

# The Basics of Post-liberal Lutheranism

Forde: "What, after all, do Lutherans have to contribute to this postliberal, postmodern age?"<sup>1</sup>

Forde: "What the Lutheran communion has to contribute to the ecumenical church is its understanding of what the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the administration of the sacraments as gospel is all about."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Forde, "Lutheran Ecumenism: With Whom and How Much?" *Lutheran Quarterly* 17 (2003) 454. Also published in *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) 188.

<sup>2</sup> Forde, "Lutheran Ecumenism," *Lutheran Quarterly* 17 (2003) 445; *A More Radical Gospel*, 179.

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## Why leadership transferred from Lindbeck to Forde.

Gerhard Forde asks: Who is this “shadowy, if not menacing, figure on the contemporary scene, perhaps not yet clearly defined, often a puzzle to both friend and foe, usually mistaken simply for a hard-line conservative confessionalist or orthodoxist”<sup>3</sup>?

Why, it’s a postliberal Lutheran! It’s Forde himself. He’s best known for promoting “Radical Lutheranism.”<sup>4</sup> He also called for “Post-liberal Lutheranism.”<sup>5</sup> Both terms reflect the same stance. His call for “postliberal Lutheranism” grew out of his twenty-two years on the U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue. “Postliberal” clarifies the context. In this postmodern world there is no going back to inerrancy and no going forward with the relativism of postliberal theology. Rather, the way forward is with **post-liberal Lutheranism**. It’s the path begun by Luther and Paul before him. It is only way forward. Forde:



Gerhard O. Forde

“To mistake a **post-liberal Lutheran** for a hard-line conservative confessionalist or orthodoxist ... is seriously to misread the situation.

**A post-liberal Lutheran** is one who has been through the options spawned since the Reformation and realizes that they have all been used up. **Least of all does infallibilism or reactionary conservatism of any sort provide an answer.**”<sup>6</sup>

Our context is post-liberal. When the Enlightenment in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries eroded old certainties, the churches had to react to defend the faith. Forde: “In broad terms, the reaction was of two sorts: resistance or accommodation.”<sup>7</sup>

**No to inerrancy.** Forde: “For both Catholics and Protestants the resistance took the form of a defensive hardening of lines against the Enlightenment ‘erosion’ of the biblical and apostolic faith. At its apex, the hardening of lines took the form of rallying behind infallibilism: papal infallibility in the case of Rome and **biblical infallibility or inerrancy** in the case of Protestants.”<sup>8</sup>

**No to liberal theology.** Those who found the new forces of critical thinking and historical study convincing or inescapable attempted to accommodate. Twentieth century liberal theology was characterized by an openness to science and biblical criticism, and experience. “Liberal” here means “to liberate,” as Forde clarifies:

“Among Protestants it was called Liberalism. Broadly speaking we shall take ‘**liberalism**’ in this essay to mean attempts **to ‘liberate’ from ecclesiastical or biblical authoritarianism** by grounding faith elsewhere in ‘natural,’ human religious experience.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Forde, “The Catholic Impasse: Reflections on Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Today,” *Promoting Unity. Themes in Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue*. Eds. H. George Anderson & James R. Crumley (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989) 66-77, here 72. Bolding added here and below for emphasis.

<sup>4</sup> Forde, “Radical Lutheranism,” *The Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (1987) 5-18.

<sup>5</sup> Forde, *Promoting Unity*, especially 70, 72, 76.

<sup>6</sup> Forde, *Promoting Unity*, 72.

<sup>7</sup> Forde, *Promoting Unity*, 71.

<sup>8</sup> Forde, *Promoting Unity*, 71.

<sup>9</sup> Forde, *Promoting Unity*, 72.

To be sure, liberal theology failed, but that did not mean going back to inerrancy:

“The surrender of **biblical inerrancy** to various versions of “truth as encounter” and other existentialist ploys seemed to lack the bite of the older views of biblical authority. Perhaps it was that something of the offense was gone. Yet there was no way back. Older views of **biblical inerrancy** were not an offense, they were just **intellectually offensive**.”<sup>10</sup>

**No to post-liberal theology.** Post-liberal theology developed in the last few decades of the Twentieth Century as a critique of liberal theology. Whereas liberalism had been rationalistic, scientific, and experiential, post-liberalism focused on the creeds and practices of faith communities as the basis for identity and dialogue. Post-liberal theologians emphasized Christianity as an overarching story, a narrative, and the varying communities of faith as each having their own grammar, culture, and practices. Post-liberal theology aimed to protect the integrity of differing faith communities, allowing each its own grammar of faith and practice. The post-liberal theology movement, also known as the “New Yale School of Theology,” was identified with its most prominent spokesman, George A. Lindbeck (1923-2018).<sup>11</sup>

The son of Swedish-American Lutheran missionaries, raised in China and Korea, Lindbeck was attuned to the yin and yang of the Chinese mindset. He grew up with an appreciation for other cultures, religions, and Christian denominations. He taught at Yale Divinity School (Instructor/Assistant Professor 1951-62, Associate Professor, Professor, 1964) until his retirement in 1993. He was a “Delegated Observer” to the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and was subsequently appointed to the US Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue (1965-1983) and the Joint Commission between the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation (1968-1987). His post-liberal theology grew out of his involvement in ecumenism, as he states: “It was the ecumenical movement even more than my teaching at Yale ... that has been the context of my thinking.”<sup>12</sup>



George A. Lindbeck

In his 1984 book, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*,<sup>13</sup> Lindbeck drew on linguistic philosophy and cultural anthropology to establish a “cultural-linguistic” understanding of Christianity. He credited modern nonfoundationalists in particular for the insights he gained:

“Whatever their differences, they were not bewitched by modern uniqueness: they hold that the basic processes of the linguistic, social and cognitive construct of reality and experience

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<sup>10</sup> Forde, “The One Acted Upon,” *dialog* 36 (1997) 57-58.

<sup>11</sup> Other post-liberal theologians (sometimes called narrative theologians) include scholars who taught or studied at Yale Divinity School, including, but not limited to Hans Frei, David Kelsey, and Stanley Hauerwas.

<sup>12</sup> George A. Lindbeck, “How my mind has changed.” *Christian Century* (May 9, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine. Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

are much the same in all times and places, however varied the outcomes. One need not grow up in China to find such views persuasive, but in my case it helped.”<sup>14</sup>

Lindbeck proposed to understand denominations as “interpretive communities,” each with its own distinctives. But the nonfoundationalism of his theology led instead to relativism; it meant there could be no “basic differences” among traditions. Because everything is relative, the way to determine truth is by unity. Unity then becomes the problem and the solution: Unity defines truth.

Lindbeck had functioned as the *de facto* quarterback for the Lutheran team on the US Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue in its early years. This informal position developed naturally given he had been trained as a medievalist and had been a “Delegated Observer” at Vatican II.

But Lindbeck’s post-liberal theology failed to win support among both his fellow Lutheran and Roman Catholic colleagues. Rather, they continued to hold that ultimate truth is at stake in the doctrinal differences at the heart of the division between Lutherans and Roman Catholics.<sup>15</sup>

As Lindbeck’s star receded, the leadership on the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue changed. Forde gradually became the *de facto* Lutheran quarterback, the one responsible for leading and articulating Lutheran identity. Lindbeck eventually resigned from the Dialogue in 1983. Under the joint leadership of Gerhard Forde for the Lutherans and Carl Peter for the Roman Catholics, the Dialogue produced some of the most creative and important theological work of the Twentieth Century.<sup>16</sup>

**Yes to post-liberal Lutheranism.** Forde was an international leader of the Twentieth Century Luther Renaissance. Along with others he charted a new course for Lutherans in the modern world. He called himself a “post-liberal Lutheran.” “Post-liberal” means there is no going back to inerrancy and no going along with the non-foundationalism of mainstream liberal theology.

Forde remains a trustworthy leader for American Lutherans. This review of his “post-liberal Lutheranism” is not undertaken with blind devotion but with gratitude for the course correction he made and the clarity of his writing. This presentation of post-liberal Lutheranism differs from his legacy only with great care and only when the gospel itself makes it necessary.

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<sup>14</sup> Lindbeck: “On the nontheological side I gained a new dimension in the ‘60s from Wittgensteinians, T.S. Kuhn, Peter Berger, Clifford Geertz and contemporary nonfoundationalists.” See George Lindbeck, “How my mind has changed” (Page 2 of the article as it appears online).

<sup>15</sup> “Over a plateful of veal in a restaurant near the campus, Dulles delicately suggests that real differences still divide Lutherans and Catholics on the acquisition of faith, the interior renewal wrought by faith, and manifestations of this renewal.” From a 1999 interview of Cardinal Avery Dulles by George Will (*Washington Post*, Dec. 22, 1999). See also Avery Dulles, “On Lifting the Condemnations,” *dialog* 35 (1996) 220: “By patiently exploring the remaining differences we may serve the Lord of the Church better than by hastily declaring that those differences no longer stand in the way of full communion.”

<sup>16</sup> See “[The Remarkable Friendship between Gerhard O. Forde and Carl J. Peter](http://www.crossalone.us),” www.crossalone.us.

## Part 1: Election. The basis of everything

### 1. Election. The true God is hidden/revealed

#### a. Holiness is beyond us (*absconditus, revelatus sub contrario*).

##### 1. The scandal of holiness.

“Both Testaments witness to a Creator God who is holy love. Because his creatures rebelled against his Holy will, they were separated from him and doomed to die. But the God who is holy love remained true to Himself, justifying (holy) the ungodly (love) (Romans 4:5) by making it right Himself (love) through death on the cross for sin (holy). As a consequence, the result of sin, death (Romans 6:23), was conquered in the resurrection.”<sup>17</sup>

Only the cross gives us a clue to what holiness and sin/death are about.<sup>18</sup> Only God himself could handle this (2 Cor 5:21). When Luther writes: “The cross alone is our theology,”<sup>19</sup> he is echoing what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:18-24, and 2:2. The last temptation is to think we can define sin and thus manage it (1 Cor 4:3-4). Holiness and sin are beyond us.

That revelation that God died on the cross explodes all our thinking, all our categories and conceptualities. The cross is not a “super-miracle;” the cross is the “anti-miracle.”

##### 2. The scandal of particularity.

The God of holy love became a particular individual, a male, with a particular mother, and lived from about 4 B.C. and 30 A.D. and died on a cross. This is the scandal of particularity (*finitum capax infiniti*), and it is simply beyond us. It is awe-full. Job 38:4 rebukes us as it did Job: “Where were you when I created the foundations of the earth?” Who are you, lowly ones, to claim that you understand what this is about? That God Himself would come is not anticipated in the Old Testament. There is no cross in the Old Testament.

##### 3. The scandal of Creator/creature.

For Hebrew thinking, especially after the return from exile (Ezra), any hint of idolatry was forbidden. This shows the *imago dei* cannot mean “image” as “like” God in any way (Gen 1:27). The difference is that of the finite/infinite, and after the fall into sin, holiness/sin and death. In the New Testament, in the Hellenistic context, Colossians, for example, has another conceptuality of “image” (Col 3:10). But nevertheless the “image” is restored in Christ because it was lost. The prevalence of Gnostic thinking among us, of a “spark of divinity within” makes it important to clarify this.

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<sup>17</sup> Joseph A. Burgess, “*Cur Deus homo?*” Unpublished paper for the Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue, Available [here](#). (Quote from page 5).

<sup>18</sup> *Luther's Works* 26:32-36.

<sup>19</sup> *Weimar Ausgabe* 5.176.32. *Luther's Commentary on the First Twenty-two Psalms*. Trans. John Nicholas Lenker (Sunbury, Penn: Lutherans in All Lands Co., 1903) 1:289.

### Notable Quotes:

**Forde, 1972.** "Indeed, humans are to 'image' God in taking care of creation. In light of the proclamation the active sense of 'imaging God' seems a better way to handle the troublesome question of the image of God. Just as God rules in the realm of things above in perfect peace and harmony, so also humans are to 'image' God and take care of things below. Rebellion means refusal, to image God. It is rather the attempt to be God."<sup>20</sup>

#### 4. The three scandals.

The New Testament calls these scandals "the Gospel," the good news, the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). The Gospel was known to the early Christians and the early church even when they did not have a canon (rule), much less an inerrant text. This helps to clarify that the cross is not part of our theology; "the cross alone is our theology."<sup>21</sup> Not "the Bible" is our theology. Or inerrancy and the cross are our theology.

#### 5. Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, the holiness of his cross.

"Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Psalm 29:2, 96:9, 27:4, 1 Chron 16:9). God is beyond all our thinking and all our categories. (See also Job 42:6, 1 Cor 1:22, 2 Cor 5:21). Holiness/glory is in the cross alone. John 1:14, 12:23, 28, John 17:1, 2 Cor 4:4-6). Deut 32:39, Job 9:22, Isaiah 40:13-14; 45:15 (1-15), 55:8-9, 63:17, Jer 31:28 Lamentations 3:38, Amos 3:6, Romans 9:14-18, 11:32, Eph 1:4, 2:10, Matt 20:15-16, John 1:13, 6:44, 6:45, Romans 11:34, 1 Cor 2:16.

Worship is celebration in the beauty of holiness, the holiness of the cross. There is no right or holy practice in itself. Tradition and change are always in tension. The danger for worship leaders is to think: "We're going to make it happen." We use many symbols and ask: Which symbols still communicate? Finally worship is freedom and concern for communication. There is his promise that when we proclaim his cross and resurrection and administer his sacraments, the Lord works through these means to create faith.

### Notable Quotes:

**Forde, 1977.** "But there was also joy, the joy of living in the light of the truth of what God had done through the Gospel. But that joy was a kind of calm confidence, not a quixotic emotionalism. There was a certain distrust and downplaying of the vagaries of religious emotionalism. The truth was that sinners were accepted in baptism and forgiven through the means of grace, and that was that. One could count on that, and there was no need to get all worked up about it! The liturgy was chanted by the pastor and responded to with gusto by the people. **They were concerned to worship the Lord 'in the beauty of holiness' without a lot of fussiness.**"<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 48-49.

<sup>21</sup> *Weimar Ausgabe* 5.176.32.

<sup>22</sup> Forde, "The 'Old Synod': A Search for Objectivity," *Striving for Ministry*. Eds. Warren A. Quanbeck, Eugene L. Fevold, and Gerhard E. Frost (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977) 77.

**Forde, 1969.** “The recovery of the **eschatological act character of revelation** is quite necessary for the proper understanding of the gospel.”<sup>23</sup>

**Forde, 2000.** “When Martin Luther issued his frightening dictum to Erasmus and stated that God, hidden in majesty, has not bound himself to his word but kept himself free over all things,<sup>26</sup> he was, I think, insisting on the impossibility of simply collapsing God into Jesus. True, not many have followed Luther on this, but it is a critical point ultimately for soteriology and contemporary theology as well. For Luther it springs from his realization that it is simply impossible to bring the ‘naked God’ in his majesty to heel systematically. Indeed, God hidden in majesty actively removes or hides himself from the clutches of our control – our so-called ‘free choice.’ There is **no solution to this problem in systematic theology or kindred theological disciplines for that matter.** The only solution lies in the living proclamation in the present.”<sup>24</sup>

**Forde, 1997.** “...the Lutheran *decretum horrible* that the *deus absconditus* has not bound himself to his word but kept himself free over all things. Virtually all of theology ever since, even to the present day, has busied itself trying by theological manipulation to banish that God from sight. It is, you might say, the favorite arm-chair sport of theologians. That means there is always somewhere, even among the staunchest Lutheran theologians, a reservation compelled to assert some bit of human responsibility. And that is the beginning of the end of all serious theology. This, I came to see, is where theology loses its bite. It **loses its doctrine of God**—the belief that God is in charge even in terrifying hiddenness. It **loses its Christology**—the awareness that **the awesome and hidden God shows his hand concretely only in the preached word of the cross and sacraments.** Which is to say it loses its faith in the Spirit and its ecclesiology as well. Where the word loses its bite as living address it flattens out into a religion and enters the market where **one has to look to philosophical or apologetic arguments to establish one’s case.**”<sup>25</sup>

#### Resources

- Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 175-233.
- Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, Chapter 3.
- Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 13-37, 68-85, 119-33.
- *The Cross and the Crown*, Chapter 3.

