk about me; they tell *my story*. I appear in them long before I obey them. In this way the text precedes me and this text addresses me. In that I myself am addressed, I am freed at the time to listen, even if it means to listen critically, with all my powers, with my body and soul and all my thinking ability. **One is not kept from interpreting just because he is being interpreted at the same time.**”³¹

Burgess

- **“Opponents of historical criticism presuppose the unity of Scripture.** Is this a unity such as Christians posit for the Trinity, a unity which is finally a mystery? Or is this a unity which excludes contradictions, a unity built on logic, so that even if items stand in contradiction, a contradiction cannot exist because **the presupposition of unity does not allow for contradiction?** In that case the reader is expected to suspend judgment, to oppose his intellect, because of the supreme authority of the presupposition of unity. Most of the time, to be sure, the unity of Scripture is defended by means of an overarching concept such as the Word, or the covenant, or salvation history, or God’s plan, or God’s kingly rule, or God’s grace.

“The rejoinder by the historical critics is simple: **How are difficulties solved by refusing to deal with them?** More importantly, is it not in fact true that instead of working on the basis of the unity of Scripture, **each stream of Christian tradition uses its own theological approach,** its own canon within the canon, to sort out and solve the difficulties in Scripture?”³²

Forde

- **1964.** “First, then, **the verbal inspiration method.** According to this method, faith’s question, ‘How do you know?’, the question about the authority of the Word of God, is answered by the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of scripture. Scripture is the Word of God, i.e., the Word of God and scripture are identical, because scripture is in all its parts and in its very words inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. . . . What is the thinking behind this position? According to Francis Pieper, the celebrated Missouri Synod theologian of the turn of the century, **it is so because it is a position which is established *a priori*.** What does this mean? It means that it is so because it *must be so* in order for the scripture to be considered the Word of God. . . . **The position must be established *a priori*,** before the actual examination of the evidence, otherwise it cannot be considered a sure basis for faith.”³³
- **1964.** “This briefly is **the verbal inspiration method.** How are we to evaluate this method? What are some of its advantages and disadvantages? First of all, it has the obvious advantage of being exceedingly simply and readily understandable. It follows the lines of a simple logical

³¹ Oswald Bayer, “What Makes the Bible Become Holy Scripture?” *Martin Luther’s Theology. A Contemporary Interpretation*. Tr. Thomas A. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 69.

³² Joseph A. Burgess, “Lutheran Interpretation of Scripture,” *The Bible in the Churches. How Various Christians Interpret the Scriptures*. Ed. Kenneth Hagen (Marquette: Marquette University Press, 1998; Third Edition) 111.

³³ Forde, “Law and Gospel,” *Theological Perspectives*, 52-53.

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."³⁴

- **1964.** "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.**"³⁵
- **1969.** "He [Gerhard Ebeling] has point out that it is quite evident in the contemporary debate that we have to do with differing uses of the concept of law. . . . [I]t could mean that the differences are symptomatic of a much deeper difference in the entire method of theologizing. . . This means, for instance, that the problem cannot be solved, as many biblical scholars assume, merely **by exegetical analysis of the use of the word 'law' in the Old and New Testaments.** What is involved rather is the very difficult problem of the development of theological concepts in which one must consider both the history of conceptual usage and the thing itself which one wants to convey by means of the concepts. It is therefore impossible for systematic theology simply **to capitulate to biblical philology,** especially in the case of a concept like law, for two reasons. First, the biblical usage itself is not consistent; there is no such thing as *the* biblical concept of law. Second, the concept of law is bound to a history, which means **it may have to be used differently today to convey what the text originally intended.** It is the task of systematic theology, Ebeling has said, to take account of the manifold character of the history of language and to work through this history to express clearly the reality inherent in the Christian proclamation."³⁶
- **1984.** ". . . Paul and Matthew are at irreconcilable odds . . ." ³⁷
- **1987.** "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."³⁸
- **1990.** "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

³⁴ Forde, "Law and Gospel," *Theological Perspectives*, 55.

³⁵ Forde, "Law and Gospel," *Theological Perspectives*, 56.

³⁶ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 170-71.

³⁷ Forde, *Christian Dogmatics* 2:447.

³⁸ Forde, "Radical Lutheranism," *Lutheran Quarterly* (1987) 12-13; *A More Radical Gospel*, 12.

itself only by ignoring **the development of careful historical investigation of the Scripture and the problematics that gave rise to that historical work.**"³⁹

- **1991.** 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?**"⁴⁰
- **1991.** "The insistence that **scripture interprets itself** is simply the hermeneutical correlate of **justification by faith alone.**"⁴¹
- **1992.** "If we grasp what Luther's theology is about, we will see that at stake is a different understanding of **how a truly 'objective' reality is mediated**. The eschatological word draws its objectivity from the fact that it is **an 'alien' word entirely from without, from God's future** which is the end of us. It can live, therefore, only from its own inherent power."⁴²
- **1995.** "*Sui ipsius interpretes* [scripture interprets itself] is simply the hermeneutical correlate of justification by faith alone. In this light, formal claims made for extra-scriptural authority structures and/or **formal declarations about biblical authority (inerrancy, infallibility, etc.)** are constructs which in one way or another are **simply a reflex of the needs of the subjective *sensus proprius*.**"⁴³
- **1997.** "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.**"⁴⁴
- **2004.** "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.**"⁴⁵

Lønning

- **"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,

³⁹ Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 68.

⁴⁰ Forde, "Authority in the Church," *A More Radical Gospel*. Gerhard O. Forde, 65.

⁴¹ Forde, "Authority in the Church," *A More Radical Gospel*. Gerhard O. Forde, 66.

⁴² Forde, "The Meaning of *Satis Est*," *Lutheran Forum* (1992) 14-18, here 16; *A More Radical Gospel*. Gerhard O. Forde, 166.

⁴³ Forde, "*Scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpretes*: Reflections on the Question of Scripture and Tradition," *A More Radical Gospel*. Gerhard O. Forde, 72. This essay by Forde differs significantly from Forde's original text including this passage. **The editor Steven Paulson changed the text by adding a sentence that breaks Forde's logic and changes his argument.** The portion above is from Forde's original uncorrupted text. For a comparison of Forde's original text and *Lutheran Quarterly's* corrupted text, see [Forde's editors have tampered with his text- 2](#).

⁴⁴ Forde, "The One Acted Upon," *dialog* 36:1 (1997) 57-58.

⁴⁵ Forde, *Captivation of the Will. Luther vs Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage*. Ed. Steven Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 79; Forde, "Postscript to *The Captivation of the Will*," *Lutheran Quarterly* 19 (2005) 78.

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.**"⁴⁶

Oberman

- **"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.'**² **This historically innovative principle forms the surprising basis of his response to Erasmus, in which we can also find a new and crucial point of departure for present-day theology.** It is this principle that distinguishes Luther from the biblicism of both his own and later eras."⁴⁷
- *"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*.**"⁴⁸

L/RC 6. Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church, 1978.

- "Some Lutherans even today regard **the doctrine of the 'inerrancy of Scripture'** as the true touchstone of faithfulness to the Lutheran Confessions.

"Others, however, have come to hold that **such an emphasis on the letter of Scripture is not compatible with the doctrine of justification by faith,** the article by which 'the Church stands and falls.' Put most simply, this doctrine affirms that because God justifies the ungodly, forgiving sinners for Christ's sake, nothing else can be trusted for salvation. Neither **scriptural inerrancy** nor, even less, the infallibility of the Church's teachers, teaching offices, and doctrines is the basis of the Christian's confidence. All these may err, but not the gospel of God's unconditional mercy in Jesus Christ to which the biblical writings are the primary witness. . . . **The gospel, so to speak establishes its own transcendence. Its truth becomes known and its authority acknowledged only upon being heard through the Word, received in the sacraments, and believed through the power of the Spirit.**"⁴⁹

⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁷ Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) 221. Internal footnote #2: LW 33:25.

⁴⁸ Oberman, *Luther*, 225.

⁴⁹ *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VI*, Eds. Paul C. Empie, Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978) 62-63. Hereafter L/RC 6.

- For more on inerrancy see pp. 23-28, 39-40 of *The Basics of Post-liberal Lutheranism*.

4. Paulson: Certainty is based on inerrancy and the preached promise

- **2003:** “The proclamation of this written text of God’s dealings with his people, proclaimed to actual sinners in the present so that, as Christ says to his preachers, “he who hears you hears me,” is the way that **a writing has such divine, original and final power.**”⁵⁰
- **2018:** “Faith is **absolute assurance** because it depends upon God’s most public revelation in the form of a **preached promise**....”⁵¹
- **2018:** “Precisely how anti-hidden, or clear, is Scripture? It is wholly and doubly so—not as an object of Scholastic inquiry, but as the external word of the preaching office used by the Holy Spirit to make *faith* rather than normal legal ‘understanding’ or reason. Consequently, Luther’s first step in describing a promise rather than a law is to reject theology’s hiddenness of Scripture and say that if there is going to be **full assurance and certainty in faith**, it necessarily comes from something other than an inner human power. It is given from the outside by **a preacher authorized by the clear word of Scripture** to give a promise, which the Spirit uses to make *faith* the highest degree of certainty—*full assurance*.”⁵²
- **2018:** “The heart of Luther’s *sola Scriptura* is not simply that tradition, or the teaching hierarchy, must yield to Scripture’s text but that Scripture is God’s ‘thing’ or place in which he reveals himself wholly and completely, withholding nothing. Of course, this is not without the inner and outer clarity of Scripture, the preaching office, and the Holy Spirit’s hearing, but Luther is saying—against all convention—that God is conveyed absolutely in a created thing, through a creature to a creature. . . . Moreover, **faith’s full assurance originates** not from within but from outside, **in Scripture’s written word**....”⁵³
- **2019:** “**Certainty** does not rest on feeling certain. Certainty rests in the external word that has been uttered by a preacher. **By ‘external word’ Luther means the text of Scripture**, along with its miraculous bestowal or mediation from one person to another via the office of ministry. That office is the outward office of the Word that utters **the two words of God in perfect clarity**: first **the Law that tells us exactly what to do and judges us**; and then the gospel that tells us precisely what Christ thinks of us—apart from the law.”⁵⁴
- **2019:** “God is not bestowing uncertain things or parts but giving David the most certain things of all. **Scripture is clear** and **God’s revelation** is the most **certain** word, not the uncertain absoluteness of God’s being.”⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Paulson, “Lutheran Assertions Regarding Scripture,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 17 (2003) 383; *Justification is for Preaching*, 228.

⁵¹ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 1:97.

⁵² Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 1:100.

⁵³ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 1:110-11.

⁵⁴ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 2:140.

⁵⁵ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 2:318.

- **2019:** "The second volume [*Luther's Outlaw God*] will address this greatest of all theological dialectics, **unpreached and preached God**, and show how Luther employed it prolifically in his exegetical theology. This allowed him **to avoid abstract questions** by attending to the details of **Scripture's text** as they show **God's two words of law and gospel at work**, and then **apply them directly** to people in need."⁵⁶

Forde: Certainty comes from the living Christ, the 'alien' word, from God's future.

- **1989.** "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 repristiniate the past. But the real question is what constitute or guarantees true concreteness and 'objectivity' in the church. . . . 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 what which is truly and irreducibly **'from without.'** And only so is truly **'objective.'**"⁵⁷
- **1992.** "If we grasp what Luther's theology is about, we will see that at stake is a different understanding of **how a truly 'objective' reality is mediated.** The eschatological word draws its **objectivity** from the fact that it is **an 'alien' word entirely from without, from God's future** which is the end of us. It can live, therefore, only from its own inherent power."⁵⁸

L/RC 8

- **1992.** "(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."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 1:245.

⁵⁷ Forde, "The Catholic Impasse," *Promoting Unity*, 76.

⁵⁸ Forde, "The Meaning of *Satis Est*," *Lutheran Forum* (1992) 16; *A More Radical Gospel*. Gerhard O. Forde, 166.

⁵⁹ "Lutheran Reflections," *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII*. Eds H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992) 127-28.