### b. Election establishes the Trinity

#### 1. The Triune God is known only in the distinction between law and gospel.

**Schlink, 1961.** “The Triune God is not yet known if he is presented without the distinction of law and Gospel. In the Roman church the dreadful fact had become evident that, **in spite of the preservation of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, God was *not* known any more, since the Gospel had been lost.** But to know God’s

<sup>23</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969) 217.

<sup>24</sup> Forde, “Robert Jenson’s Soteriology,” *Trinity, Time, and Church: A Response to the Theology of Robert W. Jenson*. Ed. Colin Gunton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 126-38, here 136.

<sup>25</sup> Forde, “The One Acted Upon,” *dialog* 36 (1997) 59.



essence means to know 'the most profound depth of his fatherly heart, and his sheer, unutterable love' (L.C. II, 64). To know God's love means to receive his gracious love. However, the love of God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier is not given through the demands of the law but through the gift of the Gospel. **The triune God, therefore, is known only in the distinction of law and Gospel, that is, by faith in the Gospel.** The train of thought in this chapter has shown that the Creator is known only in the Gospel. The same holds true of knowing God the Sanctifier, for the Holy Spirit is given only through the Gospel. Of every knowledge of God the statement applies: 'Thus the entire Holy Trinity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, directs all men to Christ as to the book of life'" (S.D. XI, 66).<sup>26</sup>

## 2. "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" is God's name.

Yahwe (Exodus 3:14). "Father, Son, Holy Spirit" = one word, God's name. God is Father because he has a Son. God is not "x" to which we then add functions, names, or qualities. The Holy Spirit is not "she." It is incorrect to say "Jesus is God" as if Jesus qualifies to a standard called "God." Rather, "God is Jesus," and everything else is hidden and to be avoided as temptation. "Thou shall have no other gods"—other gods are idols.

### Resources

- Edmund Schlink, *The Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*. Tr. P.F. Koekneke and H.J.A Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1961) 66.
- Forde, "Naming the One Above Us," *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*. Ed. Alvin F. Kimmel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 110-19.
- Robert Jenson, "Trinitarian Naming and Sexist Sensibilities," *Entre* (October 1985) 6-9.
- *Our Charter*, available at [www.crossalone.us](http://www.crossalone.us)

## c. Election means God saves through the Word of the cross

### 1. The three uses of "the Word."

The Gospel is "the power of God for salvation" (Rom 1:16). Through this Word alone we are saved. What is this Word? **First**, the Word alone is Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14). **Second**, the Word alone is the proclamation of the Word of the cross effecting salvation and creating faith (Rom 10:17; 1 Cor 1:18, 21). **Third**, the Holy Scripture inspired by God is the Word alone because it witnesses to Jesus Christ and testifies to the Word of the cross. The scriptural witness is the ultimate norm for all formulations of the Gospel.

### Notable Quotes:

**Forde, 1964.** "For Luther the gospel was something so special that in the final analysis it could **not really be contained in books at all**, but something which had to be proclaimed by the living voice (cf. *WA* 12:259, Sermons on I Peter). 'And it, the gospel, really is **not what you find in the books and what is contained in the letters**, but rather a spoken declaration and living Word--- a voice which resounds, is publicly proclaimed and everywhere heard. . . . Therefore if one would ask what the gospel is,

<sup>26</sup> Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961) 66.

the sophists of the higher schools would answer: it is a book which teaches a good thing. They do not know what it is because they do not understand it. Gospel means good message.' Luther could even go so far as to say that it was **a great deterioration and limitation of the Spirit that books had to be written about the gospel** because it is something which by its very nature must be preached."<sup>27</sup>

**Forde, 1982.** "To the age old question, 'What shall I do to be saved?' the confessional answer is shocking: "Nothing! . . . The 'nothing,' the *sola fide* dislodges everyone from the saddle, Jew and Greek, publican and pharisee, harlot and homemaker, sinner and righteous, liberal and orthodox, religious and non-religious, minimalist and maximalist, and shakes the whole human enterprise to the roots. It strikes at the very understanding of life which has become so ingrained in us, the understanding in terms of the legal metaphor, the law, merit and moral progress. Justification the reformers said, is by imputation, freely given. It is an absolutely unconditional decree, a divine decision, **indeed an election**, a sentence handed down by the judge with whom all power resides."<sup>28</sup>

## 2. There is no neat distinction between the person of Christ and his work.

**Forde, 1990.** "First, the construing of Jesus as the man who does God to us already moves into the arena of atonement implicitly when not explicitly. It is **not possible to make a neat distinction between person and work** when one tries to move from the language of substance to the language of action."<sup>29</sup>

**Forde, 1990.** "God does himself to us in Jesus. The proclamation is the concrete event in which that occurs for us."<sup>30</sup>

**Forde, 1984.** "The preaching of the Word, that is, is to do the same thing as the sacrament – to **give Christ and all his blessings**. Indeed, since the Word **is** Christ, preaching is 'pouring Christ into our ears' just as in the sacrament we are baptized into Him, and He is poured into our mouths."<sup>31</sup>

## 3. Election means: "Jesus . . . is his own 'system.'"<sup>32</sup>

This does not overlook the incarnation and the resurrection but brings out the stark reality, the unique difference from all other religions, the cross (and all other religions are human inventions). The cross is scandalous, foolishness.

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<sup>27</sup> Forde, "Law and Gospel as the Methodological Principle of Theology," *Theological Perspectives: A Discussion of Contemporary Issues in Theology by Members of the Religion Department at Luther College*. (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1964) 50-69, here 63.

<sup>28</sup> Forde, *Justification by Faith. A Matter of Death and Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982) 22-23.

<sup>29</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 195, footnote 15.

<sup>30</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 100.

<sup>31</sup> Forde, "Preaching the Sacraments," *Lutheran Theological Seminary Bulletin* 64:4 (1984) 4; *The Preached God*. Gerhard O. Forde. *Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*. Eds. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 90.

<sup>32</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972) 38.

## Notable Quotes

**Forde, 1972.** “For in a theology of the cross, “the cross and resurrection *is* the way. . . “The cross is not to be understood by means of *another* system, the cross *is* its own system.”<sup>33</sup>

**Forde, 1972.** “The point is rather that one must himself *go through* the cross. Most theologies are little more than detours *around* the cross. A theology of the cross insists that one must go through it, for **the cross and resurrection *is* the way.**”<sup>34</sup>

**Forde, 1982. “Luther’s different hermeneutic leads to a different authority structure and thus a different ecclesiology.** Where one tries to move from the ‘dead’ letter to ‘life-giving spirit’ in allegorical fashion, one needs assurance as to which ‘interpretation’ is ‘right.’ An authoritative office is demanded by the hermeneutic itself. Where the word actually kills and makes alive matters are quite different. The one so killed and made alive needs no earthly structure to *guarantee* the ‘doctrine.’ Where death and resurrection are not reckoned with theologically, however, such ‘assurance’ can only be misunderstood as ‘psychological’ egotism and ‘subjectivism.’ The system which does not entertain the fact of death and life through the word operates only with a kind of antithesis between the ontological and the psychological. Hence Roman Catholics seem able to understand Lutheranism only as a kind of ‘psychologism’ or ‘existentialism’ whose main point is to translate abstract ontological language into the language of ‘personal experience’ and ‘assurance of salvation’ on a subjective level—the consolation of the ‘terrified conscience.’ **When the theological significance of death-life language is not grasped one tends only to pit ontology against psychology in the continuum of ‘deathless’ being.**”<sup>35</sup>

### Resources

- Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, Chapter 3.
- Forde, *Justification by Faith—A Matter of Death and Life*, 21-38.
- Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 57-85.
- Forde, “Caught in the Act: Reflections on the Work of Christ,” *Word & World* 3 (1983) 22-31.

## d. Election means the Gospel is self-authenticating

### 1. The Gospel has no outside verification.

No claim to infallible scripture, doctrinal formulation, office holder, or conversion experience can guarantee the Gospel.

#### Notable Quotes:

**L/RC 6, 1978.** “Some Lutherans even today regard the doctrine of the ‘**inerrancy of Scripture**’ as the true touchstone of faithfulness to the Lutheran Confessions.

<sup>33</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 36.

<sup>34</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 38.

<sup>35</sup> Forde, *Justification by Faith—A Matter of Death and Life*, 100, footnote 10.

“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.**”<sup>36</sup>

**Forde, 1990.** “One has to do with God on the move in Word and Sacrament. One has to do with a divine ordinance. Nothing can set itself above that, in heaven or on earth. This gospel is the highest, the ultimate, the final Word of God. **This gospel cannot therefore appeal to anything beyond itself.** Preaching the gospel is the highest exercise of authority there is in the church. If others don’t agree, there is no higher authority or reason I can call upon to convince them that they should, or that they had better. There is no institution that can grant the authority to do that. The gospel, by its very nature, fixes an absolute limit, an eschatological limit. There is nothing beyond or above or after it save the God who through his Son ordained it to be spoken. The reformers made a great point of saying that the last word about this affair is simply the word of Jesus: ‘My sheep hear my voice.’ If people don’t hear it, the only thing we can do is say it again, and pray for the Spirit. But then we had best invest our effort in making sure we say it properly!”<sup>37</sup>

## 2. Why is the Gospel itself the final authority?

### Notable Quotes:

**Burgess, 1990.** “If you ask me ‘why,’ my proper response is to proclaim to you the promise that for Christ’s sake all your sins are forgiven. Because this promise is the answer to your need, which is sin. And if you again ask why **this** promise, I will try to proclaim the promise to you again. For it is in the proper **usus** that final authority lies. Our problem is not finitude but sin, and the cross alone shows us what sin really is and God’s answer to sin. Therefore we proclaim that Jesus died and rose for you and me. In this way we come to live, as seen from a (sinful) human point of view, *sub contrario*, paradoxically, **not by reason or experience but by faith, in an eschatological tension simul iustus et peccator.** It is summed up by the sentence Lutherans used to memorize as children from Luther’s explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed: ‘I believe that I cannot by my own reason or understanding believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or

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<sup>36</sup> *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.

<sup>37</sup> Forde, “*Satis Est? What do we do when other churches don’t agree?*” Address to ELCA Conference of Teaching Theologians, p. 15-16. Available [here](#).

come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel . . . .”<sup>77</sup> This is the meta-theological proposal which Lutherans make to the church catholic.”<sup>38</sup>

**Forde, 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.”<sup>39</sup>

### 3. Faith and certainty (vs. security).

For Luther “faith” is a way of speaking of the hiddenness of God. Luther: “One thing is for sure: We cannot pin our hope on anything we are, think, say, or do.”<sup>40</sup> To be sure, Luther says faith is a living active thing, but faith is not our psychological response to God’s initiative. Faith is what God does.

In contrast, Lutheran Orthodoxy is based on security (*securitas*) in an inerrant Scripture and pure doctrine (over against the certitude of election by the word of the cross). In the same way Lutheran Pietism is based on the security in an inerrant Scripture and “evidence” in one’s life that one is doing it right (over against the certitude of election by the word of the cross.)

Having our basis in Christ does not fail; having our basis in ourselves always fails.

#### Notable Quotes:

**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.”<sup>41</sup>

#### Resources

- “Lutheran Reflections,” L/RC 6, 62-63.
- “A Lutheran Hermeneutical Perspective,” *Justification by Faith. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII.* Eds. H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1985) 47-48. Hereafter L/RC 7.

<sup>38</sup> Burgess, “Teaching Authority in the Lutheran Tradition,” Unpublished paper for the Lutheran Episcopal Dialogue, available at [crossalone.us](http://crossalone.us), under Post-liberal Lutheranism, Burgess, [here](#).

<sup>39</sup> Forde, “The Meaning of *Satis Est*,” *Lutheran Forum* (1992) 14-18, here 16; *A More Radical Gospel*, 166.

<sup>40</sup> Smalcald Articles 3/3/36; BC Tappert 309; Kolb/Wengert 318.

<sup>41</sup> “Lutheran Reflections,” L/RC 8, 127-28.

- "Lutheran Reflections," *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 8*. Eds. H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992) 125-32. Hereafter L/RC 8.
- Burgess, "Teaching Authority in the Lutheran Tradition," available [here](#).
- Forde, "Infallibility Language and the Early Lutheran Tradition," L/RC 6, 135-37.
- Forde, "Is Invocation of Saints an Adiaphoron?" L/RC 8, 336-37.
- Forde, "The Catholic Impasse," *Promoting Unity*, 74-77.

#### e. Infant Baptism is the perfect example of election

All discussion of Baptism begins with Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Creed: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or understanding . . . (See also Luther's Preface to the Small Catechism 23-27, *BC Tappert* 341).

1. In Baptism we receive the Holy Spirit, who cannot be divided quantitatively (SC 6, 10).
2. In Baptism, we receive eternal life, not just the potential for eternal life (SC 6, 10).
3. In Baptism we receive faith, not just a kick-start (LC 4: 52-55).

The only guarantee in a final sense is God Himself, what he has done and the promises he makes, all summed up and filtered through the cross and resurrection. He makes us his own; He gives us his Holy Spirit, eternal life, and faith. By ourselves we cannot repent and believe because we rebel against him, that is what the First Commandment is about.

One place this is spelled out is Romans 6:5, in the context of Baptism: "If we are united with Him in a death like his (Baptism), we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. See also 1 Peter 3:21; Titus 3:5.

If faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17), should a sleeping baby be awakened when brought to the font? No, in Baptism the Lord claims the tiny baby. At the Lord's Supper even the severely mentally limited are welcome regardless of their understanding. All of us, even the pious and brightest, are lost, unknowing, and helpless when it comes to sin and holiness.

**NB:** For the Reformed Baptism is based on the analogy of entering the covenant, the people of God. Baptism is parallel to circumcision. You are carried along and grow into the family of God. Yes, the New Testament has the circumcision analogy, but it does not control the theology.

The Reformed do not hold to law/gospel, and as Ebeling states, the basic difference between Reformed and Lutheran is the **use of the Bible**.<sup>42</sup> The Reformed template for theology is "covenant." The Reformed decipher the will of God in Scripture apart from Christ and the sacraments. Covenant theology and salvation history thinking are contrary to the basic Lutheran dialectic of holiness and sin revealed in the cross alone.

<sup>42</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, "The Significance of Doctrinal Differences for the Division of the Church," *Word & Faith*. Translated by James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, 1963) 168.

## Notable Quotes:

**Burgess, 1982.** “The varying perspectives in the New Testament at the very least allow for faith as a gift of God. Lutherans customarily state this in the words of Luther’s explanation to the third article of the Apostles’ Creed: ‘I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel.’ At this point some will raise the spectre of the *opus operatum*, or of magic, or of sacramental manipulation in baptism. Yet none of these spectres is a problem unless the absolute seriousness of sin is diminished. **If my faith or even my repentance were able to be a contribution to salvation, then sin would not be sin and grace would not be grace.**

“To the one who objects that grace must be *pro me* and that salvation is not mine unless I am personally involved, the answer in part is that even our restored relationship with God (not to speak of our broken relationship with God) is not an I-Thou relationship in the same sense in which one has an I-Thou relationship with another human being; somehow in our modern hybris we have lost track of **the infinite distance between Creator and creature** just as we have sublimated **the seriousness of sin**. To be sure, God’s grace is *pro me*, but that too is part of his grace.

“Thus faith is a gift, purely and simply. All are in the same situation when it comes to faith, just as all are in the same situation with respect to sin. That means **adult baptism is simply delayed infant baptism**. Infant baptism admittedly cannot be shown with absolute certainty to have been church practice until the end of the second century, but the theological rationale was there from the beginning. This is the essential meaning of sin and grace.

“We must not allow ourselves to be trapped into making the validity of faith the decisive question. **God breaks through to me by his words and actions, in spite of my sin and weakness**. Though deaf, I hear; though blind, I see. Thank God my salvation does not depend on my feelings, my consciousness (whether I still believe if I am asleep, senile, mentally ill, or retarded), my level of psychological development (whether I still believe I believe or doubt I believe), the faith of the Church, or, finally, on me (in any way, shape, or form), lost and helpless as I am.”<sup>43</sup>

**Forde, 1972.** “He *has* sent his Son to die and conquer the grave; he *has* baptized you and given you the sacrament of his body and blood and that is the *revelation* of his almighty will!”<sup>44</sup>

**Forde, 1972.** “... Luther, when he was ‘tempted’ by the devil—especially about predestination—answered, ‘I have been baptized!’ It was the concrete action of the ‘down to earth’ God that settled the question. What God does in Christ here on earth is the revelation of his will.”<sup>45</sup>

**Forde.** “Death must be faced. It cannot be trivialized or hidden away. Indeed, Luther insisted, Jesus came to die for us, to take away the sting of death from us, so that we could begin to live. And the ‘big death’ is first of all to believe that we are just before God for Jesus’ sake. The

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<sup>43</sup> Burgess, “Faith: New Testament Perspectives,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 1 (1982) 147-48. Available [here](#).