Part 3: Paulson: We have access to eternal law

1. Paulson uses the euphemisms “divine plan” and “divine limits”

- **2007:** “God giving his heart in Jesus Christ is not a simple matter. It complicates things for us on earth, especially those of us who are trying hard (sometimes) to live according to **God’s divine plan as revealed in his law.**”⁶⁰
- **2007:** “Our culture tends to idolize sex – exploit it and not receive it as a gift to be enjoyed and given within **divinely established limits.**”⁶¹

2. Paulson: “The Law” is God’s eternal standard, *lex aeterna*

- **2004.** “Luther is even bolder with the law ‘after Christ.’ The law did not disappear like smoke in thin air: ‘the law in all eternity will never be abolished but will remain either to be fulfilled in the damned or already fulfilled in the blessed.’² Right there is the difference between being in heaven and being in hell—in hell the law remains forever ahead of you as something that needs yet to be done (like Sisyphus rolling his stone up and down without end); in heaven the law is past. **In both cases the law has been completely historicized, and so you are always either ahead or behind it.** For Luther, that spelled the end of the great theological attempt to describe **life as the vision of God’s great structure of being according to ‘laws’** –an attempt that was nearly perfected by Thomas Aquinas’s beatific vision.”⁶² [For Paulson “law” is God’s eternal law code, but for Luther “law” is a power of this world. Paulson implies that *lex aeterna* is a Catholic problem, but it is also a Lutheran problem.]
- **2009:** “In Luther’s day a dispute arose when the clever preacher John Agricola proposed that the way to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ was to leave out the preaching of the law entirely.... Wouldn’t that be nice for a preacher? No more need to accuse anyone or bother with **the law even when it is plainly in the Scripture to be preached.** . . . They [ELCA pro-gay supporters] believe they are the messengers and purveyors of a new and higher law than had ever existed before in church and world—even laws given by God himself. Furthermore, this new and higher form of law comes in the person of the Holy Spirit who gives them new spirit-led revelations **that are not in Scripture** but are supposed to be part of God’s hidden plan.....Fanatics think that the Holy Spirit has given them a new word **not found in Scripture** that approves of homosexual acts....They know, even though they have **no word from God to stand on.**”⁶³ [Paulson stands on Biblical law when he opposes “homosexual acts,” but when Biblical law concerns slavery, usury, divorce, the length of men’s hair, or the sabbath as Saturday, etc., what then?]
- **2018.** “[T]he law was never given to empower anyone. Just the opposite, **law in its proper sense** disempowers, incapacitates, encumbers, exhausts, and enfeebles. This is what Paul means by calling the gospel *foolishness*: “For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor 1:25).”⁶⁴ [1 Cor 1:25 is not about the law

⁶⁰ Mattes and Paulson, “Introduction,” *The Preached God*. Gerhard O. Forde, 10.

⁶¹ Mattes and Paulson, “Introduction,” *The Preached God*. Gerhard O. Forde, 25.

⁶² Paulson, *Luther for Armchair Theologians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004) 129.

⁶³ Paulson, “Against the holy blasphemers,” *Network News* (December 2009) 5-6.

⁶⁴ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 1:160.

but about the Greeks and their understanding of wisdom, and Paul's understanding of the foolishness of all our thinking.]

- **2018.** "Predestination showed Luther exactly what his faith was in, and how frightening it was to find God, the outlaw, operating outside **the plan of his own holy law.**"⁶⁵
- **2018.** "**Law** is ultimately a mirror rather than a fence, and what it reveals is that evil is not in stones, it is in the human heart."⁶⁶
- **2019.** "Rather the Father wanted to take away the sins of sinners and would not be stopped by anyone or anything, including **his own, most holy law.**"⁶⁷
- **2019.** "So *Anfechtung* is something assured in the lives of believers because everything in the world, especially **God's own law**, conflicts with this promise."⁶⁸
- **2019.** "By 'external word' Luther means the text of Scripture, along with its miraculous bestowal or mediation from one person to another via the office of ministry. That office is the outward office of the Word that utters the two words of God in perfect clarity: first **the Law that tells us exactly what to do and judges us**; and then the gospel that tells us precisely what Christ thinks of us—apart from the law."⁶⁹ ["The Law that "tells us exactly what to do" is a euphemism for eternal moral law.]
- **2019.** "If God shows himself in his law, what else is he withholding? What is this partial revelation, and what remains beyond our grasp? The answer to both of these questions is always the same: **God's divine eternal law** presently accuses—but one day it will exonerate."⁷⁰

Forde on Lutheran orthodoxy and *lex aeterna*

- **1969.** "In later **Lutheran orthodoxy** law was understood as **an eternal, objective order, a *lex aeterna***, which described the ideal to which human life must aspire."⁷¹
- **1969.** "The idea of law as **an eternal ideal** and the '**third use**' of the law go hand in hand. For if the law is the eternal ideal, it stands to reason that this must be man's guide even after justification. If the foregoing analysis is correct, however, it would seem that law can never be taken merely as an abstract ideal which man can isolate and fix in his 'system.'"⁷²
- **1969.** "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**

⁶⁵ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 1:167.

⁶⁶ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 1:197.

⁶⁷ Paulson, "Forde Lives!" *The Essential Forde*, 30.

⁶⁸ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 2:25.

⁶⁹ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 2:140.

⁷⁰ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 2:187.

⁷¹ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 176.

⁷² Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 180.

displaced. Law cannot be understood as a *lex aeterna* in the sense that the orthodox held—an eternal standard which governs the system."⁷³

- **1969.** "[The Christian has no] 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 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.

"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 possible to his problems."⁷⁴

- **1969.** "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."⁷⁵
- **1969.** "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."⁷⁶
- **1972.** "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.**"⁷⁷
- **1984.** "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**

⁷³ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 195.

⁷⁴ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 211-12.

⁷⁵ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 214.

⁷⁶ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 226.

⁷⁷ Forde, *Where God Meets Man* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972) 111.

law as an eternal order, still evident in some of Philip Melancthon's theological constructions."⁷⁸

- **1997.** "For the fact is that the Catholic theology of the West going all the way back to the gnostic crisis was built on **the ontological *lex aeterna* base** rather than on **an eschatological two-age base. This is a problem we all share.** The Reformation – with its 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."⁷⁹
- **2005.** "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.**"⁸⁰
- For more on eternal law see pp. 29-33 of *The Basics of Post-liberal Lutheranism*.

3. Paulson misrepresents Forde on the "essence" of law

- **2019.** "The **law** is not just operating in the mode of a 'function' when it accuses, but in accusing it is **revealing both its essence and existence** for us and for itself."⁸¹
- **"He [Forde]** did not want to hypothesize about the law in its **essence** apart from what, in fact, happened to get Jesus killed."⁸²
- "So the **essence** of the law, its heart or will, came strangely to be exercised upon the innocent man—by lawless men who insisted on saving the law—murdered by all."⁸³

Forde: Law is never a neutral "essence."

- 1969. "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."

⁷⁸ Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:448.

⁷⁹ Forde, "What finally to do about the (Counter-) Reformation Condemnations," *Lutheran Quarterly* 11 (1997) 3-16, here 14.

⁸⁰ Forde, "Postscript to *Captivation of the Will*," *LQ* 19 (2005) 78; *Captivation of the Will*, 79; "Luther and Erasmus," *The Essential Forde*, 125.

⁸¹ Paulson, "Forde Lives!" *The Essential Forde*, 24.

⁸² Paulson, "Forde Lives!" *The Essential Forde*, 28.

⁸³ Paulson, "Forde Lives!" *The Essential Forde*, 29.

- “Luther’s defense of the eternity of the law is thus quite different from Harnack’s **‘essence-office’ distinction**. The law is eternal because man as sinner cannot escape it. One might say indeed that for man as sinner, the **‘essence’** of the law is the ‘office’ precisely because, as sinner, man cannot distinguish between them. As long as sin remains, the law will always accuse; **it will never be a neutral ‘essence.’** Only when it is fulfilled does it cease.”

4. Paulson: “The Law” is not *lex aeterna*

- **2019.** “Forde’s preaching of the cross: Against the *lex aeterna* and the third use of the law.”⁸⁴ [This is the title of a section in Paulson’s introduction, “Forde lives!” in *The Essential Forde*. But the content of the section does not reflect the title. Rather, Paulson writes that “the law” is “God’s most holy law,”⁸⁵ (a synonym for *lex aeterna*) and he refers to “the law’s norm and rightness,”⁸⁶ as if the law is an eternal standard known by revelation.]

5. Paulson affirms and denies separating moral and ceremonial law

- **2007. The divine moral law continues.** “Our culture tends to idolize sex – exploit it and not receive it as a gift to be enjoyed and given within **divinely established limits.**”⁸⁷
- **2009. Christ is the end of ritual law but not moral law.** “Leviticus tells you to sacrifice a goat. So there. Why don’t you sacrifice a goat? A fanatic cannot make the proper distinction between the law and the gospel and to identify where the law applies and where it comes to an end. A fanatic cannot make the distinction. Now Lutherans and Lutheran theology should know better. It should know there is a distinction between the law and the gospel and as Paul says very clearly it is not the law but faith which makes one righteous. We can go right to Romans 3:28. Right at the end of the chapter. I think it’s verse 33 where he says: What then shall we say? Does this remove the law altogether? No, it establishes the law. It puts the law in its proper place. But the proper place for the law is not the means by which you are made righteous. This is a fanatic opinion. A fanatic opinion thinks that its judgment on homosexuality is going to be a righteous one that will make them righteous. And it will actually impart righteousness to another human being apart from the forgiveness of sins entirely. This is the way fanaticism operates, and it can’t make a distinction between the law and the gospel any longer. **Anybody who spends any time discussing the distinction between law and gospel knows there is a distinction now between the law of the Decalogue, the law of the Ten Commandments that we’re talking about here, and the so-called ceremonial law that identifies how it is that you do a sacrifice of a goat.** This is why we teach the Ten Commandments at the beginning of the Small Catechism. We don’t teach the sacrifice of a goat. But you’ll find both of these in the Old Testament. You have to make the proper distinction. Of course, **the issue of sexuality is an issue now of the**

⁸⁴ Paulson, “Forde Lives!” *The Essential Forde*, 27.

⁸⁵ Paulson, “Forde Lives!” *The Essential Forde*, 30.

⁸⁶ Paulson, “Forde Lives!” *The Essential Forde*, 30.

⁸⁷ Mattes and Paulson, “Introduction,” *The Preached God. Gerhard O. Forde*, 25.

Decalogue and the proper establishment of the law and the way we teach and preach that law.”⁸⁸

- **2017. The NALC affirms the moral law continues.** The NALC/LCMS/LCC’s “Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures. Part 2.c. We may not simply reduce scriptural reliability to ‘spiritual’ matters. . . a limitation of biblical reliability to ‘spiritual matters’ undermines **biblical authority in matters of morality and ethics.** Therefore, we affirm scriptural reliability in every matter of doctrine and life.”⁸⁹

Forde: Both the ceremonial and moral law end in Christ.

- **1993.** “We do not, any longer (if we ever did!), need lectures about Luther’s views on conscience from exegetes who have never studied him carefully. All of that is as irrelevant as speculations about Paul’s conscience. What is theologically important in discussion about law is the basic structure of the *doctrine* of law and its uses. **Above all, it is crucial to see that Luther repeatedly and explicitly rejects the making of a distinction between ceremonial (ritual) law and the ‘entire law.’** Both the early (1519) and the late (1533-35) Galatians Lectures show it was a constant theme throughout his life. Wherever he gets a chance he pounds away on the issue.⁹ In the argument against Erasmus he says that this error has made it impossible to understand Paul and has obscured the knowledge of Christ. Indeed, ‘even if there had never been any other error in the Church, this one alone was pestilent and potent enough to make havoc of the gospel.’¹⁰ **Where there is ‘leakage’ of any sort, wherever law is thought to survive the end and carry over into the new age (as an eternal natural or moral law or a ‘third use,’ for instance) the gospel is inevitably obscured if not lost altogether.”⁹⁰**
- **1993.** “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

⁸⁸ Paulson at a Lutheran CORE meeting, Roseville Lutheran Church (11/18/2010). Transcript of the CD at 25:52.

⁸⁹ “God’s Word Forever Shall Abide. ‘A Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures,’” by the NALC, LCMS, and LCC (Lutheran Church Canada). 2017. The ‘Guiding Statement’ is found at the back of *The Necessary Distinction. A Continuing Conversation on Law and Gospel*.

⁹⁰ Forde, “Luther and the *Usus Pauli*,” *dialog* 32 (1993) 275-82, here 278.

liturgiologists! One might grant, of course, that this is no small accomplishment, but the price does seem a bit high!”⁹¹

- For more on the above see pp. 48-50 of *The Basics of Post-liberal Lutheranism*.

6. Paulson affirms and denies the Decalogue is eternal moral law

- **2004. Paulson: For Luther, the Decalogue is not eternal law.** “[To Luther] the law had to be considered one way ‘before Christ’ and another way ‘after (or under) Christ.’ This opened up a series of controversial insights for Luther. First, the law ‘before Christ’ had a history developed over time in somewhat different ways in different cultures. Luther did not separate Old Testament law into a moral foundation that applied to everyone and a ceremonial law that applied only to the Jews. **He even called the Ten Commandments the Jewish form of his culture’s *Sachsenspiegel* (Saxon code of law).** As soon as Luther’s students heard such things they naturally asked, ‘Why then preach about Moses if he has nothing to do with us?’ . . . Luther gave three reasons to preach from the Old Testament: First, the Ten Commandments are ‘extraordinarily fine rules’ that one would be wise to adopt for living because they agree with natural law and are a great mirror to hold up to your own culture and self. But the key is that **you may select them for governing according to human reason.**”⁹²
- **2009. The Decalogue is eternal law.** “Anybody who spends any time discussing the distinction between law and gospel knows there is a distinction now between the law of the Decalogue, the law of the Ten Commandments that we’re talking about here, and the so-called ceremonial law that identifies how it is that you do a sacrifice of a goat. This is why we teach the Ten Commandments at the beginning of the Small Catechism. We don’t teach the sacrifice of a goat. But you’ll find both of these in the Old Testament. You have to make the proper distinction. Of course, the issue of sexuality is an issue now of the Decalogue and the proper establishment of the law and the way we teach and preach that law.”⁹³
- **2018. The Decalogue is eternal law.** “. . . God promised to accompany Moses and arm him with a sign that would return Moses to the same mountain in order to become the medium (one of several, the angels being another, if Paul and the rabbis are correct) **when the Decalogue itself was given.**”⁹⁴
- **2019. The Decalogue is eternal law for this world.** “Eternal law does not remain ontologically in the form of the ordering principle of heaven, or the real heart of God. As Hopman has point out, the sentence continues: ‘Only the Decalogue is eternal—as such (*res*), that is, not as law—because in the coming life things will be like what the Decalogue has been demanding here.’⁹⁵ [Hopman writes: “The totality of Luther’s statements in the