<sup>44</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 25.

<sup>45</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 27.

**'big death,'** the hardest death or us to take, is just the sheer gift of grace, **the divine election**. Physical expiration is indeed tragic and painful enough, but it's nothing like **the election of grace**, because that means that God takes control of our destiny."<sup>46</sup>

#### Resources

- Burgess, "Faith: New Testament Perspectives," *American Baptist Quarterly* 1:2 (1982) 147-48.
- Forde, "The Irrelevance of the Modern World for Luther," *A More Radical Gospel*, 75-81.
- Forde, "Something to Believe In: A Theological Perspective on Infant Baptism," *Interpretation* 47 (1993) 229-41; *The Preached God*, 131-45.
- "Basics of Salvation." Handout available at [www.crossalone.us](http://www.crossalone.us).

#### f. Election establishes that revelation is over against reason

Revelation and reason do not have a common point. Revelation is God's doing, *sub contrario*, a sign of contradiction for it is foolishness to the Greeks and a scandal to the Jews. Salvation through the cross is contrary to human reason (1 Cor 1:18-25). That the holy one became sin defies all canons of rationality. It is very tempting to proclaim a "rationale" for the cross.

Reason itself is caught in sin. Modern appeals to "divine causality," "theological realism," "conceptual coherence," and the like presume that reason is not fallen. But even pious, reverent thinking is corrupt and inadequate. We can, however, use reason and philosophy to show the fallacies of all claims that we have more than the cross alone.

Our job is to proclaim and administer the sacraments. The Holy Spirit alone "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies" (Small Catechism, Third Article of the Creed). We at our peril are "tempted" to undergird and supplement this work. Post-liberal Lutheranism is a basic challenge to these temptations.

**NB:** Anglicans and Methodists have four sources of revelation: Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. For Calvin and the Reformed reason was not included in the fall. In spite of their differences over the use of the Bible, pulpit and altar fellowship exists among over a hundred Lutheran and Reformed church bodies in the world because of the Leuenberg Agreement (1972) and the Leuenberg process since then.<sup>47</sup>

#### Notable Quotables:

**Schwärzwaller.** "Since Adam was sent away from paradise, we are always looking for **back doors**, as it were, in order to realize our aim to be able to boast of participating in God himself and his thinking! I'd prefer Adam, for he was honest and did not try to hide his aim! What answers the question: What does this have to do with me? We know and **confess** two things: **first**, that God, the real God became human, really human, according to Constantinople and Chalcedon. This is true and is a fact independent of any philosophical answers, principles, axioms, or whatever, and **second**, that nobody in the whole world would be as bold as to fancy, state, or wish that our salvation and lives are dependent on this very

<sup>46</sup> Forde, "The Irrelevance of the Modern World for Luther," *A More Radical Gospel*, 80.

<sup>47</sup> *An Invitation to Action*. Eds. James E. Andrews and Joseph A. Burgess (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.) See especially footnote 4, 118-19.



child, born in a manger, brought to death on the cross, and resurrected the third day. This is the topic, at least of theology — and we are busy enough to tell this and to spell out the meaning of it! Mr. Hinlicky, however, is two centuries late in rehashing a position of idealistic philosophy. What confusion to transform into terms of philosophy what God has done, and then ask questions God has already answered, and then try to solve the questions we raise as if there were any necessity of asking them. **On a meta-level this means to subdue theology and theological questions under the leadership and control of our brains. Wow, aren't we shrewd and smart?"**<sup>48</sup>

**Forde, 1972.** "The cross is not to be understood by *another* system; the cross *is* its own system."<sup>49</sup>

#### Resources

- Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, Chapters 1, 2.
- Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, Chapters 1, 2.
- Forde, "The Apocalyptic No and the Eschatological Yes," *A More Radical Gospel*, 17-32.
- Klaus Schwarzwaller, "The Bondage of the Free Human," *By Faith Alone. Essays on Justification in Honor of Gerhard O. Forde*. Eds. Joseph A. Burgess and Marc Kolden (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004) 46-66.

#### g. Election means the cross alone distinguishes law and gospel

Luther: "The cross alone is our theology."<sup>50</sup> The cross alone determines the law, the lostness of our lost situation. The cross alone determines the gospel, God's answer to the lostness finished on the cross.

Discerning law and gospel is derived from the cross and cannot be derived simplistically from Biblical material.<sup>51</sup> But this does not mean that Biblical material is antithetical to or a corrective to what Lutherans mean by discerning law and gospel. Nor can Biblical material be used to expand or modify what Lutherans mean by law and gospel. Nevertheless, law/gospel thinking is the only accurate and adequate way of thinking with and interpreting the whole of Scripture.

#### h. Election means the Holy Spirit has one job

- The Holy Spirit has one job: To re-present Christ (John 16:12-15).
- Test the spirits (1 John 4:1-4). "Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants disguise themselves as servants of righteousness." (2 Cor 11:14-15).

<sup>48</sup> Klaus Schwarzwaller, Personal letter to Mark Mattes, 1/4/2010, quoted in Mark Mattes, "Response to Hinlicky's 'Paths Not Taken,'" *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, 5/1/2010.

<sup>49</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 36.

<sup>50</sup> WA DB 5 176.

<sup>51</sup> Nils A. Dahl, "In What Sense is the Baptized Person '*simul iustus et peccator*' according to the New Testament?" *Lutheran World* 9 (1962) 219-31.

- “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or understanding . . .” Explanation to the Third Article of the Creed, Small Catechism.
- “. . . not as the world gives” (John 14:27). Discipleship is not about visible transformation. The Christian life is hidden. Oberman on Luther: “In the battle with the Devil, there is no rest, no peace, and no visible success.”<sup>52</sup>
- Outside of us, in spite of us, therefore certain. He judges us; we do not judge him.

#### Resources

- “Lutheran Reflections,” L/RC 8, 25-32.
- Inge Lønning, “The Reformation and the Enthusiasts,” *Conflicts about the Holy Spirit*. Eds. Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann (New York: Seabury Press, 1979) 33-40.
- Carter Lindberg, “Justice and Injustice in Luther’s Judgment of ‘Holiness Movements’” *Luther’s Ecumenical Significance. An Interconfessional Consultation*. Eds. Peter Manns and Harding Meyer (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 161-81.

#### i. Election means the Gospel is constitutive for the church, not vice versa

The Reformation was not fundamentally about the reform of abuses, even though it also had to deal with abuses. The Reformation was fundamentally about the primacy of the Gospel and Gospel freedom, that is, that bishops are subject to the gospel (AC 28:20-23), rather than the Gospel being subject to any structure, episcopal, congregational, papal, or any other. Lutherans are committed to the view that the office is dependent on the Gospel rather than the Gospel dependent on the office.<sup>53</sup>

The church is in the Kingdom on the right as it functions to bring the means of grace, the Word and sacraments. For the rest, the church is in the Kingdom on the left, sinful, broken, operating on the basis of common reason (“common sense”) and continuous forgiveness.

The historic episcopate, ordaining women, and infant baptism are ecclesiological questions, having intrinsic consequences for the Gospel. They are not like ethical questions, which fall within God’s left-hand kingdom.

#### Notable Quotes:

**Forde.** “In the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue I can remember sitting through endless word studies and so forth and then trying to ask when the end finally did come: **‘But what about the eschatological question, the eschatological structure of the matter?’** No answer. Carl Peter of blessed memory once made the suggestion that eschatology should be the topic of a dialogue round but nothing ever came of that.

“Why? I expect it is because eschatology proposes a much more **radical break** in the old **ontological continuities** than one is able to absorb. There is much that needs attention here before it will all be sorted out. I don’t propose to do that but can only air some suspicions. I suspect that the problem goes all the way back to the challenge to Christianity

<sup>52</sup> Heiko Oberman, *Luther. Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) 180.

<sup>53</sup> George Lindbeck, “The Lutheran Doctrine of the Ministry: Catholic and Reformed,” *Theological Studies* 30 (1969) 611.

represented by gnostic and other dualisms. The ontological dualisms were largely overcome but it would seem that **eschatological 'dialectic' of the ages was the casualty**. In this light the significance of the Reformation dialectic of law and gospel, death and life, kingdom on the left, kingdom on the hidden/revealed nature of the church and so on is that it announced a return to a more eschatological structure in theology. As several interpreters have pointed out, **the Reformation anticipated the contemporary recovery of eschatology**. But the checkered history of the dialectic since the Reformation demonstrates that **the task is unfinished**. I am convinced that that is where the future lies for the Christian Gospel and consequently also for catholic theology."<sup>54</sup>

**Forde, 1990.** "The *satis est* should not also be thrown to the dogs of ambiguity. It simply demands that we not concede to those who want to make a particular order, either high or low, **constitutive of or necessary for salvation or therefore unity**. This is a theological and not just a practical necessity. It follows from the nature of the gospel. The gospel is the last Word, the eschatological limit, it knows no appeal to anything higher, beyond, or after, itself. To be grasped by that is to understand that agreement in human forms in this age is not necessary. The peace and tranquility the Reformers desired will come when the gospel itself brings us to that understanding."<sup>55</sup>

**Forde, 1988.** "From this perspective one could say that it has been the constant struggle of the church to arrive at an appropriate understanding of **Christian eschatology and consequently a proper exercise of the church's power. The Reformation was a major epoch in this quest**. Justification by faith alone as the article by which the church stands or falls recalls the church to the realization that its true power is simply the power of the gospel, the unconditional promise of the new eschatological kingdom. The doctrine of the church is intended to foster the delivery of such a promise, through the preaching of the Word and the giving of the sacraments which end the old and bring the new."<sup>56</sup>

**Forde, 1992.** "But differences there were, in traditions, rites, and ceremonies, as they put it, 'instituted by men.' Therefore, the task they saw was not that of attempting to preserve an existing physical unity, since that, quite obviously, no longer existed – if it ever had. The task, rather, was that of coming to a deeper understanding of **the unity of the church in the face of such physical difference and dispersion**. Thus they sought to grasp the *true* unity of the church which persists through all of its physical manifestations. And this true unity of the church could be grasped only in the light of the gospel of justification by faith alone. That is to say, the church and its unity could itself be nothing other than an object of faith, not of sight. The 'indivisibility' or better, 'hiddenness,' of such unity was not, therefore, simply a counsel of last resort, a taking refuge in 'spiritualization' when all else failed. It was rather a matter of principle. It would make no difference at all to CA 7 whether there were one physical church or several. The true unity would still be an object of faith and not sight. If the church and its unity is to be an object of that same faith that justifies, then it cannot be an

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<sup>54</sup> Forde, "Misfired Arrows? The Problem of the Condemnations of the Reformation Era," unpublished address available online [here](#).

<sup>55</sup> Forde, "Satis Est? What do we do when other churches disagree?" (p.21). Address to the 1990 ELCA Conference of Teaching Theologians, available [here](#).

<sup>56</sup> Forde, "Justification by Faith Alone. The Article by which the Church Stands or Falls?" *dialog* 27 (1988) 266; *In Search of Christian Unity: Basic Consensus/Basic Differences*. Ed. Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 75.

object of sight. That was not a counsel of despair. It was part and parcel of the good news itself."<sup>57</sup>

**Forde, 1990.** "Where justification is by faith alone, however, **the true church is revealed only in acts which set us free** from the tyranny of law, sin, and death. So its only visible marks in this world are acts of ultimate liberation, primarily the pure preaching of the gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments, but also as Luther would sometimes say, in other manifestations of liberation, ministry, bearing the cross, suffering, prayer, and so forth.

"What the CA proposes is an utterly unromantic understanding of the church. The church of Jesus Christ is created by that most unromantic theologoumenon of all, the gospel of the forgiveness of sins, not by any *iustitia propria*, human achievement, commonality, institutionalism, holiness, priesthood, or what have you. Those things just breed disunity. It rests solely on the *iustitia aliena*, or, as Melanchthon would say, the merits of Christ."<sup>58</sup>

#### Resources

- "Lutheran Perspectives," L/RC 5, 21-23.
- "Lutheran Reflections," L/RC 6, 58-69, especially 62-63.
- "A Lutheran Hermeneutical Perspective," L/RC 7, ¶¶ 88-93, ¶¶ 117, 119.
- Burgess, "Teaching Authority in the Lutheran Tradition," available [here](#).
- Forde, "The Meaning of *Satis Est*," *Lutheran Forum* 26
- Forde, "The Catholic Impasse," *Promoting Unity*, 67-77
- Forde, "The Ordained Ministry," *Called and Ordained*, 117-36.

#### j. **Adiaphora (unique to Lutherans)**

*Adiaphoron* is intrinsic to Lutheran identity. It is a necessary conclusion from what Lutherans mean by discerning law and Gospel and therefore also distinguishing two kingdoms. Because the Gospel is always *sola fide and sola cruce*, nothing can be added as a requirement, not the sign of the cross, not a conversion experience, a particular structure (congregationalism, episcopacy, papacy), and the like. Any structure is permissible, but no structure can be required.

An *adiaphoron* is only an *adiaphoron* when it is an *adiaphoron* for both sides in a dispute. Otherwise it is *statis confessionis*. One stands *in statu confessionis* over against the offense of undermining the all-sufficient cross. The *adiaphoristic* principle means that:

- Whatever does not stand in the way of proclaiming the Gospel and celebrating the sacraments purely and rightly is a matter of Christian freedom, an *adiaphoron*;
- Something good in itself, such as ecclesiastical ranks "created by human authority" (Apology 14:1; cf. 7:33-34), cannot be made a requirement for salvation and the lack thereof cannot be allowed to cast doubt on being fully in Christ's body; and

<sup>57</sup> Forde, "The Meaning of *Satis Est*," *Lutheran Forum* 26 (1992); *A More Radical Gospel*, 164.

<sup>58</sup> Forde, "*Satis Est?* What do we do when other churches don't agree?" Address to the 1990 ELCA Conference of Teaching Theologians, 16. Available [here](#).

Two examples of Lutherans breaking the *adiaphoristic* principle:

- During the later 1950's and 1960's the charismatic movement hit US Lutheran churches. These churches responded: You are completely free to exercise charismatic gifts as your own person spirituality. But if you in any way claim or even imply ("I am just celebrating God's gift when I speak in tongues.") that others lack the fullness of the Holy Spirit, you have broken the *adiaphoristic* barrier. The charismatic Lutheran churches were not willing or able to hold to the *adiaphoristic* principle and, as a consequence, none continued to be Lutheran except nominally. Charismatic gifts became a new requirement in addition to proclaiming the Gospel and celebrating the sacraments purely and rightly.
- In 1999 the ELCA changed its constitution (§10.81.01) to require the Episcopal historic episcopate as structure of the ELCA. As a consequence, bishops now determine the gospel rather than being held to account by the gospel. The ELCA is no longer free to vary its structure for the sake of mission. It has become a Gospel-plus church.

#### Notable Quotes:

**Forde.** "If it is held, as is sometimes the case by proponents of such necessity, that the matter [amending the ELCA Constitution to require the historic episcopate] can be looked upon as an *adiaphoron* then we have seriously to ask whether this does not put us *in statu confessionis*. Something which is a matter of freedom is being imposed a necessity. What ministers have to witness to is precisely the freedom of the gospel."<sup>59</sup>

**Forde, 1992.** "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. It does, indeed, need to be mediated, spoken and administered by humans exercising that office of such speaking and doing. One can even say that such an office is divinely instituted since God, by 'providing the gospel and the sacrament,' called it into being. But since it is an office announcing the end, it is self-limiting. It can only seek to get out of the way for the eschatological Kingdom. This is what *satis est* means. It is a self-limiting concept. Therefore one can claim no more than human warrant for the institutional forms coined in this age."<sup>60</sup>

#### Resources

- "Lutheran Reflections," L/RC 8, 125-32.
- Burgess, "An Evangelical Episcopate?" *Called and Ordained*, 142-43.
- Forde, "Is Invocation of Saints an *Adiaphoron*?" L/RC 8, 327-38.
- Forde "The Meaning of *Satis Est*," *Lutheran Forum* 26 (1992) 14-18.
- Forde, "A Response to the Concordat of Agreement," [here](#).