⁹¹ Forde, “Called to Freedom,” Presidential Address to the International Congress for Luther Research, 1993, *The Preached God*. Gerhard O. Forde, 254-69, here 259.

⁹² Paulson, *Luther for Armchair Theologians*, 128.

⁹³ Paulson at a Lutheran CORE meeting, Roseville Lutheran Church (11/18/2010). Transcript of the CD at 25:52.

⁹⁴ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 1:13.

⁹⁵ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 2:225.

Antinomian Disputations about the law's relationship with God's heavenly kingdom vindicates Forde's explanation of this passage. The *res* of the law, Christ is not the essence of the law, but the end of the law (Rom. 10:4)."^{96]}

7. Paulson/Hopman: God's eternal law is "written on the heart"

- **2016. Nicholas Hopman:** "Forde's affinity of defining the law as the law **written on the human heart** and as its oppression of the heart does not make the law subjective according to human whim; **it is the Creator's law** and condemns the creature."⁹⁷ [Like Paulson, Hopman presumes that "law" is God's eternal law code, *lex aeterna*.]
- **2018. Paulson.** "Only when the law becomes internal (**written on the heart**) does law cease coercing."⁹⁸
- **2018. Paulson.** "Luther knew that there certainly was law in the word, a standard, and he even knew this was internal, **in our hearts**, because God put it there."⁹⁹
- **2019. Paulson.** "Second, **the Decalogue is written in the hearts** even of gentiles, and so 'will remain with us even in the coming life.'"¹⁰⁰
- **2004. Paulson and Mattes likely inserted sentences into Forde essay "Luther's Ethics":** "For Luther, law is natural in the sense that it was built into 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. The natural law, in that sense, was "**written on the heart.**" To be sure, **such law may be obscured by the fall.** But, in any case, for Luther, we have a restatement of such natural law in the scriptures, preeminently in the laws of Moses. Luther assumed, it seemed, that since the Creator and the author of the scriptures, the Spirit, are one, there should be no fundamental difference between natural law and the law found in scripture. The touchstone for Luther's understanding of **what is natural** is therefore not a theory of **natural analogy** but **rather the Holy Spirit and the doctrine of creation. One cannot trust unaided reason without qualification.** But where law is understood within and limited by **the story of salvation**, there it is, so to speak, naturalized."¹⁰¹ [The above sentences appear in "Luther's Ethics," a lecture Forde gave at Capital University. The text appears in *A More Radical Gospel*, pp. 137-55. No date or occasion for the speech is given by Paulson and Mattes (p. xxvi.). It is highly likely that Paulson and Mattes inserted whole sentences of their own into Forde's text. Terms used in the closing paragraphs, such as "law obscured by the fall," "natural analogy," "unaided reason," "the story of salvation," are **not terms Forde used nor do they reflect what Forde wrote elsewhere.** These phrases are characteristic of Paulson and Mattes. The appeal in these

⁹⁶ Hopman, "Luther's Antinomian Disputations and *lex aeterna*," *Lutheran Quarterly* 30 (2016) 167. Hopman nevertheless retains a material view of law as God's eternal standard following Paulson, rather than Forde's recovery of Luther's functional understanding of law as an existential power of this world. Paulson appears to have not noticed earlier what Forde on the Antinomian Disputations in *The Law-Gospel Debate* (1969).]

⁹⁷ Nicholas Hopman, "Antinomian Disputations and *lex aeterna*," *Lutheran Quarterly* 30 (2016) 158.

⁹⁸ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 1:71.

⁹⁹ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 1:148.

¹⁰⁰ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 2:225.

¹⁰¹ Forde, "Luther's Ethics," *A More Radical Gospel*. Gerhard O. Forde, 154-55.

sentences to natural law as supernatural law and to inerrancy reflects the theologies of Paulson and Mattes, not Forde.]

8. Paulson: The law has cracks; we accommodate exceptions

- **2019.** “It is the strength of a law to reveal a general truth: You shall not kill. As Immanuel Kant especially noticed, this is true precisely when it is universal—applying it in every place and time as a duty, regardless of one’s circumstance—even against one’s desires. . . . **Luther noticed a crack in this general rule of law** in that kings are occasionally ordered to kill in Scripture—in direct opposition to the law. **Yet cracks can be accommodated, since general rules are always able to accommodate exceptions.**”¹⁰² [If “the law” has old cracks, how about new cracks? Who decides when and how to make exceptions?]

Forde on the Decalogue as natural law

- **1969.** “**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**.

“This means that for Luther law does not constitute, as it does for orthodoxy, **a fixed scheme according to which God and his revelation can be ‘figured out.’** . . . This means that law, for Luther cannot be *identified* with any set of propositions or prescriptions, be it the decalogue or any other code. Law is *anything* which frightens and accuses ‘the conscience.’ The bolt of lightning, the rustling of a dry leaf on a dark night, the decalogue, the ‘natural law’ of the philosopher, or even (or perhaps most particularly) the preaching of the cross itself—all or any of these can and do become the voice of the law.”¹⁰³

- **1970.** “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.”¹⁰⁴
- **1972.** “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.**”¹⁰⁵
- **1984.** “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.

¹⁰² Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 2:69.

¹⁰³ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 177.

¹⁰⁴ Forde, “*Lex semper accusat?*” *dialog*, 274. *A More Radical Gospel*, 49, and *The Essential Forde*, 193.

¹⁰⁵ Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 111.

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.**”¹⁰⁶

- **1993.** “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!”¹⁰⁷

Part 4: Paulson affirms and denies a third use of law

1. Paulson uses the euphemisms “divine plan” and “divine limits”

- **2007.** “God giving his heart in Jesus is not a simple matter. It complicates things for us on earth, especially those of us who are trying hard (sometimes) to live according to **God’s divine plan as revealed in the law.**”¹⁰⁸
- **2007.** “Our culture tends to idolize sex – exploit it and not receive it as a gift to be enjoyed and given within **divinely established limits.**”¹⁰⁹

2. Paulson affirms a third use of law but avoids the term “third use”

- **2011.** “The law is eternally in the past for those who have been put to death in baptism; it is a memory. Their future is without any law, since **a good heart does the works of the law—**without any law at all—perfectly freely.”¹¹⁰
- **2017. NALC: Inerrancy, eternal law, third use of law.** The NALC/LCMS/LCC’s “Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures. Part 2: What kind of Book is the Bible? 4. **An Inerrant book** – a book that is completely reliable. c. We may not simply reduce scriptural reliability to ‘spiritual’ matters. . . a limitation of biblical reliability to

¹⁰⁶ Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:454-60.

¹⁰⁷ Forde, “Called to Freedom,” *The Preached God*. Gerhard O. Forde, 259.

¹⁰⁸ Mattes and Paulson, “Introduction,” *The Preached God*. Gerhard O. Forde, 10.

¹⁰⁹ Mattes and Paulson, “Introduction,” *The Preached God*. Gerhard O. Forde, 25.

¹¹⁰ Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 225.

'spiritual matters' undermines **biblical authority in matters of morality and ethics**. Therefore, **we affirm scriptural reliability in every matter of doctrine and life.**"¹¹¹

- **2019.** "The law still has much to say to the old Adam or Eve, including the baptized Christian who is **not yet perfectly fulfilling the law as Christ promised we would—that is, to the extent that he or she is not a Christian.**"¹¹²
- **2019.** "That [preaching] office is the outward office of the Word that utters **the two words of God in perfect clarity**: first **the Law that tells us exactly what to do** and judges us; and then the gospel that tells us precisely what Christ thinks of us—apart from the law."¹¹³

3. Paulson denies a third use of law

- **2019.** "The cross did not produce the old saw that one is freed *from* law (like cheap grace) only in order to be freed *for* it in a new way—a joyful obedience."¹¹⁴
- **2019.** "Forde's preaching of the cross: Against the *lex aeterna* and the third use of the law."¹¹⁵ [This is the title of a section in Paulson's introduction in *The Essential Forde*. But the section affirms eternal law ("God's most holy law," p. 30) and never mentions the third use of law apart from the title. As Forde writes below eternal law and the third use of law go hand in hand.]

Forde on two uses of law, not three.

- **1969.** "Closely related is the problem of the 'third use' of the law. The idea of **law** as an **eternal ideal** and the **'third use'** of the law go hand in hand. For if the law is the eternal ideal, it stands to reason that this must be **man's guide even after justification**. If the foregoing analysis is correct, however, it would seem that **law can never be taken merely as an abstract ideal which man can isolate and fix in his 'system.'**"¹¹⁶
- **1969.** "This means that in the Lutheran view **law is**, in the good sense of the word, **'natural.'** That is to say for faith law is divested of its *supernatural* pretensions and limited to this age. Law is the theological term denoting the manner in which God relates himself to this age. Law is the 'form' of *this* age. This explains the Lutheran tendency **to limit law to the first two uses—civil and theological**. The law gives form to this age and it accuses the sinner. As such it is an existential power which will continue to accuse as long as man remains in his sin. **Only a living faith in Christ as the end of the law can hold the law in its proper perspective. Faith alone makes and keeps the law 'natural.'**"¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ "God's Word Forever Shall Abide. 'A Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures,'" by the NALC, LCMS, and LCC (Lutheran Church Canada) 2017.

¹¹² Paulson, "Forde Lives!" *The Essential Forde*, 31.

¹¹³ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 2:140.

¹¹⁴ Paulson, "Forde Lives!" *The Essential Forde*, 23.

¹¹⁵ Paulson, "Forde Lives!" *The Essential Forde*, 27.

¹¹⁶ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 180.

¹¹⁷ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 211.

- **1969.** “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.”¹¹⁸
- **1984.** “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.”¹¹⁹
- **1985.** “Precisely the proper distinction between law and gospel limits and **humanizes the law.**”¹²⁰
- For more on the uses of the law see pp. 46-55 of *The Basics of Post-liberal Lutheranism*.

Part 5: Paulson: The Christian is “above the law,” “outside the law”

1. Paulson avoids a third use by “operates above the law,” “outside the law”

- **2007.** “Yet for Luther, at least, freedom was the highest goal, and so his teaching made of freedom what Forde calls ‘an offensive’ doctrine. It is untamed. It identifies a historical limit to the law in Christ himself (and alone). . . . We will one day be free. But this is not only waiting for what will come, it is a hope based in a belief in creation right now. That is, humans are precisely created for the kind of freedom that **lives outside the law** and is **utterly free of sin.** They are meant, then, to do ‘what they want.’”¹²¹
- **2018.** “God is outside the law, making people who are **outside the law.**”¹²²
- **2018.** “True freedom, then, is not to build a wall that evil cannot breach, as the Pharisees gamely attempted, but it is ‘not to worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will

¹¹⁸ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 226.

¹¹⁹ Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:450.

¹²⁰ Forde, “Forensic Justification and the Law in Lutheran Theology,” *Justification by Faith. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*. Eds. H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 301. Hereafter L/RC 7.

¹²¹ Paulson and Mattes, “Introduction,” *The Preached God. Gerhard O. Forde*, 28.

¹²² Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 1:153.

drink' (Matt 6:31)—which is a new life lived **entirely outside the law** in any way. Of course, the Pharisees could only take this as a frontal attack on all things good, and so the gospel itself is felt to be a curse. But for those who receive a preacher, there really is a new life lived freely—without the least protection **afforded by food laws** and with **a heart that no longer listens to its own voice.**"¹²³ [Food laws end; the heart follows God. We can sort out voices and listen only to God.]