<sup>59</sup> Forde, "A Response to the Concordat of Agreement," available [here](#).

<sup>60</sup> Forde, "The Meaning of *Satis Est*," *Lutheran Forum* 26 (1992) 17-18; *A More Radical Gospel*, 268.

## 2. Election through the cross alone

### a. Excludes proofs for God

Proofs for God are a way of trying to break the First Commandment. We think we should be able to understand and know, but we are creatures caught in sin. There is no point of contact or faculty in us untainted by sin.

The five classic proofs for God: First cause, final cause, design, moral order, "being" (ontological). These proofs do not prove God; they only prove causality. They are a form of intellectual semi-Pelagianism.

Apologetics has a place only in pointing out the errors of those trying to use apologetics to bolster the proclamation of the Gospel. The bondage of the will is also the bondage of the mind, reason, and all attempts to demonstrate causality, conceptual coherence, semantic realism, linguistic realism, and the like. Evil explodes everything about causality.

### b. Excludes natural theology and philosophical theology

"Lutheran" theologies based on neo-Thomism implicitly limit or reject the *Deus Absconditus* and deny that reason is fallen.

**NB:** At Vatican I the Roman Catholic Church committed itself to reason as an initial help in knowing God and God's revelation. Leo XIII made Aquinas a "teacher" of the church in 1879. Modern Lutheran "neo-Thomistic" theologies are based on the view that reason can help in knowing God.

#### Notable Quotes:

**Forde, 1997.** "Theologians of glory operate on the assumption that creation and history are transparent to the human intellect, that one can *see through* what is made and what happens so as to peer into the 'invisible things of God.' There is a kind of oxymoron in the thesis in speaking of 'seeing the invisible,' but it is intended, no doubt, to indicate the **presumption** involved."<sup>61</sup>

**Forde, 1990.** "Those Pietists who became 'Heilsgeschichtlers' always liked to take potshots at the *communicatio idiomatum*, and especially the *genus maiestaticum*. They had learned from the likes of Otto Piper that it was one of the most outlandish examples of dogmatic nit-picking indulged in by the seventeenth-century orthodox dogmaticians, those curators of useless abstractions! And what was the cure to the problem of abstraction, the dogmatic sins of the fathers? **History! Heilsgeschichte! God, it was loudly announced, is a living God, who reveals himself in history, not in dogmatic schemas.** We were all brought up on that. At least at the outset we shared this with Barth. The solution to the problem of the abstraction is to conceive and explicate all of dogmatics in terms of the concrete history of Jesus Christ. **Dogmatics are a matter of revelation, which radically excludes natural theology.**"<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 72.

<sup>62</sup> Forde, "Karl Barth on the Consequences of Lutheran Christology," *The Preached God*, 79.

**Forde, 1990.** "A systematic theology sensitive to the place of proclamation will take a different road here. On the one hand, it would agree with those who find a natural theology at hand among humans; on the other hand, **it would agree with Barth that the aim is to get rid of the natural theology.** Against the natural theologians it would argue that the natural theology we have is not the foundation of the system, but rather the source of our trouble."<sup>63</sup>

**Forde, 1972.** "Today the god-remodelers are a dime a dozen. Everyone, it seems, wants to do God the favor of making him less objectionable. Some say he is not absolute or omnipotent yet, but is perhaps in the process of becoming so. Some say he is not infinite, but finite. Some even say he has obliged us all by dying! In light of Reformation theology one would have to say that all these attempts at reconstruction are an idle and fruitless kind of pseudo-theology. They are all variations on the old attempt to escape God's almightiness. They are little more than wishful thoughts and opinions, attempts to guess what God might be like 'in himself': They carry no conviction."<sup>64</sup>

#### Resources

- Forde, "The Apocalyptic No and the Eschatological Yes," *A More Radical Gospel*, 17-32.
- Forde, "Karl Barth and the Consequences of Lutheran Christology," *The Preached God*, 69-85.
- Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 69-102.

#### c. Excludes inerrancy and biblicism

Lutheran inerrantists and biblicists appeal to election, justification, and the cross. How can they be wrong? The problem is that for them everything is superseded by the Bible understood as the prior miracle of an inerrant (inspired) text, which gives us eternal law and from which the cross (and resurrection) derive their authority. Then our sinful selves are not totally sinful, for we can at least "know" revelation and "know" that we have a problem. We have the authority of "the Book" to help faith in the cross along. Erasmus *redivivus*. Inerrancy undercuts the whole Lutheran enterprise.

**NB:** Biblicism is the presupposition that what is in the "canon" is "close enough" and "in its totality" a unified historical statement of God's saving action. Many in LCMC and the NALC assume that we can hold to most of the Bible, although not the six days of creation, slavery, and not the Bible's "clear" rejection of women's ordination.

#### Notable Forde Quotes:

##### **1964: "Law and Gospel as the Methodological Principle of Theology."**

"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

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<sup>63</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 43-44.

<sup>64</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 31.

syllogism: The Word of God is true, scripture is the Word of God, therefore scripture is true. It is **the easiest** and most convenient doctrine in the world with which to operate."<sup>65</sup>

"For over two hundred years now it [the verbal inspiration of scripture] has demonstrated its **inability to cope with truths established by scientific and historical research**. In the face of the mounting knowledge of the world, **the verbal inspiration method has had no constructive counsel to give, but can only advise one to retreat from the world** and refuse to face those things which one finds uncomfortable. One does not need to go outside the Bible itself to show the inability of this method to cope with the facts. Clearly the belief that there are no mistakes of any sort in scripture simply is not true. **The many discrepancies within the Bible itself – where the Bible disagrees with itself – demonstrate this fact.**"<sup>66</sup>

"For the twentieth century the burning question is the question 'how do you know?' and **one cannot compromise on this question today without compromising the gospel**. It is not possible to hold both these methods [inerrancy and law/gospel] today, or to compromise between them without compromising and hence distorting the gospel."<sup>67</sup>

#### **1969: *The Law-Gospel Debate*.**

"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**. This could mean, he says, one of two things. Either the difference is terminological, in which case one would merely have to take note of the differences and make the necessary adjustments, or it could mean that the differences are symptomatic of a **much deeper difference in the entire method of theologizing**. It is this latter which Ebeling thinks is the case, so that for him it is not enough merely to debate on the level of terminology.

"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."<sup>68</sup>

#### **1978: Forde, "Infallibility Language and the Early Lutheran Tradition," L/RC 6.**

"The preface to *The Book of Concord* speaks of the 'Word of God' as being 'pure, infallible, and unalterable.'<sup>18</sup> There is some debate among Lutherans as well as among Reformation

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<sup>65</sup> Forde, "Law and Gospel," *Theological Perspectives*, 55.

<sup>66</sup> Forde, "Law and Gospel," *Theological Perspectives*, 56.

<sup>67</sup> Forde, "Law and Gospel," *Theological Perspectives*, 67.

<sup>68</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 170-71.



scholars, however, as to whether Luther and the early Lutherans consistently attributed **formal infallibility to the Holy Scriptures as such. The majority are inclined to view that they did not.**<sup>19</sup> Luther's writings abound, of course, with references to the inspiration of Holy Scriptures and to the authorship, words, phrases, thoughts, and sometimes even linguistic irregularities being the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup> However, what one is to infer from that as far as **formal infallibility is concerned, especially in light of passages which seem to indicate otherwise,** is a debatable question. In any case for our purposes here I think it is correct to say that early Lutheran theology refrained, especially because of its battle with 'left wing' factions in the Reformation, from using scriptural infallibility as a formalistic principle in the derivation of Christian dogma or ethical practice.<sup>21</sup> **That was a development which occurred in later Lutheranism.** For the most part infallibility language seemed to be applied to the Word of God in its function as gospel in order to back up the trustworthiness of the promises of God."<sup>69</sup>

"[W]ith rare exceptions infallibility language is used positively only in a gospel context. It is used to assert that the promises of God in his Word are trustworthy and that they apply to the hearers of that Word.... The question which naturally arises at this point is: What is the Word of God to which this kind of infallibility is ascribed? **A formal legalistic biblicism is clearly not what Luther and early Lutherans had in mind.** In the controversy with the peasants especially, and with other sectarians of the times as well, **such biblicism was encountered and rejected. 'Luther's ultimate authority and standard was not the book of the Bible and the canon as such but that scripture which interpreted itself and also criticized itself from its own center, from Christ and from the radically understood gospel.'**<sup>27</sup> For Luther, the authority of Scripture was Christ-centered and therefore gospel-centered. Scripture bears testimony to all the articles about Christ and is on that account to be so highly valued.<sup>28</sup> One who does not find Christ in the Scriptures engages in superfluous reading, even if he or she reads it carefully.<sup>29</sup> One should 'refer the Bible to Christ...nothing but Christ should be proclaimed.'<sup>30</sup> Luther can even go so far as to say: **'If adversaries use scripture against Christ, then we put Christ against the scriptures.'**<sup>31</sup> The Word of God therefore is ultimately Christ and the proclamation of the gospel."<sup>70</sup>

[See also Luther here: "All the genuine sacred books agree on this, that all of them preach Christ and deal with him. That is **the true test,** by which to judge all books, when we see whether they deal with Christ or not, since all the scriptures show us Christ (Romans 3) and St. Paul will know nothing but Christ (1 Corinthians 2). What does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even though St. Peter or Paul taught it; again, **what preaches Christ** would be apostolic, even though Judas, Annas, Pilate and Herold did it." (LW 35:396).]

#### **1984: Christian Dogmatics.**

"The law that must be preached is the absolute offense of the unconditional gospel. . . ." <sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Forde, "Infallibility Language and the Early Lutheran Tradition," L/RC 6, 127-28.

<sup>70</sup> Forde, "Infallibility Language and the Early Lutheran Tradition," L/RC 6, 129. Footnotes in the text as follows (Fn): Fn 27: P. Althaus, *Theology*, 336; Fn 28: *WA* 32:56, 21-27 *Sermons*, 1530; Fn 29: *WA* 51:4, 8. *Sermons* 1545; Fn 30: *WA* 16:113, 5-9. *Sermons on Exodus*. 1524-1527; Fn 31: *WA* 39/1:47, 19-20; *LW* 34:112. *Theses on Faith and Law*, 1535.

<sup>71</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*. Eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 184) 2:424.

“Unable to rhyme Matt. 5:17-18 with Rom. 10:4, the dogmatic tradition has experienced nothing but trouble over the law. When one does not see that “heaven and earth” *do* “pass away” in the eschatological fulfillment anticipated and grasped by faith, and that just such fulfillment *is* the end and the goal, **Paul and Matthew are at irreconcilable odds**. Unable to grasp this fulfillment as end, the tradition for the most part had to indulge in what was strictly forbidden by both Matthew and Paul: tampering with the content of the law to arrive at a compromise. The result was the idea that in Christ the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament were abrogated (thus throwing a sop to Paul’s claim that Christ was the ‘end’ of the law while the ‘moral’ law was not (thus supposedly satisfying Matthew’s claim that not one iota or dot would pass away until ‘the end’). But that is patent nonsense which only confuses the issue further and completely obscures the eschatology involved. **Neither Testament makes that kind of distinction between ceremonial and moral law**. Indeed, it seems that in most instances, ruptures of the ceremonial law are more serious than that of the moral law. Furthermore, the tradition was left with the problem of deciding just what was moral and what was ceremonial. Are the first three commandments, for instance, moral or ceremonial? One might, of course, as happened most generally, try to settle on the decalogue as the moral law. But there is a good deal in the Old Testament and the New outside the decalogue which might also qualify as moral and ethical material of the highest quality. Who is to decide?”

“The outcome of such confusion was, in general, that natural law became the arbiter. Natural law decides what is moral and what is not. But therewith the fate of the church’s understanding of law was sealed, as well as of its eschatological outlook. Natural law became the structural backbone of theological system, displacing eschatology.”<sup>72</sup>

**1987: “Radical Lutheranism,” *dialog*.**

“This is the source of what we might call the inner and outer aspects of Lutheranism’s crisis. The attempt to combine two incompatible views means that internally it has always had to battle its fundamental scepticism, its uncertainty about the basis for its faith. So in its practice it has resorted mostly to a dogmatic absolutism largely dependent on a view of **scriptural inerrancy**, which usually brought with it **disguised moral absolutisms** of various sorts as well. A will that supposedly begins in a state of freedom ends in captivity. The message becomes a perverted mirror of itself. ‘Yes, you are free, but you jolly well had better choose to believe in justification by faith alone or you will go to hell. The Bible says so! And then you had better show your thanks by your sanctification.’”<sup>73</sup>

**1989: “The Catholic Impasse,” *Promoting Unity*.**

“At its apex, the hardening of lines took the form of rallying behind infallibilism: papal infallibility in the case of Rome or **biblical infallibility or inerrancy in the case of Protestants**. The threatened erosion of apostolic or scriptural truth by Enlightenment criticism could best and most safely be countered by outright refusal to consider the argument.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:447.

<sup>73</sup> Forde, “Radical Lutheranism,” *Lutheran Quarterly* (1987) 12-13; *A More Radical Gospel*, 12.

<sup>74</sup> Forde, *Promoting Unity*, 71.

**"The post-liberal Lutheran** is, of course, something of a shadowy, if not menacing, figure on the contemporary scene, perhaps not yet clearly defined, often a puzzle to both friend and foe, usually mistaken simply for a hard-line conservative confessionalist or orthodoxist. But that is seriously to misread the situation. **A post-liberal Lutheran** is one who has been through the options spawned since the Reformation and realizes that they have all been used up. **Least of all does infallibilism or reactionary conservatism of any sort provide an answer.**"<sup>75</sup>

**1990: *Theology is for Proclamation.***

"On the "right," conservatives and reactionaries insist that we are safe only if everything is, so to speak, set in stone. We are protected from the erosions of time only by **an inerrant scripture**, infallible secondary discourse. But this is likewise an undermining of the present-tense proclamation. Old news remains bad news even if it is supposedly **inerrant** or infallible."<sup>76</sup>

"Conservative Christology seeks to trace explicit 'proof' for the 'divinity' of Jesus directly back to the teaching of **an inerrant scripture**. There is direct continuity between the Christology of Jesus thus uncovered and **their own**. Today such a Christology can maintain itself only by ignoring **the development of careful historical investigation of the Scripture and the problematics that gave rise to that historical work.**"<sup>77</sup>

"On the one hand, the life and teachings [of Jesus] are of no significance apart from the death and resurrection. Indeed, they had to be transformed in the light of the cross and resurrection. This fact is usually the most difficult, especially for the literalists among us. **We must reckon with the fact that the words and teachings of the earthly Jesus in all probability could not have been handed on as he gave them even if those very words had been preserved.** The death and resurrection had intervened and it would be untrue to what God was doing to hand on anything about Jesus apart from that fact."<sup>78</sup>

**1991: "Authority in the Church," Address to Minneapolis Area Synod Assembly.**

"This principle [Scripture interprets itself] can and has been interpreted in a rather simplistic sense, to wit, that the obscure passages are to be interpreted by the clearer ones. But that is rather the argument that goes with quite another principle, that of **the perspicuity of scripture**. Is this not more **a principle of the Reformed?**"<sup>79</sup>

**1993: "Called to Freedom," Presidential Address to the Luther Congress.**

"Both the early and late Luther attacked the idea that Christ is **the end of the ritual law but not the whole law**. In both the early (1519) and later (1531-36) Galatians lectures he pounded away on this issue whenever he got a chance. In his argument against **Erasmus** he said that **this error has made it impossible to understand Paul** and has obscured the knowledge of Christ. Indeed, he claimed that 'even if there had never been any other error in

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<sup>75</sup> Forde, "The Catholic Impasse," *Promoting Unity*, 72.

<sup>76</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 8

<sup>77</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 68.

<sup>78</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 85.

<sup>79</sup> Forde, "Authority in the Church," *A More Radical Gospel*, 65.

the Church, this one alone, was pestilent and potent enough to make havoc of the gospel." The presupposition for true freedom, for Luther, is that **Christ is the end of the law in its entirety.**"<sup>80</sup>

**1995: "The Law and Sexual Behavior," *Lutheran Quarterly*.**

"Some in the church like to argue that since **the church has changed its mind** on matters like **divorce** or **ordination of women** it seems consequent that it could change its stance on sexual behavior as well. But in questions of **the civil use of law** it is not legitimate to argue that one example of change justifies another. **Each case has to be argued individually.**

"If genital sexual relations between people of the same gender are to be approved and/or blessed, the only way that could be done would be to bring them within something akin (at least) to the estate of marriage. **Can this be done in terms consonant with our understanding of the uses of the law? The thesis of this paper is that it cannot.**"<sup>81</sup>

**1997: "The One Acted Upon," *dialog*.**

"The surrender of **biblical inerrancy** to various versions of "truth as encounter" and other existentialist plays seemed to lack the bite of the older views of biblical authority. Perhaps it was that something of the offense was gone. Yet there was no way back. **Older views of biblical inerrancy were not an offense, they were just intellectually offensive.**"<sup>82</sup>

**2004: *The Captivation of the Will*.**

"The only way to overcome the problem of the hiddenness of God not preached is by God preached. **But that will not happen by attempting to infer God's will from the law.**"<sup>83</sup>

**Resources**

- "Lutheran Reflections," L/R 6, 59-68.
- Burgess, "Confessional Propria in Relation to New Testament Texts," *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*. Ed. John Reumann, Samuel H. Nafzger, and Harold H. Ditmanson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 253-67.
- Burgess, "Lutheran Interpretation of Scripture," *The Bible in the Churches*, 101-28
- Forde, "Law and Gospel," *Theological Perspectives*, 50-69.
- Forde, "Infallibility Language and the Early Lutheran Tradition," L/RC 6, 120-37.
- Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 57-85.
- Forde, "The Catholic Impasse," *Promoting Unity*, 67-77.
- Inge Lønning, "The Holy Scriptures," *The Lutheran Church. Past and Present*. Ed. Vilmos Vajta (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977) 83-100.
- Lønning, "No Other Gospel: Luther's Concept of the 'Middle of Scripture' in Its Significance for Ecumenical Communion and Christian Confessions Today," in *Luther's Ecumenical Significance*. Eds. Peter Manns and Harding Meyer (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 229-45.

<sup>80</sup> Forde, "Called to Freedom," *The Preached God*, 260.

<sup>81</sup> Forde, "Law and Sexual Behavior," *Lutheran Quarterly* 9 (1995) 8, 18. *The Essential Forde*, 155, 159.

<sup>82</sup> Forde, "The One Acted Upon," *dialog* 36:1 (1997) 57-58.

<sup>83</sup> Forde, *Captivation of the Will*, 79; *Lutheran Quarterly* 19 (2005) 78.

#### d. Excludes eternal law and third use of law

##### 1. The longing for eternal law.

**NB:** The NALC/LCMS/LCC's "Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures," claims the Bible gives access to eternal moral law:

"Part 2. 4. An *inerrant book*, 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 scriptura reliability in every matter of doctrine and life."

This statement was drafted by Forde's junior colleagues, James Nestingen, Steven Paulson, Mark Mattes, along with representatives from the LCMS and LCC. (See attached appendices.)

In today's world appeals to eternal law and natural law do not work like they used to. Just ask Roman Catholics. They hold to a revealed natural law except when they cannot agree on natural law (contraception, abortion), then the Pope decides. That is the problem. The Reformed, like the LCMS, hold to a third use of law. Lutherans actually have something far better; we have Luther's Two Kingdoms. We can reclaim our heritage, use it in the Twenty-First Century, and pass it on for future generations.

##### **Notable Quotes:**

###### **1969: *The Law-Gospel Debate.***

"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."<sup>84</sup>

"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.'"<sup>85</sup>

"This eschatological understanding of law necessitates a fundamental reorientation at a number of crucial points. First, of course, is it means that **the orthodox concept of law is displaced. Law cannot be understood as a *lex aeterna* in the sense that the orthodox held—an eternal standard which governs the system.**"<sup>86</sup>

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

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<sup>84</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 176.

<sup>85</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 180.

<sup>86</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 195.

**transition between the two ages.** All attempts to think in terms of the *lex aeterna* of orthodoxy, the historical process of Hofmann, the practical religion of Ritschl, or an undialectical theology of the new age must be rejected."<sup>87</sup>

"The history of the idea of the **'third use of the law'** offers little encouragement for its use in a truly evangelical ethic. **It has its roots ultimately in the orthodox concept of the *lex aeterna*** and has hardly served any other purpose than to impose a new kind of legalism."<sup>88</sup>

**1970: "Lex semper accusat?" dialog.**

"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. Furthermore, whenever anyone, be he reactionary or revolutionary, sets up law or a system by which he thinks to bring in the messianic age, that is precisely the misuse of law against which Christians must protest. That is why, I would think, not even revolution is entirely out of the question for the Christian if that appears the only way to bring about necessary changes. But it must be a revolution for the proper use of the law, for taking care of this world, in the name of purely natural and civil righteousness and **not in the name of supernatural pretension.** That is to say, it must be a positive revolution and not a revolution of negation."<sup>89</sup>

**1972: Where God Meets Man.**

"Law belongs to earth, not to heaven. **It is natural, not supernatural.** It is a servant, not a master. That is why Luther did not speak of law as something static and unchangeable. Laws will and must change in their form as the times demand. Luther, for instance, refused to grant **eternal status** even to the laws of Moses. They are strictly 'natural,' he said, not unlike the common law of any nation. **Men on this earth simply don't have access to eternal laws.**"<sup>90</sup>

**1983: "Fake Theology: Reflections on Antinomianism Past and Present," dialog.**

"At the same time, a theology seduced by **nomism** [eternal law] (**all too often the case in the church**) is ill equipped to do battle with antinomianism. Since it has already compromised the eschatological gospel, it can fight only from the position of law and charge its opponents with the 'terrible heresy' of being anti-law. Thus the term 'antinomian.'"<sup>91</sup>

**1984: Christian Dogmatics**

"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

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<sup>87</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 214.

<sup>88</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 226.

<sup>89</sup> Forde, "Lex semper accusat?" dialog, 274. *A More Radical Gospel*, 49, and *The Essential Forde*, 193.

<sup>90</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 111.

<sup>91</sup> Forde, "Fake Theology," dialog 22 (1983) 247.

rightly sensed that justification by faith could not simply be combined with **the older idea of law as an eternal order**, still evident in some of Philip Melanchthon's theological constructions."<sup>92</sup>

**1984: "The Authority of Scripture," Faculty Panel, Luther Seminary.**

"The old being can be coddled in more ways than one. It may also have a penchant for legalism, for seeking **security in the law, and using the Word of God as a means to dominate**. In such cases the authority that people seem to hanker after usually means just **the authority to dominate**. Under the guise of putting oneself **under the Word of God, one puts oneself in the position of using it to control and dominate**. It calls to mind one of those passages in Luther's *Freedom of the Christian* where he speaks of pastors who like to use the Word of God as rods with which to beat people. That must go."<sup>93</sup>

**1987: "Radical Lutheranism," *Lutheran Quarterly*.**

"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."<sup>94</sup>

**1990: *Theology is for Proclamation*.**

"The basic difficulty is that talk of law and gospel has been superimposed on a scheme to which it was originally quite opposed, the same old scheme of the continuously existing subject over against **the eternal ladder of the law**. The subject is to climb the ladder to arrive at righteousness or heaven or wherever it is supposed to lead. The gospel then comes along to make the law work, to shore up the enterprise when it falters, to provide either power to ascend or pardon for failure and even to offer the promise of the ultimate goal to faith, provided, of course, one lives a decent life afterward. 'Sanctification' and the third use of the law is the revenge exacted for too lavish expenditure of the bounty of God. When old beings are not put to death, one must do something to keep them in line. **Preachers become moral police**. Superimposed on that scheme, preaching law and gospel just goes sour."<sup>95</sup>

**1996: "The Apocalyptic 'No' and the Eschatological 'Yes,'" *A More Radical Gospel*.**

"But now the interesting and puzzling thing here is how we are to assess the general reaction to all of this from what we have come to call the more '**orthodox**' theology that developed in the church. For reasons that now seem to us to be quite obvious but were not to them, those who became the teachers of the church rejected Gnosticism. But,

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<sup>92</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:448.

<sup>93</sup> Forde, "The Authority of Scripture," from a panel presentation at Luther Seminary, April 24, 1984. Transcribed by Bradley Jenson.

<sup>94</sup> Forde, "Radical Lutheranism," *Lutheran Quarterly* (1987) 12-13; *A More Radical Gospel*, 12.

<sup>95</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 151.

what bothered me is the question of how and on what grounds this was done. My suspicion is that it was done by attempting to meet the Gnostics theologically on their own ground, **by a move to an ontology in which they hoped to engage the challenge of Gnostic dualism**. Or, perhaps, it was a kind of synthesis between biblical teaching and Hellenism, in which the more egregious elements of Gnosticism and Hellenism were countered by the biblical word. The 'false *gnosis*' was confronted by **the 'true *gnosis*' (Irenaeus)**. So Yahweh was reinstated as the one and only God. The Old Testament was reinstated as a Christian book. Creation and incarnation countered the disparagement of this world. 'Free choice' was established as a defense against Gnostic and Manichaean fatalism. Out of the Gnostic crisis emerged a kind [of] **Christian Gnosis**. Now, of course, it has to be said that this kind of move is entirely understandable, even necessary, given the circumstances. The problem, however, is that **eschatology is the casualty**.<sup>96</sup>

**1997: "What finally to do about the (Counter-) Reformation Condemnations," LQ.**

"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."<sup>97</sup>

**2004: *The Captivation of the Will*.**

"The only way to overcome the problem of the hiddenness of God not preached is by God preached. **But that will not happen by attempting to infer God's will from the law**."<sup>98</sup>

**Resources**

- Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 3-11, 175-233.
- Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 89-115.
- Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:395-469.
- Forde, "Lex semper accusat?" *dialog* 9 (1970) 274; *A More Radical Gospel*, 49; *The Essential Forde*, 193.
- Forde, "Radical Lutheranism," LQ (1987).
- Forde, "The Viability of Luther Today. A North American Perspective," *Word & World* 7 (1987) 22-31.
- Forde, "What finally to do about the (Counter-) Reformation Condemnations," *Lutheran Quarterly* 11 (1997) 3-16.
- Donald H. Juel, "Homosexuality and the Church," *Word & World* X (1990) 166-69.

<sup>96</sup> Forde, "The Apocalyptic No and the Eschatological Yes," *A More Radical Gospel*. Gerhard O. Forde, 23.

<sup>97</sup> Forde, "What finally to do about the (Counter-) Reformation Condemnations," *Lutheran Quarterly* 11 (1997) 3-16, here 14.

<sup>98</sup> Forde, *Captivation of the Will. Luther vs. Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage*. Gerhard O. Forde. Ed. Steven Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 79; *Lutheran Quarterly* 19 (2005) 78.



## Part 2: How we know

### 1. The brokenness of all our human efforts is an aspect of the Gospel

#### a. Sin, death, and the devil are all the same thing

Compare Romans 6:23, 1 Cor 15:26, 56; Hebrews 2:14-15. From the moment we are born we are caught by sin, death, and devil, but we are misled to think we can discern and manage them. Compare 2 Cor 11:14, 1 Cor 4:3-5. The devil appears as an angel of light, and we cannot even judge ourselves, nor can we judge God. Are there even two or three “good works” that are free of sin? No. Isa 64:6, Jer 17:9, Romans 3:9-20.

#### Notable Quotes:

**Forde, 1990.** “. . . [I]f sin enters historically and is not necessary, then we need to confess both that creation is good and that we are bound by cords we will not break. Since sin is such power it is there before us. We did not create it but were captivated by it, seduced by it, at our very origin. It precedes us, and as such is the work of the divine adversary Satan. It is, so to speak, there waiting for us. We are born into a world where it awaits us. We are born into a world that is cut off from God. We are born in Adam.”<sup>99</sup>

#### b. The problem of evil cannot be solved

#### Notable Quotes:

**Forde, 1990.** “Apart from the proclamation God and Satan are virtually indistinguishable.”<sup>100</sup>

**Forde, 1972.** “For Luther most attempts to ‘solve’ the problem of evil are theologically suspect because they involve the same kind of **illegitimate attempts to penetrate God’s ‘mask’ that we have already seen.** . . . The real question is whether we have any warrant to affirm life and to believe in the face of evil and tragedy that the good God is in fact in ultimate control, whether we can confess our trust in ‘the Father Almighty.’ The question is really whether anything that happens here is strong enough to enable us to look evil in the face and still say, ‘I believe.’ . . . Luther’s conviction was that such a thing happened in the cross and resurrection of Christ. There something was accomplished: the will of God was revealed in such a way as to enable us to say, ‘I *believe* in God the Father Almighty,’ which means, “I trust God with the government of the world.’ Of course this is **not a solution to the problem of evil** in the sense that it explains where it came from or how it started or how exactly it is related to God’s omnipotence. Luther has no better answers to those questions than anyone else: **the problem of evil remains for him a deep mystery.** But by making the distinction between God hidden and revealed he points out better how it might actually be handled. **Apart from his revelation in Christ, God is hidden. We have, ultimately, no means for penetrating that hiddenness.**”<sup>101</sup>

**Forde, 1990.** “On the one hand, that the naked God hides from us and saves us from destruction: ‘No one can see God and live.’ . . . There is a ‘hidden grace’ in the hiddenness of

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<sup>99</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 53.

<sup>100</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 20.

<sup>101</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 29-30.

God. On the other hand, the negative aspect is that apart from the proclamation we live under the wrath of the divine hiddenness—the terror of the naked abstractions, the divine absence, the nothingness. The ever-present absent One of the terrifying abstractions, the One who is the end of us, God not preached merges into and becomes confused with Satan, the accuser and destroyer.”<sup>102</sup>

**Forde, 2005.** “Apart from Jesus we are on our own. Luther could even say that apart from Jesus God is indistinguishable from the devil.”<sup>103</sup>

**Forde, 1990.** “God does not come in ways that pander to our so-called freedom of choice. God comes to invade the house of the ‘strong man armed’ who aims to keep his goods in peace. **God comes to challenge the adversary to battle for the life of the captive . . .** God can only come as one who is just the opposite—the negation—of what we might choose. ‘Since . . . the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe’ (1 Cor 1:21). God comes as the rejected one, beaten, spat upon, crowned with thorns, and wasted. We are on the way up, seeking to be gods; God is on the way down, becoming human.”<sup>104</sup>

#### Resources

- Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 29-44.
- Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 13-37, 50-56.

## 2. Canon. The cross controls salvation history and the text

### a. The authority of Scripture is in its proper use

The historical canon of Scripture is governed by the theological canon of the cross, without leaving the historical behind. The historical canon is like the parentheses within which the theological canon of justification by faith alone functions.

The historical canon is the manger in which the Christ Child lies, the stain glass window through which the Light comes to us. To imply that the canon is certain pieces of the Bible is as misguided as implying that the whole Bible fell directly and inerrantly from heaven.

### b. “Scripture interprets itself” = “justification by faith alone”

As #1 above, the cross controls salvation history and the text; the text does not control the cross or its meaning.

#### Notable Quotes:

**Forde, 1991.** “The insistence that **scripture interprets itself** is simply the hermeneutical correlate of **justification by faith alone.**”<sup>105</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 16.

<sup>103</sup> Forde, *The Captivation of the Will*, 45.

<sup>104</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 56.

<sup>105</sup> Forde, “Authority in the Church,” *A More Radical Gospel*, 66.

**Forde, 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?**"<sup>106</sup>

**Forde, 1995.** "*Sui ipsius interpres* [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* [proper sense].**"<sup>107</sup>

Forde, 1996. "At any rate, taken as a whole, from the eschatological perspective, the later followers of the Reformation tended to cave in to incessant complaints of the gospel's 'impracticality.' This is perhaps most evident again in the understanding of the interpretation of scripture. Luther's searching attempts to see the *usus* of the word as killing letter and life-giving spirit went largely buried in manuscripts that were not published or read very widely. All that remained was the insistence that scripture should be interpreted according to its literal sense and that when one got in a tight spot one could invoke a bowdlerized version of Luther's dictum that 'scripture interprets itself.' The word lost its active character as eschatological word doing both the end and the new beginning and reverted to a mere signifier."<sup>108</sup>

Bayer, 2003. "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."<sup>109</sup>

### c. Taking the Bible seriously, so seriously we can deal with its problems

There is no such thing as "a" biblical theology, much less "the" biblical theology. Any such claim is a construct with hidden presuppositions. The Bible contains multiple theologies.