- **2019.** "The reason Paul can be trusted in his judgment about marriage in 1 Corinthians 7 is because of the Lord's mercy—which is a matter of necessary, infallible, truthful speaking apart from the law—instead of his own truthfulness as measured by the law. Therefore, Paul's opinion on marriage is not a command, but the fruit of faith. Here the Christian is **operating above the law**, freely, on the basis of God's absolute necessity – which is the predestination of mercy already given to Paul."¹²⁴

2. Paulson's one kingdom theology: The Christian "cannot sin"

- **2004.** "Luther was even bolder with the law 'after Christ,' The law did not disappear like smoke in thin air: 'the law in all eternity will never be abolished but will remain either to be fulfilled in the damned or already fulfilled in the blessed.' Right there is the difference between being in heaven and being in hell – in hell the law remains forever ahead of you as something yet to be done (like Sisyphus rolling his stone up & down without end); in heaven the law is past. In both cases, **the law has been completely historized**, and so **you are either always ahead or behind it.**"¹²⁵ [No simul and no two kingdoms.]
- **2017.** "Divine necessity, what God insists on doing, is Christ, not the Law. This is a great shock to a servile ass. But it is the glorious freedom of the royal ass, who is **a creature made so new by God that he cannot sin**, just as the servile ass was a creature who could not but sin. The servile ass has the Law ever before him; the royal ass has the Law behind him."¹²⁶ [No simul and no two kingdoms.]
- **2018.** "But for Luther, the difference between being an ass ridden by Satan or Christ is between **two freedoms**—one a peasant freedom for the law alone, and the other by Christ's forgiveness. In that case, one will either be a servile ass or a royal ass—one with **the law in front of it waiting to be done**; the other with **the law behind it that is already done.**"¹²⁷ ["The Law" here is an eternal standard, a revealed heavenly code.]

3. Paulson: Christian freedom has few practical consequences

- **2007.** "Instead, one begins trusting that God is providing **a new freedom that already starts peeking out** in this world."¹²⁸ [Paulson does not say where and how freedom "peeks out." Law as the eternal standard remains dominate. No two kingdoms.]

¹²³ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 1:198.

¹²⁴ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 2:367.

¹²⁵ Paulson, *Luther for Armchair Theologians*, 129-30.

¹²⁶ Paulson, *The Necessary Distinction. A Continuing Conversation on Law & Gospel*, 284.

¹²⁷ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 1:189.

¹²⁸ Mattes and Paulson, "Introduction," *The Preached God. Gerhard O. Forde*, 8.

- **2018.** "Luther's Christian freedom then means the human is not being freed from hating the law into loving it, or from being accused by the law into being blessed by it. **The Christian is being freed, necessarily, from the law altogether.**"¹²⁹ [There is nothing about the Christian as always under law, about law as human and changing, and about the proper use of law in God's left-hand kingdom. In short, no two kingdoms.]
- **2018.** "Christian *freedom* comes from God's *necessity*."¹³⁰ [To speak of "God's *necessity*" can be misunderstood to mean that it is God's nature to forgive, as Heinrich Heine reportedly said on his deathbed: "God will forgive; that's his business."]
- **2019.** "Christ's kingdom is not ruled or organized by the law but by the gospel. That is, **the Christian life is now free from sin** and the sting of death (and so Satan's sermons that try to improve us and promise us glory) because it is free from the law, thus fulfilling the law without the law as the work and gift of the Holy Spirit."¹³¹

Forde: Christian freedom has real down-to-earth consequences

- **1987.** "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.

"**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."¹³²

¹²⁹ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 1:73.

¹³⁰ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 1:174.

¹³¹ Paulson, "Forde Lives!" *The Essential Forde*, 32.

¹³² Forde, "The Viability of Luther Today," *Word & World* 7 (1987) 29.

- “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.”¹³³

4. Paulson has little good to say about common reason

- **2004.** “. . . God also established the essential, limited work of civil government, which **uses reason** and the power of ‘the sword’ to limit evil in this old world. **Luther extolled reason and human free will to exercise proper dominion** in those created things given to its jurisdiction.”¹³⁴
- **2007.** “Indeed, the law ‘hounds’ us until we are in Christ. If the law were endless, one would inevitably believe that one must fashion an end of it for one’s self. Nevertheless, **a Christian may affirm that the Mosaic law is still useful – it may agree with ‘natural law,’** for instance. In other words, the gospel permits one to become more natural, to be fully human, living by faith and not driven by a quest for security or self-legitimization. . . . The moral life is primarily the business of the ‘old age’ – civil righteousness. Sanctification is not our ascent to God, but God’s descent as new being to us – **rearranging us to become spontaneously** a neighbor to those in need.”¹³⁵
- **2017. The Bible rules.** The NALC/LCMS/LCC’s “Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures. Part 2.4. **An Inerrant book** – a book that is completely reliable. c. We may not simply reduce scriptural reliability to ‘spiritual’ matters. To do so is to invite a Gnostic sort of faith that not only questions the Bible’s truthfulness in such matters as creation, but in the whole of redemption as well So also, a limitation of biblical reliability to ‘spiritual matters’ undermines **biblical authority in matters of morality and ethics**. Therefore, **we affirm scriptural reliability in every matter of doctrine and life.**”¹³⁶
- **2019.** “**Reason** in humans is supposed to elevate them above animals by **making their desires into something divine**—higher and spiritual—rather than merely instinctual and lowly.”¹³⁷ [Neither Paul, Luther, nor Forde claim human reason is to elevate desires into something divine.]

¹³³ Forde, “Called to Freedom,” *The Preached God*. Gerhard O. Forde, 267-69.

¹³⁴ Paulson, *Luther for Armchair Theologians*, 199.

¹³⁵ Mattes and Paulson, “Introduction,” *The Preached God*. Gerhard O. Forde, 25.

¹³⁶ “God’s Word Forever Shall Abide. ‘A Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures,’” by the NALC, LCMS, and LCC (Lutheran Church Canada), 2017.

¹³⁷ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 2:196.

Forde on common reason as primary in God's left-hand kingdom

- **1969.** "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."¹³⁸
- **1970.** "For faith in the end of the law leads to the view that its purpose is to take care of the world, not to prepare for the next. **That means we no longer 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."¹³⁹
- **1972.** "It is not thinking or 'reason' as such that is at fault, but rather a *certain kind of thinking*—a thinking which leads to the theology of the ladder, a thinking which attempts to make that kind of simplistic connection between God and man. **Luther would never downgrade thinking or reason as such. Reason he insisted, was the highest gift of God to man.** Only when it is *misused* by being extended beyond its limits does it become dangerous. It is one of the ironies (or tragedies) of history that the very kind of theology he saw as the work of the 'whore reason' has come to be enshrined in the minds of many as 'orthodox.'"¹⁴⁰
- **1984.** "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."¹⁴¹
- **1987.** "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."¹⁴²
- **1987.** "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.**"¹⁴³

Juel

- **1990.** "Our tradition has chosen to speak of a 'natural law' rather than a 'divine law' to characterize the structures by which evil is restrained and life ordered for the good of all. "We do not believe there is a single heavenly code which religious people know better than others. **'Natural law,' through which God ordains order, is embodied in human codes—some better, some worse.**

¹³⁸ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 211-12.