Over some fifteen hundred years material from diverse contexts, at times in conflict with itself and even contradicting itself, came together in whatever biblical 'canon' is being used.

For example, Matthew and Paul contradict one another theologically (Matt 5:17-20: You can keep the law; Paul [Romans 7:13, 10:4-5; Gal. 3:11], you cannot.) Hebrews (6:4-6; 10:26; 12:17 against second repentance) conflicts with Paul, James 1-2 contradicts Romans 4-7.

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<sup>106</sup> Forde, "Authority in the Church," *A More Radical Gospel*, 65.

<sup>107</sup> Forde, "*Scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpres*: Reflections on the Question of Scripture and Tradition," *A More Radical Gospel*, 72. As printed this article differs significantly from Forde's original text, including this passage. The editor Steven Paulson changed the text at this point **by adding a sentence** that breaks Forde's logic and changes his argument. See Forde's original, uncorrupted text a portion of which is printed above. For a comparison of Forde's original text and *Lutheran Quarterly's* altered text see:

<sup>108</sup> Forde, "The Apocalyptic No and the Eschatological Yes," *A More Radical Gospel*, 28.

<sup>109</sup> 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.

Because the early Christians held that the end would come within their generation (1 Thess 4:5, 1 Cor 15:51, Mark 9:1, Matt 10:23, 2 Peter 3:3-4), they did not worry about written records until the fall of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) when they were scattered and the end did not come. When they did write, they were not writing doctrine for all time but passing on the preaching of the early church and dealing with the situations they faced in their congregations.

The cross controls salvation history and the text; the text does not control the cross or its meaning. What then is the function of the text? The text is like a stained-glass window through which the light of the Gospel shines, yet the window may weaken and even distort the Gospel. The Gospel (*was Christum treibet*) is always in control.

Revelation is not *sola Scriptura* in an historical sense. Revelation is the Gospel, the *viva vox evangelii*, the cross. We do not preach the text. Even when we try to, we interpret. We preach through the text, sometimes even against the text, because we are called to preach the Gospel.<sup>110</sup>

**NB:** In contrast the NALC/LCMS Guiding Statement on Scripture insists on the unity of Scripture as a required presupposition: "Lutheran theology also acknowledges that there are in the Scriptures **no conflicting or contradictory concepts of God** and His ways with humanity, but rather **a perfect theological unity**, despite different emphases in different biblical books and authors" (Part 2/3b).

#### d. Inspiration

##### 1. The canon is defined by orthodoxy, not inspiration.

New Testament materials are not a video or audio tape but a record of the preaching of the early church. As someone has said, "In the beginning was preaching."

Many places in Scripture state: "The Lord said. . .," but true to the Hebrew understanding of how God works, it is understood that God works with fallible people in their history.

Lutheran Everett R. Kalin has shown that decisions made in the early church about which letters and gospels to include or exclude in the canon were based on whether they were **trustworthy** or **orthodox**. Kalin: "In the first centuries all baptized Christians were understood to be inspired as was Old Testament "scripture" used to proclaim Jesus as Lord. In addition, as Kalin reports, the early church fathers referred to writings outside of the New Testament as "inspired" when they proclaimed Christ as Lord."<sup>111</sup>

This is the same basis on which Paul rejected "another gospel" even if an angel from heaven" preached it (Gal 1:8). For Luther the "true test" is: "What does not preach Christ is not apostolic, even though St. Peter or Paul taught it; again, what preaches Christ would be apostolic, even though Judas, Annas, Pilate, or Herod did it" (LW 35:396).

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<sup>110</sup> See "Pure text, no: pure Gospel, Yes," available [here](#).

<sup>111</sup> Everett R. Kalin, "The Inspired Community: A Glance at Canon History," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 42 (1971) 341-49.

Therefore 2 Timothy 3:16 is wrongly used whenever it is used as proof that the Bible is verbally inerrant.

## 2. Lutherans have an open canon, defined by the Gospel.

The fascinating process of developing the twenty-seven books of the New Testament is broken, not inerrant. The first list of twenty-seven books as we have them first appeared in an Easter letter of Athanasius to his diocese in 367 A.D.

Lutherans subscribe to the fact of canonicity but not to a historically limited list. In contrast, Roman Catholics and Reformed have both defined their canon in formal ways, the Catholics in 1442 at Florence and 1546 at Trent, and the Reformed in the Belgic Canon 4.

### Notable Quotes:

**Forde, 1978.** "Luther's ultimate authority and standard was not the book of the Bible and the canon as such but that scripture which interpreted itself and also **criticized itself from its own center**, from Christ and from the radically understood gospel.<sup>127</sup> ...One should 'refer the Bible to Christ...nothing but Christ should be proclaimed.'<sup>30</sup> Luther can even go so far as to say: 'If adversaries use scripture against Christ, then we put Christ against the scriptures.'<sup>31</sup> **The Word of God therefore is ultimately Christ and the proclamation of the gospel.**"<sup>112</sup>

**Burgess, 1979.** "When Luther published his translation of the New Testament in 1522, he placed Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation at the end. In contrast to the other New Testament writings, they were not numbered in the table of contents. Like the Apocrypha of the Old Testament, these four books were clearly separated from the previous material by an empty space."<sup>113</sup>

**Lønning, 1984.** ". . . Lutheranism has not made a dogmatic determination concerning the biblical canon. The silence of the Lutheran confession in this respect is indeed itself ambiguous. From its Reformation roots, however, this should best be interpreted, perhaps, by means of the common, though somewhat contradictory term of **an open canon.**"<sup>114</sup>

### e. The New Testament is superior to the Old

There is no cross in the Old Testament. Basic is the fact that, especially since Ezra, Jews are absolute about idolatry, which means that they in no way accept a Son who is "of one substance" with the Father in the Trinity.

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<sup>112</sup> Forde, L/RC 6, 129.

<sup>113</sup> Burgess, "Confessional Propria in Relation to New Testament Texts," *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*. Ed. John Reuman in collaboration with Samuel Nafzger and Harold Ditmanson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) 253.

<sup>114</sup> Inge Lønning, "'No Other Gospel.' Luther's Concept of the 'Middle of Scripture' in Its Significance for Ecumenical Communion and Christian Confessions Today," *Luther's Ecumenical Significance*. Eds. Peter Manns and Harding Meyer (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 233.

The New Testament makes extensive use of the Old Testament, but freely. For example, in 1 Cor 9:9 Paul argues that ministers should be paid and quotes Deuteronomy 25:4: "You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain." And then he says (paraphrase): "You think this was written for them; it was written for us" (1 Cor 9:10).

To assert that "suffering," as in Jeremiah, Job, and the Suffering Servant, et alii, anticipates the cross is a gnostic move.

The New Testament interprets and is superior to the Old because of the cross. This goes back to Lutherans having a theological canon.

**NB:** For the Reformed tradition, the Old and New Testaments are equal to each other and interpret each other. All is the Word of God; covenant theology holds them together. Barth, Eichrodt, von Rad, etc.

### **Notable Quotes:**

**Käsemann, 1971.** "Neither the scriptures nor the world can be adequately grasped except through belief in the justification of the ungodly.... But everything depends on the right coordination of the two. Just as the church must not take precedence over Christ, but must be Christ-determined without itself determining Christ, so salvation history must not take precedence over justification. It is its sphere. **But justification remains the centre, the beginning and the end of salvation history.** Otherwise the cross of Jesus would also inevitably lose its central position and then everything would be distorted – anthropology and ecclesiology as well as Christology and soteriology."<sup>115</sup>

**Forde, 1990.** "The gospels had to be written to tell the truth about Jesus in the light of the cross and the resurrection. They had to be written to preserve the delicate dialectic between continuity and discontinuity. We may indeed argue as to **the relative success each of the Gospels achieves in this sensitive enterprise**, but it is essential for proclamation today to understand this if one is going to preach significantly on the Gospels. On the one hand, the life and teachings are of no significance apart from the death and resurrection. Indeed, they had to be transformed in the light of the cross and resurrection. This fact is usually the most difficult, especially for the literalists among us. **We must reckon with the fact that the words and teachings of the earthly Jesus in all probability could not have been handed on as he gave them even if those very words had been preserved.** The death and resurrection had intervened and it would be untrue to what God was doing to hand on anything about Jesus apart from that fact."<sup>116</sup>

**Forde, 1990.** "What the church has to offer the modern world is not ancient history but the present tense unconditional proclamation."<sup>117</sup>

### **f. Inerrancy is idolatry of the text.**

We are not caught in the game of establishing "biblical facts," that is, affirming or denying that "this" really happened or "this" was really said. For example, concerning the

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<sup>115</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul* (Fortress; Minneapolis, 1971) 75-76.

<sup>116</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 84-85.

<sup>117</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 7-8.

resurrection, that it really happened, a “fact,” i.e., does not establish the “Gospel.” Only believers saw the resurrected Christ (Acts 10:41). “Resurrections” were reported elsewhere in those times. The modern Jewish thinker, Pinchas Lapide, said: “Sure, Jesus rose from the dead. So what?” Lapide did not thereby become Christian.

We trust in the promises. To trust in some kind of Biblical facticity is a kind of idolatry. Then we are not living by faith alone.

To be sure, “inerrancy,” “infallibility,” “inspired,” “direct transmission” are just words and are used variously. But usage of materials has implications, implying inerrancy, etc. Some say: “I reject inerrancy,” yet they use the Bible as if it were a video tape. We lose the Gospel to a new law whenever inerrancy (under the guise of Biblicism) controls preaching and teaching.

**Notable Quotes in addition to the Forde quotes on pp. 23-28 above:**

**Burgess, 1998.** [On reason and critical thinking] “The question, of course, is whether reason for historical critics is necessarily made superior to Scripture or whether historical critics do not also use reason as a tool . . . [F]or the vast majority historical criticism is a method, not a philosophy. In order to penetrate more deeply into the meaning of Scripture, it is necessary to think.”

[On miracles] “The historian is also aware of the fact that literary forms sometimes give the reader a clue to the intent of a miracle story. The important point, however, is that the historian does not try to deny or destroy what the Bible describes; rather, the historical critic helps us understand the text and in fact helps us focus on Jesus Christ alone and him crucified (cf. 1 Cor. 2:2).

[On facticity] “Sometimes it is assumed that history is able to produce facts and that the Bible, a book of history, is full of facts which Christians are to believe in. Historical criticism, in turn, is thought by some to be very destructive because it seems to question some of the facts in the Bible.

“The trouble with ‘facts’ is that truly modern science no longer claims to produce facts but rather statistical averages. And modern historical study no longer claims to produce facts but rather a record of interpretations and ideas. Even the person on the street knows that an accident at the crossroads will be interpreted differently by different witnesses . . . .

“On the other hand, the person on the street still thinks that words have a specific meaning, a meaning which can be established by means of a dictionary after determining the context. What people do not realize is that dictionaries are history books . . . Grammar is the same kind of problem. Most suppose that grammar is exact, that correct usage can be established. Some think that with a ‘historical-grammatical’ method it is possible to avoid the perils of the historical-critical method. Yet grammar too is historical and depends on the philosophies of language operative at a specific time.”<sup>118</sup>

**Lønning, 1984.** “Everything in the universe of Luther’s Reformation stands or falls with the thesis of the clarity of Holy Scripture. . . . The function of the thesis of the clarity of Scripture, however, is only properly recognized when the essential content has been somewhat

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<sup>118</sup> Burgess, “Lutheran Interpretation of Scripture,” *The Bible in the Churches*, 112-13.

correctly determined. **For Luther it is not a question, as is later the case with Orthodox dogmatists, of the quality of transparency (*perspicuitas*) which statements in Scripture should in a specific way have.** Rather, the expression *claritas scripturae* should be understood quite unambiguously from the contrast between light and darkness and the imagery associated with these two concepts . . . . Holy Scripture henceforth is presented as **the pure proclamation of Christ and only this.**"<sup>119</sup>

**Oberman, 1989.** "That this motto [*sola scriptura*] had fallen into disuse would be no loss from Luther's point of view. He started from a different and, in fact, contradictory principle, which was to be ignored in the Protestant longing for a 'paper pope': 'God and the Scriptures are two different things, as different as Creator and creature.'<sup>2</sup> **This historically innovative principle forms the surprising basis of his response to Erasmus, in which we can also find a new and 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."<sup>120</sup>

**Oberman, 1989.** "*The Bondage of the Will* of the year 1525 is directed against the most important representatives of the Renaissance north of the Alps—but not only against them and their followers then and now. It **is aimed equally at the fundamentalists,** who have taken up the cause of the Reformation and promoted it under **the motto of *sola scriptura.***"<sup>121</sup>

#### **g. Early church controversies about Jesus and the need for the Creeds**

Arius (250?-336) claimed that there was a time when he (Jesus) was not, that he is *ho deuterios theos* (second, secondary god).

Certain texts in the Gospel of John raised questions about Jesus. Was he equal to the Father? Or a lesser "revealer" who "tentied" here but was not fully human? (John 1:14 "tentied among us;" 1:18: "He has made him known;" 14:27: "The Father is greater than I." Cf. 1 Cor 15:28. Also questions were raised about adoptionism: Rom 1:3; Matt 3:17; and tritheism Matt 28:19.

As a consequence, councils were called to keep the Gospel in the center.

#### **Resources**

- "Lutheran Reflections," L/RC 6, 59-68.
- "Lutheran Reflections," L/RC 7, 47-48.
- "Lutheran Reflections," L/RC 8, 125-32.
- L/RC 9, ## 20, 40.
- Bayer, "What Makes the Bible Become Holy Scripture?" *Martin Luther's Theology. A Contemporary Interpretation*. Trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 68-92.
- Burgess, "Lutheran Interpretation of Scripture," *The Bible in the Churches*, 101-28.
- Burgess, "Confessional Propria," *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, 253-67.
- Forde, "Law and Gospel," *Theological Perspectives*, 50-69.

<sup>119</sup> Lønning, "No Other Gospel," *Luther's Ecumenical Significance*, 233-34.

<sup>120</sup> Oberman, *Luther. Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 221. Internal footnote #2: LW 33:25.

<sup>121</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 225.



- Forde, "Infallibility Language and the Early Lutheran Tradition," L/RC 6, 120-37.
- Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 57-85.
- Forde, "*Scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpres*: Reflections on the Question of Scripture and Tradition," See Forde's actual text, not the changed text that appears in *A More Radical Gospel*, 72.
- Forde, "Authority in the Church," *A More Radical Gospel*,
- Forde, "Radical Lutheranism," *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (1987) 12-13.
- 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.
- Lønning, "The Holy Scriptures," *The Lutheran Church: Past and Present*. Ed. Vilmos Vajta (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977) 83-100.
- "The Trap of Authenticating Biblical Facts," [www.crossalone.us](http://www.crossalone.us).
- Pure text, no – Pure Gospel, yes. [www.crossalone.us](http://www.crossalone.us)

### 3. Creeds and councils. Responding to attacks on Christology

[Creedal fragments in the New Testament: 1 Cor 8:6, 12:3, Rom 10:9. "Jesus is Lord." Another way to test true faith: Did Jesus come in the flesh? (1 John 4:1-4).]

Lutherans hold to the first four ecumenical councils, which were a response to the confusion over heresy and orthodoxy. The creeds are about salvation: Jesus is truly **GOD** to save us. Jesus is truly man to save **US**.

- The Councils of Nicea (325) and 381 (Constantinople) Nicene Creed: Jesus is true God (*homoousios*) = "of one substance" (not *homoiousios* – of the same substance).
- Council of Ephesus (431): Jesus is true man. Mary is *theotokos* (not Mother) God bearer.
- Council of Chalcedon (451): Jesus is true God, true man, "unmixed, undivided." Stop! Do not go further.

Lutherans have the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed (The ending goes wrong: "Whoever doesn't hold. . . ") at the beginning of the *Book of Concord*.

In the L/RC Dialogue 1 Lutherans and Roman Catholics both affirmed the Nicene Creed but for different reasons. The Catholics because of tradition and the Lutherans because of the Gospel.

### 4. Tradition

Lutherans take tradition very seriously. But the "great" tradition founders on women's ordination, which is a recent and narrow development within the "great" tradition. The "great" tradition founders again on the papacy, which is very old and broad within the "great" tradition.

#### Notable quotes:

**Burgess, 1994.** "Thus the problem of tradition remains difficult and dominant. . . . Even so irenic a document as the German study *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era* states that 'there is

yet no explicit consensus about the critical function of Scripture over against the formation of the church's tradition.' Basically the problem of Scripture and tradition is part of every theological dispute even though, because controversy tends to focus on particular questions, the larger question of the process of transmission is usually not in the foreground."<sup>122</sup>

## 5. Conscience

Luther on conscience is a hugely disputed subject. Conscience is not Jiminy Cricket or the like. Luther used the concept variously. Luther states that to forgive others is a sign, assurance, and comfort that one is forgiven in heaven. This flatly contradicts what Luther himself writes in the Large Catechism that we return daily to baptism (LC Baptism 65, 70, 84, 86; cf. SC Baptism 12), and that is enough.

### Notable Quotes:

**Forde, 1984.** "Does one appeal to 'conscience' in preaching? No doubt, as Luther often said, one would preach in vain if there were no conscience. But one must preach, perhaps we can say, as though conscience were the empty house of Jesus' parable, now occupied by seven more demons. One must not preach in such fashion as to solidify their tenure in the house. One assumes indeed that people live and suffer 'under the law,' but that **what they are suffering from is the misuse of the law, the assumption that law, in conjunction with conscience, is the way.** Many today like to say that we do not need, therefore, to preach 'the law,' but only the gospel. That is a mistake. **The 'law' that must be preached is the absolute offense of the unconditional gospel,** the 'letter' which kills, so the spirit can make new – the kind of law which destroys the illusions about law as the way and thus drives the demons from the house."<sup>123</sup>

## 6. Confessions

In the 1970's Lutherans in America split over how to use the Bible as "the only rule and norm," as stated in *The Book of Concord*. To be sure, the Bible contains assertions that are logically clear, such as Jesus is subordinate to the Father (John 14:28), and women must wear veils in church (1 Cor 11:5), divorce is not permitted except for adultery (Matt 5:32), but these clear assertions are not normative for faith and life today.

How do we sort out the varied assertions found in the Bible? *The Book of Concord* uses a variety of phrases to describe the doctrine of justification by faith alone as the plumb line for judging all other doctrines and for the proper use of *The Book of Concord*.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Burgess, "Montreal (1963) A Case Study," *The Quadrilog. Tradition and the Future of Ecumenism. Essays in Honor of George H. Tavard*. Ed. Kenneth Hagen (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994) 270-86, here 283.

<sup>123</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:424.

<sup>124</sup> The varied ways of referring to the doctrine of justification include the following: "chief article," "the principle one," "the chief part," "the most important topic," "this article," "the 'most important' of all Christian teachings," "this one teaching," "the pure teaching of the gospel," "in teaching and in all the articles," and "this teaching." In context all these ways of referring to justification show how justification by faith alone is not only the chief article but also the article by which all other articles, including the article on Scripture in the Preface to the Epitome of the Formula of Concord, are to be understood.

## 7. *Propria* and catechisms

Ever since the Reformation Lutherans have used the exclusive word “alone” (*sola* in Latin) – Christ alone, cross alone, faith alone, Word alone, Scripture alone, grace alone – to guard the pure preaching of the Gospel. The little word “alone” defines the big question: What is it to be saved? By the exclusive “alone,” we Lutherans are not being rigorous. We do it because salvation is at stake whenever the purity of the Gospel is distorted (Gal 1:6-9).

Lutheran identity has been stated in terms of Luther’s Small Catechism. In 1529 Luther wrote the Large Catechism in haste in the midst of many other things. In contrast, the Small Catechism (1529) had been reworked by Luther over many years.

Of particular importance is Luther’s explanation to the Third Article of the Creed: “I believe that by my own reason or strength, I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him.” In other words, we are elected, chosen: “You did not choose me, but I chose you . . .” (John 15:16).

## 8. *Amt*, Office

- Augsburg Confession 5 describes a function, not an office. Augsburg Confession 14 also does not describe an office. “Rightly called” rejects that which is arbitrary and that which is self-aggrandizing, for example, the self-selection of the “inner” call and the implicit claim to authority because of the “inner” call. Claims for “inner” call maybe just wish-fulfillment or from an “Angel of light” who is the devil disguised (2 Cor 11:14). No matter how dramatic, strong, or warm the feeling, there is no way of knowing where such a feeling is from God. Thus not about an “inner” call, but the “outer” call to a task that needs to be done and for which one is qualified and trained.
- Clergy are called to proclaim the Gospel. And the only test is: Is the Gospel being proclaimed? (Or has another gospel, a message of do-goodism, God-within-me, discipleship-we-make-it-real taken over?) Both the preacher and the hearers are to focus on one question: Is this the Gospel?
- What is the Gospel? 1 Cor 9:15. 2 Cor 4:5. John 1:29; Galatians 1:6-9, 2:5, 14; 1 Cor 1:17-25. The Gospel in ten words: God in Christ died and rose for you and me. Yet the Gospel is not a formula, not a matter of repeating certain words.
- Pastor = mailman, postman. But: Not intrinsically to persuade, convince, entertain. 1 Cor 1:17: “through the foolishness of what we preach . . . (1 Cor 1:21). Not intrinsically a teacher, yet the Gospel is incarnate, thus into our world of history and human reason. The Lord divides law and Gospel, he alone through the Holy Spirit. Could we preach in Chinese? No, we are called to proclaim the Gospel to these people in their situation. The preacher is not to produce his/her own opinions, but preach the Gospel. “Woe is me . . .” (1 Cor 9:16).
- The Gospel is outside of us, in spite of us (*extra nos, contra nobis [uns Gegenüber]*). The sacraments are done to us and do not depend on us. The Holy Spirit works through these as through means to save (Augsburg Confession 5, 7). Romans 10:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 13; 1 Peter 1:23-25).

## Notable Quotes:

**Forde, 1990.** "The office of ministry is God's idea, not ours. But how or when was the office instituted? **It is always a temptation here to look for some particular instance in 'holy history'** or perhaps for a crucial moment in the life of Jesus when something like an act of institution is supposed to have taken place. So many, particularly Roman Catholics, have looked to Matt. 16:18: 'You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.' Others may seek different instances for an 'institution,' or at least an indication that Jesus must have had church and ministry in mind. But if, subsequently, historical investigation calls talk of the church and ministry by Jesus himself into question, we appear to be on shaky ground.

"The confession [Articles 5 and 14 of the Augsburg Confession], however, avoids this impasse. **Divine institution** is not **identified** with an isolated moment or act, even of Jesus, but rather **with the giving of the gospel and the sacraments.** The gospel and the sacraments were given when God went public in Jesus. God thereby instituted the office."<sup>125</sup>

**Forde, 1990.** "Before we leave the subject of the ordained public office we must enter something of a caveat. Increasingly one hears the claim advanced by those involved in ecumenical dialogues that the ordained public office is '**constitutive**' of the church. To be faithful to the confessional view one must be quite clear that **the office constitutes nothing.** Christ is the head of the church and as the sheer giver of all good constitutes the church. The office is constituted by this sheer act of divine giving, not vice versa. The office is simply *ministry*: service inspired by the divine deed. To say more than that is to confuse the giving and the gift. The delivery of the gift, and, indeed, even a 'delivery boy' is quite necessary, but it does not constitute anything."<sup>126</sup>

**Forde, 1991.** "What distinguishes such [ordained] ministry from other ministry is simply its public nature. It is a public office to and in which one is 'ordered' by the church.

"This public exercise of the office is limited, indeed, self-limited, by what it has to ad-minister, i.e., by the gospel itself. Where it exceeds that limit and appeals to 'higher' or 'other' authority, it falsifies itself as ministry of the gospel and succumbs to law. The aim of the office is to set people free from sin, death, and the devil by the word of the gospel and to call into being thereby the church which **proclaims and waits upon the coming of the eschatological kingdom of God.**"<sup>127</sup>

**Forde, 1991.** "In the public office, the age to come, **the kingdom of God**, stakes out a claim, sets up **an embassy**, here in this age."<sup>128</sup>

**Forde, 1991.** "First, one should connect the *rite vocatus* [Article 14] with the fact of divine institution in Article 5. There is no particular sacramental magic here. That is so because for the confessors all public offices are divinely instituted.

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<sup>125</sup> Forde, "The Ordained Ministry," *Called & Ordained. Lutheran Perspectives on the Office of the Ministry*. Eds. Todd Nichol and Marc Kolden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 117-36, here 124.

<sup>126</sup> Forde, "The Ordained Ministry," *Called & Ordained*, 132-33.

<sup>127</sup> Forde, "Public Ministry and Its Limits," *dialog* 30 (1991)102.

<sup>128</sup> Forde, "Public Ministry," *dialog* 30 (1991) 104.

“Second, the call to public office has its own internal rationale. Since it is a public matter, the call comes through the church, through God’s people. All private and individual claims to possess the Spirit are uncertain and cannot be taken as a warrant for the public office.

Third, . . . I see no justification for the complaint that there is some glaring or frightful lacuna here which for ecumenical, practical, or church political reasons has to be filled in with borrowings from Rome, Canterbury, or Constantinople. A reading of the history and consideration of the theological roots of the matter simply does not support the contention that the confessors at Augsburg either presupposed Roman canonical ordination or were somehow conscious of or worried about the ‘irregularity of their own ordinations.’”<sup>129</sup>

**Forde, 1991.** “The basic temptation in all public offices—secular or sacred—is to overstep the line between the power of this age and the power of the age to come, to attempt to bolster one’s temporal authority by illegitimate drafts on the divine—to claim, perhaps, that the worldly form exists *de iure divino*, as it is said.

[Regarding the ELCA’s proposal to adopt the Episcopal historic episcopate.] “Then ordination does not mean being called to the public office, but rather bestowal of some special charism. One so endowed, consequently, can be said to be ‘constitutive of the church,’ and so forth. But this is surely too grandiose. A public minister, however necessary to publicize the message, does not constitute anything, and certainly not the kingdom to be represented. The minister communicates and carries out the policies of the sovereign, but doesn’t constitute them. Where this is forgotten, the office gets remystified, so to speak.”<sup>130</sup>

**Forde, 1992.** “One can even say that such an office is divine instituted since God, by providing the gospel and the sacrament,’ called it into being. But since it is an office announcing the end, it is self-limiting. **It can only seek to get out of the way for the eschatological Kingdom.** This is what the *satis est* means. It is a self-limiting concept. Therefore one can claim no more than human warrant for the institutional forms coined in this age.”<sup>131</sup>

**Forde, 1991.** “What the Lutheran Confessors did, to put it in contemporary jargon, was to reinterpret the question of divine verse human right in eschatological terms. That, surely, is what Article 28 of the CA is about. It is essential to recognize that they did not reject the idea of divine right. But they reinterpreted it in terms of the gospel. The only exercise of divine right allowed is the preaching of and care for the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. The only authority bishops can wield by divine right is identical to that of an evangelical pastor: to preach the gospel, to forgive sins, judge doctrine, condemn doctrine contrary to the gospel, and exclude the ungodly from the Christian community (28:21).”<sup>132</sup>

## 9. Church/gospel

- There will be church structure because we are sociological beings, but any particular structure is permissible and no particular structure may be required.

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<sup>129</sup> Forde, “Public Ministry,” *dialog* 30 (1991) 105.

<sup>130</sup> Forde, “Public Ministry,” *dialog*, 30 (1991) 107.

<sup>131</sup> Forde, “The Meaning of *Satis Est*,” *A More Radical Gospel*. Gerhard O. Forde, 168.

<sup>132</sup> Forde, “Public Ministry,” *dialog* 30 (1991)108.

- Not visible/invisible but hidden/revealed (election in Christ). Apology 7-8. The Bride of Christ/*ecclesia peccatrix* (sinner).
- "It is sufficient for the true unity of the church that the Gospel be proclaimed purely and the sacraments celebrated according to this Gospel" (BC 7; Tappert 32)
- Thus: Not a building, not a particular liturgical style, not a particular kind of music, not a revealed way of organizing the church. Not a middle way between RC's and Baptists. Recall the famous codicil by Melanchthon when he signed the Smalcald Articles: We could accept the papacy if allowed the freedom of the Gospel. Which church structure is a practical matter of what promotes the proclamation of the Gospel (Smalcald 15: Tappert 316-17). No particular structure can be required.

### Notable Quotes:

**L/RC 6, 1978.** "The language of infallibility continues to seem dangerously misleading to most of us even when applied to the Bible, and to all of us when used in reference to popes, councils, or doctrinal formulations. It can too easily be abused to detract from the primacy of God's justifying act in Jesus Christ."<sup>133</sup>

**Forde, 1990.** "Where justification is by faith alone, however, **the true church is revealed only in acts which set us free** from the tyranny of law, sin, and death. So its only visible marks in this world are acts of ultimate liberation, primarily the pure preaching of the gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments, but also as Luther would sometimes say, in other manifestations of liberation, ministry, bearing the cross, suffering, prayer, and so forth.

"What the CA proposes is an utterly unromantic understanding of the church. The church of Jesus Christ is created by that most unromantic theologoumenon of all, the gospel of the forgiveness of sins, not by any *iustitia propria*, human achievement, commonality, institutionalism, holiness, priesthood, or what have you. Those things just breed disunity. It rests solely on the *iustitia aliena*, or, as Melanchthon would say, the merits of Christ."<sup>134</sup>

### Resources

- "Reflections of the Lutheran participants," *Eucharist and Ministry. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 4*. Eds. Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy. Hereafter L/RC 4.
- "Reflections of the Lutheran participants," L/RC 5, 23-33.
- "Lutheran Reflections," L/RC 6, 59-68.
- "Lutheran Reflections," L/RC 8, 125-32.
- Burgess, "Teaching Authority in the Lutheran Tradition," available here.
- Burgess, "An Evangelical Episcopate?" *Called and Ordained*, 137-50.
- Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, Chapter 4.
- Forde, "The Ordained Ministry," *Called and Ordained. Lutheran Perspectives on the Office of the Ministry*. Eds. Todd Nichol and Marc Kolden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).
- Forde, "Justification by Faith Alone: The Article by Which the Church Stands or Falls?" *dialog 27* (1988) 260-67.

<sup>133</sup> "Lutheran Reflections," L/RC 6:65.

<sup>134</sup> Forde, "Satis Est? What do we do when other churches don't agree?" 16.

- Forde, "The Meaning of *satis est*," *Lutheran Forum* 26 (1992) 14-18; *A More Radical Gospel*, 159-70.
- Forde, "*Satis est*. What do we do when other churches don't agree?" Available [here](#).
- George A. Lindbeck, *L/RC* 4, 56-60.
- Jerome D. Quinn, "Ministry in the New Testament," *L/RC* 4, 69-100.
- "The Book of Concord's Key to Itself" available [here](#).

### Part 3: Election through the cross alone means we live by forgiveness

#### 1. Discerning law and gospel is based on election through the Word of the cross

##### a. The problem is defined by the solution

God saw the problem, solved it his way, through the cross. The problem is **that** serious. We cannot see the problem because we are caught in sin. Rom 6:23, 1 Cor 15:26, 56, Hebrews 2:14. Also Small Catechism #5 "sin, death, and the devil." Isa 64:6, Jer 17:9, Rom 3:9-20. *LW* 26:33.

##### b. Forde recovers Luther's functional (rather than material) view of law

###### Notable Quotes:

**Forde, 1984.** "The Reformation's insistence upon justification by faith as an **eschatological event** brought with it a reassertion of the **functional understanding of law**. Luther especially insisted that law must be clearly distinguished from gospel and the proper 'uses' of the law carefully explained. The distinction between law and gospel and the doctrine of the uses of law are of **primary importance** because they contain the key to virtually everything we want to say subsequently about the Christian life."<sup>135</sup>

**Forde, 1984.** "Throughout this *locus* 'law' is to be taken in a **functional rather than a material sense**. 'The law' in this sense is demand, that voice which 'accuses,' **as the reformers put it**, arising from anywhere and everywhere, insisting that we do our duty and fulfill our being. Anything which does that exercises the function or 'office' of the law. Law is not a specifiable set of propositions, but is **one way communication functions** when we are alienated, estranged, and bound. This understanding transcends the usual kind of argument, as when, for instance, it is maintained that 'law' should be understood as 'Torah,' a gracious gift in the covenant rather than a harsh imposition, or when it is said that Paul misunderstood the law. Such exegetical considerations, important in their own right, are not decisive for the question at hand. It makes no difference at the outset, therefore, whether 'the law' involved is biblical, the natural law, the law of being, the law of Christ, or the faces of starving children on the television screen. It is the way the communication functions, its 'use,' that matters. The assumption we fallen humans make is that the law is the way, that we can be saved by response to a demand, by 'the works of the law.' We assume we can end the voice by acceding to its demands."<sup>136</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:415.