¹³⁹ Forde, "Lex semper accusat?" *A More Radical Gospel*. Gerhard O. Forde, 49.

¹⁴⁰ Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 10.

¹⁴¹ Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:420.

¹⁴² Forde, "Radical Lutheranism," *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (1987) 16-17.

¹⁴³ Forde, "The Viability of Luther Today," *Word & World* 7 (1987) 27.

“In the realm of the law, reason and not revelation is primary. God has not revealed any specific code for life. . . . In our deliberations, the wisdom of Scripture and the tradition cannot be cited as ‘God’s answer’ to the matter, but **neither ought that wisdom be summarily dismissed as irrelevant or outdated.**”¹⁴⁴

- For more on reason and law see pp. 46-66 in *The Basics of Post-liberal Lutheranism*.

Part 6: Paulson claims Forde says: Expect radical transformation

- **2007.** “It is frightening enough to realize that God is not interested in just talking about the world, but is **already going about radically changing it.**”¹⁴⁵ [This claim is anti-two kingdoms, does not take evil seriously, and is foreign to Forde.]
- **2007.** “Forde’s is neither a ‘pro-nomian’ nor an antinomian stance for giving shape to a Christian life as if grace were meant to perfect human nature. Instead, grace allows humans to be liberated from their curved-in life so they can in fact live as God intended them to live – **honoring and loving him above all things** and serving their neighbors and creation.”¹⁴⁶ [Forde does not claim Christians heroically honor and love God above all things.]
- **2007.** “Forde is absolutely convinced of the effectual **power of this word – and it alone – to radically transform the world, including sexual practices.**”¹⁴⁷ [Again this claim is anti-two kingdoms, does not take evil seriously, and is foreign to Forde.]

Forde on the two kingdoms

- **1969.** “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.”¹⁴⁸
- **1969.** “One must learn to think in terms of **two ages**, in terms of a **two-membered ontological framework** rather than in a one-membered scheme.”¹⁴⁹
- **1970.** “[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

¹⁴⁴ Donald H. Juel, “Homosexuality and Church Tradition,” *Word & World* (1990) 166-69. Here 167, 169.

¹⁴⁵ Mattes and Paulson, “Introduction,” *The Preached God. Gerhard O. Forde*, 7.

¹⁴⁶ Mattes and Paulson, “Introduction,” *The Preached God. Gerhard O. Forde*, 23.

¹⁴⁷ Mattes and Paulson, “Introduction,” *The Preached God. Gerhard O. Forde*, 25.

¹⁴⁸ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 185. See also 193-94, 211.

¹⁴⁹ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 222.

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 the Bible, necessarily, to tell you what to do in social matters. You have a reason, use it!¹⁵⁰

- **1972.** "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."¹⁵¹
- **1984.** "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**."¹⁵²
- **1987.** "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**

¹⁵⁰ 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.

¹⁵¹ Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 100-101.

¹⁵² Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:459.

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."¹⁵³

- **1993.** "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 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)."¹⁵⁴
- **1997.** "The fundamental death/life structure is, of course, intimately connected and indeed structurally identical with the thoroughgoing 'dialectic' of Lutheran theology in general: God hidden and revealed; *simul peccator et iustus*; old/new; law/gospel; killing letter/life-giving Spirit; **left and right-and rule of God**, etc. The dialectic is compelling not only because of its inherent ability to expound the faith I learned from the beginning but also because it reflects and illumines **the basic eschatological structure of the New Testament.** Virtually all of my writing, teaching, and lecturing circles around these themes.

"It is difficult precisely to sum up what my thirty plus years teaching at Luther Seminary have meant for my theological understanding. I suppose I have said it already in what I have set down above. I am not conscious of any radical changes of mind theologically, but rather of a constant deepening and sharpening, and I would like to think, even radicalization of the views I either held or was seeking from the beginning.

"My biggest fear in the present is that **the eschatological two-age structure of theology** is once again simply being lost."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Forde, "Radical Lutheranism," *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (1987) 16-17.

¹⁵⁴ Forde, "Lutheranism," *Blackwell's Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, Ed. Alister McGrath (Cambridge, MA; Blackwell, 1993) 357.

¹⁵⁵ Forde, "The One Acted Upon," *dialog* 36 (1997) 61.

- **1997.** “For the fact is that the Catholic theology of the West going all the way back to the gnostic crisis was built on the ontological *lex aeterna* base rather than on **an eschatological two-age base. This is a problem we all share.** The Reformation – with its 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.”¹⁵⁶
- **2004.** “Of course humans enjoy a certain degree of freedom. But it is freedom that belongs and operates in the kingdom ‘on the left.’ **The distinction between two kingdoms is vital for a proper grasp of the gospel.**”¹⁵⁷
- For more on the two kingdoms, see pp. 59-66 of *The Basics of Post-liberal Lutheranism*.

Part 7: Forde’s editors made changes in some essays which give the false impression that Forde conformed to a Missouri mindset

How can you be sure Forde material in the *Lutheran Quarterly’s* three-volume collection is really what Forde wrote? If an essay has been published elsewhere, you can be fairly confident that it has not been changed. But see Forde’s sermon “For You,” which was originally published in *The Lutheran* in April 1996 (pp. 12-13). Paulson and Mattes extensively rewrote it and published it in *A More Radical Gospel* under the title, “Jesus died for you” (pp. 220-22), as if Forde wrote it! See [Forde’s editors have tampered with his text – 1](#) for a comparison of “For You,” and “Jesus died for you.”

Regarding Forde essays and sermons which appear for the first time in the *Lutheran Quarterly’s* collection, you cannot be sure if Mattes and Paulson have made changes. Two examples: 1) Forde’s essay, “*Scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpres*: Reflections on the Question of Scripture and Tradition,” a paper for the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue has been altered to make Forde appear as if he conforms to conservative biblicism. See [Forde’s editors have tampered with his text – 2](#).

See also Forde’s essay “Luther’s Ethics” on pages 21-22 above. While we do not have an original manuscript to compare with the text as it appears in *A More Radical Gospel*, the phrases used are not constructions that Forde used and the claims for law as supernatural law conflict with what Forde wrote elsewhere. Rather, both the phrases and the theology reflect the writing of Paulson and Mattes.

* * * * *

¹⁵⁶ Forde, “What finally to do about the (Counter-) Reformation Condemnations,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 11 (1997) 14.

¹⁵⁷ Forde, *Captivation of the Will*, 74.