<sup>136</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:400.

**Forde, 1969.** "God's command and God's continuing creation belong together. **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.'"<sup>137</sup>

**Forde, 1969.** "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 certain circumstances. Since law is defined in this general way, no great point is made about a distinction between a natural or a revealed law. It is simply taken for granted that law is natural for man."<sup>138</sup>

**c. Law is an existential power, not a particular heavenly code**

**See Section 1.b.4 above**

**d. There is no decisive break between natural law and biblical law**

**Forde, 1969.** "For Luther, law is 'natural' to man in the sense that it represents the way he naturally thinks and reacts; this cannot be escaped apart from faith. The law is 'written in the heart.' But this does not mean that everyone (or anyone, for that matter) has an innate and accurate knowledge of the divine in the form of a timeless moral code; this is ruled out. Law is, on the one hand, 'in its expressly rational character the form of being of the reality of man as a reasonable creature in this world;' it is also the 'mask' through which God works. One may have only a dim knowledge of law, or he may have a highly refined ethical system derived from the philosopher. He may even derive his ethical code from the Bible which is *quantitatively* more correct. But whatever it is, his code is still law, and **on this level there can only be a question of degrees of correctness at a given time.** Hence the decalogue is the best statement of the natural law. If man does not know the law, he must be taught. But on this level, within the old age, it remains, it would seem, only a question of **the relative appropriateness of a course of action in a given situation.** On this level there is no decisive break between what is natural and what is revealed."<sup>139</sup>

**Forde, 1969.** "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. It is simply taken for granted that law is natural for man.**"<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 177.

<sup>138</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 194.

<sup>139</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 193.

<sup>140</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 194.



e. **Both ceremonial and moral law comprise “the law”**

**NB:** The NALC/LCMS/LCC’s “Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures” separates the moral (and continuing) law and from the ceremonial law, which is time conditioned. This “Guiding Statement” was drafted and endorsed by NALC representatives James Nestingen, Mark Mattes, and Steven Paulson, along with representatives from the LCMS and the LCC:

“Part 2.4.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.”

**1983: “Fake Theology,” *dialog*.**

“But once again, this is **fake theology**. If overt antinomianism is impossible, covert antinomianism is even more so. It will not work. The law just changes its tack and becomes, if anything, worse. **Is there any comfort in the idea that the ceremonial law ends, but not the moral?** And what, finally, is the difference between them? Are the first three commandments ceremonial or moral? Does the law attack any less just because theologians say it is a friendly guide? Or does that only make matters worse? Is the idea that Torah was a blessing to ancient Israel of any comfort to a twentieth-century gentile? Have we really escaped from anything by all the contextualizing and interpreting and relativizing? Or have we succeeded only in bringing the voice of despair closer?”<sup>141</sup>

**1984: *Christian Dogmatics*.**

“Unable to rhyme Matt. 5:17-18 with Rom. 10:4, the dogmatic tradition has experienced nothing but trouble over the law. When one does not see that ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’ do pass away in the eschatological fulfillment anticipated and grasped by faith, and that just such fulfillment *is* the end and goal, **Paul and Matthew are at irreconcilable odds.** Unable to grasp this fulfillment as end, the tradition for the most part had to indulge in what was strictly forbidden by both Matthew and Paul: tampering with the content of the law to arrive at a compromise. The result was the idea that in Christ the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament were abrogated (thus throwing a sop to Paul’s claim that Christ was the ‘end’ of the law) while the ‘moral’ law was not (thus supposedly satisfying Matthew’s claim that not one iota or dot would pass away until ‘the end’). But that is patent nonsense which only confuses the issue further and completely obscures the eschatology involved. **Neither Testament makes that kind of distinction between ceremonial and moral law.** Indeed, it seems that in most instances, ruptures of the ceremonial law are more serious than those of the moral law. **Furthermore, the tradition was left with the problem of deciding just what was moral and what was ceremonial.** Are the first three commandments, for instance, moral or ceremonial? One might, of course, as happened most generally, try to settle on the decalogue as the moral law. But there is a good deal in the Old Testament and

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<sup>141</sup> Forde, “Fake Theology: Reflections on Antinomianism Past and Present,” *dialog* 22 (1983) 249.

the New outside the decalogue which might also qualify as moral and ethical material of the highest quality. Who is to decide?

"The outcome of such confusion was, in general, that natural law became the arbiter. Natural law decides what is moral and what is not. But therewith the fate of the church's understanding of law was sealed, as well as of its eschatological outlook. **Natural law became the structural backbone of the theological system, displacing eschatology.**"<sup>142</sup>

**1993: "Luther and *Usus Pauli*," dialog.**

"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.<sup>9</sup> 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.'<sup>10</sup> **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.**"<sup>143</sup>

**1993: "Called to Freedom," Presidential Address to the International Luther Congress.**

"Theologically, both before and after the Reformation, the most common move toward domesticating freedom has been the attempt to qualify the Pauline claim that Christ is the end of the law to those of faith. 'Reason,' as Luther would put it, simply cannot entertain such an idea, the conviction that in Christ the law comes to an end, that law is over and freedom begins. As we have seen, freedom as usually conceived needs law as the mediator of possibility. What shall we do if there is no law to tell us what to do? But is Paul then wrong in his claim? Theologians as usual, however, have found a way to have their cake and eat it, too. They made a distinction in the content of the law – something Paul never did – between ceremonial or ritual laws on the one hand and moral law on the other. **Then they proceeded to say that Christ was the end of ceremonial law but not the moral law.** Christ ended the necessity, that is, for sacrifice, circumcision, food and ritual regulations, etc., but not the demands of moral law (e.g., the Decalogue). Christ died, it seems, to save us from the liturgiologists! One might grant, of course, that this is no small accomplishment, but the price does seem a bit high!"<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:447.

<sup>143</sup> Forde, "Luther and the *Usus Pauli*," *dialog* 32 (1993) 275-82, here 278.

<sup>144</sup> Forde, "Called to Freedom," Presidential Address to the International Congress for Luther Research, 1993, *The Preached God*, 254-69, here 259.

f. **Law is always of this world, natural, human, and changing**

“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.’**”<sup>145</sup>

“The gospel as the unconditional promise of the kingdom **humanizes and naturalizes the law.** No doubt we can say even that it “contextualizes” the law—as long as we realize that the gospel does this and not just the passage of time or historical expediency. The distinction between **the two kingdoms** or kinds of rule is made precisely to foster such **humanization.**”<sup>146</sup>

“The rejection of monastic vows, and with them the quest for one’s own holiness, meant for Luther a new understanding of and love for God’s commandments. What God commands takes us into the natural, created world. Here the proper place of **‘natural law’** is to be found. By natural law most seem to mean ‘supernatural’ law, a law built into the universe which, if followed, leads to eternal bliss, a kind of built-in permanent escape mechanism. Revealed law is then something like the completion, the clarification of what has been dimmed by the fall, the final extension of the escape ladder. **That is not what Luther meant by it, even when he compared and often identified the commandments of God with ‘natural law.’ He meant precisely *natural* and not supernatural law.** The commandments of God do no 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.**”<sup>147</sup>

“If law is eternal, if there is no distinction between this age and the next, there is no way to speak of the goodness of our actions in and for this age; everything is judged by **the moral absolute.**”<sup>148</sup>

“For faith in the end of the law leads to the view that its purpose is to take care of this world, not to prepare for the next. That means that **we do not possess absolute, unchangeable**

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<sup>145</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 211.

<sup>146</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:459.

<sup>147</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:454-60.

<sup>148</sup> Forde, “*Lex semper accusat*,” *dialog* 9 (1970) 274; *A More Radical Gospel* 48; *The Essential Forde*. Gerhard O. Forde. *Distinguishing Law and Gospel*. Eds. Nicholas Hopman, Mark C. Mattes, and Steven D. Paulson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017) 192.

**laws.** If the law no longer takes care of this world, it can and must be changed. As even Luther put it,<sup>149</sup> we must write our own decalogue to fit the times."<sup>150</sup>

"In its civil use the law restrains evil and establishes order for the care of human society. God uses the law in this sense to hold the world in readiness for the gospel and keep it from collapsing into the chaos which threatens it. Under the civil use of the law it is quite possible to speak of the goodness and 'civil righteousness' of human activity even though **it does not reach beyond this age.** If this use of the law is overextended, however, if one begins to take the law into one's own hands in order to bring in one's own version of the kingdom, tyranny results and resistance must be mounted. **Precisely the proper distinction between law and gospel limits and humanizes the law.**"<sup>151</sup>

"[The Christian does not have] some special epistemological advantages over the non-Christian when it comes to 'knowledge' of the law. It is precisely faith, however, which tells the believer that this is not so. Faith tells him that law is something he has in common with the rest of mankind. To be sure, the Christian also has the laws of the Bible, but even these **as laws are available to the non-Christian, to say nothing of non-Christian parallels of biblical law.**

"What the Christian is given is a faith that clarifies for him the nature of his existence under the law in this age. Faith tells him that the **'naturalness' of the law means that he does not have access to the will of God in the form of some eternal law of being, but rather that in common with the rest of mankind he must use his reason** in the context of his situation to work out the best practical solutions to his problems."<sup>152</sup>

"**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.**"

## 2. Election means the Christian life is *totus/totus*

Lutherans view the Christian life as *simul iustus et peccator* (totally sinful/totally justified) because of the seriousness of sin. Although Christ in his death and resurrection has been victorious, this victory is not evident and will not be evident until the final judgment.

When Luther speaks of change and growth in the human being, it is in relationship to each other and not in relation to God that growth takes place. In other words, the dialectical character of Luther's thought does not break down at this point.

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<sup>149</sup> Martin Luther on the law as human and changing: "Indeed, we would make new decalogues, as Paul does in all the epistles, and Peter, but above all Christ in the gospel" (LW 34:112). "This text makes it clear that even the Ten Commandments do not pertain to us" (LW 35:165). "The Gentiles are not obligated to obey Moses. Moses is the *Sachsenspiegel* for the Jews" (LW 35:167).

<sup>150</sup> Forde, "Lex semper accusat?" dialog, 274; *A More Radical Gospel*, 49; *The Essential Forde*, 193.

<sup>151</sup> Forde, L/RC 7, 301.

<sup>152</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 211-12.

## Notable Quotes:

### 1969: *The Law-Gospel Debate*.

"Thinking *theologically* about the dialectic involves the fact that this act is at once **total judgment and total grace**. The fact that it is **total judgment** means that here can be no attempts on man's part to translate himself prematurely into the new age either by his action or by his thinking. Man's acting and thinking in this life remain an acting and a thinking in this age, under the eschatological limit. The fact that it is also **total grace** means that man can be content to allow his acting and thinking to remain as it is, totally in this age; he can trust Christ entirely for the gift of the new age."<sup>153</sup>

"Faith means acknowledging **this totality** of judgment. Since faith accepts the being of man in Adam, it knows that its formal possibilities of knowing are not altered. Faith does not separate the believer from his fellow man in such matters; instead it drives home to him his solidarity with all mankind. In the problem of the knowledge of the law, **the man of faith must join with the rest of mankind in searching for knowledge in given situations as best he can**. Nor should the Christian refuse to recognize the possibility that certain of his 'unbelieving' brothers could be blessed with better insight than he is. Even the laws of the Bible give the Christian no warrant for superiority, for as laws they are full as available to man apart from faith as they are to man in faith. These laws too must be interpreted in their context and applied with the best skill and knowledge at man's disposal."<sup>154</sup>

### 1972: *Where God Meets Man*.

"As we have already indicated, he [Luther] thought not in terms of gradual improvement according to the law but rather more in terms of old and new where the passage from one to the other is brought about by death and resurrection. **The old and the new are total states**."<sup>155</sup>

### 1982: *Justification by Faith. A Matter of Death and Life*.

"Thus Luther, when he was struggling with both the existential and the systematic aspects of the problem came to the conclusion that all the schemes of movement from sin to righteousness, all thinking exclusively in terms of that legal or moral metaphor, had to be abandoned if grace and justification are to have any reality at all. In the place of all such schemes, in the place of the conditional thinking that always traps us, we must put **the absolute simultaneity of sin and righteousness**. When God acts upon us with his grace, with his justifying deed, his pronouncement, **we become simul iustus et peccator**, simultaneously righteous and sinner.... Grace is the divine pronouncement itself, the morning star, the flash of lightning exploding in our darkness which reveals all truth *simultaneously*, the truth about God and the truth about us."<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 223.

<sup>154</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 229.

<sup>155</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 52.

<sup>156</sup> Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life*, 29.

"If we can begin to wrap our minds around that perhaps we can be grasped by the radicality, the audaciousness, the explosiveness of the confessional point. **When God imputes righteousness he makes us sinners at the same time.** He makes it quite plain that we do not have righteousness in ourselves and never will. By declaring us righteous unilaterally, unconditionally for Christ's sake, he at the same time unmasks sin and unfaith. By forgiving sin, sin is revealed and attacked at the root in its *totality*; our unfaith, rebellion, and blindness, our unwillingness to move out of the legal prison, our refusal of life. God's justification, you see, is fully as opposed to human righteousness and pretense as it is to human unrighteousness. It cuts both ways, both at the ungodly and the super-godly. The battle is not against sin merely as 'moral' fault but against sin as 'spiritual' fault, against our supposed 'intrinsic righteousness,' pretense and hypocrisy, our supposed movement and progress, our substitution of fiction for truth. **The totality of the justifying act reveals the totality of sin.**"<sup>157</sup>

"The person is 'transported' to use a modern idiom, taken away from sin when the radical nature of the justifying act **sets the totally just (*totus iustus*) over against the complete sinner (*totus peccator*) . . . .**"<sup>158</sup>

#### 1984: *Christian Dogmatics 2*

"If you lose your 'virtue,' what will protect you then? Luther's advice in such situations was: 'Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe even more boldly.' The point is not to go out and find some sins to commit. The point is rather **not to be deceived by the glitter of ideals, of sanctity and piety, by the quest for the Holy Grail. Christ and Christ alone has dealt with sin and saves sinners.**"<sup>159</sup>

"We can best attack the problem by asking whether in Luther ... it is possible to discover any distinctive ideas about sanctification or Christian growth. **The *simul***, it is to be recalled, was posited precisely to counter the idea that justification is to be synthesized with ideas of progress according to law. The justifying act unmasks and exposes all our pretense about becoming virtuous persons, by the very fact that it is an unconditional divine imputation to be received only by faith. To be justified by God's act **means to become a sinner at the same time. The totality of justification unmasks the totality of being a sinner.** Thus the *simul iustus et peccator* as **total states** would seem to militate against any talk of progress in sanctification.... There are many utterances of Luther's which reject all ideas of progress. Sanctification must simply be included in justification because the latter is **a total state. Sanctification is simply to believe the divine imputation and with it the *totus peccator* ....**"<sup>160</sup>

"Faith, however, born of **the imputation of total righteousness**, begets the beginnings of honesty as well. Such faith sees the truth of the human condition, the reality and **totality of human sin**, and has no need to indulge in fictions."<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life*, 31.

<sup>158</sup> Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life*, 54.

<sup>159</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:438.

<sup>160</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:430-31.

<sup>161</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:434.

### **1984: "The Power of Negative Thinking," *dialog*.**

"Thus we come to the conclusion that theology must learn to reckon much more seriously with the negation of what has been called the Old Adam. There has been considerable fuss in theology again recently about the death of God. Most of the time, however, that has been just an escape hatch for the Old Adam to continue business as usual without negation. The results have been disastrous for both Church and world. A **grace** which is not **total**, *sola gratia, sola fide*, and which consequently is not a negation of the old, will only be taken advantage of and enable the old to solidify its position. It does no good to attempt repairing the damage by subsequent and more stringent application of the law. That either just appeals to the old self's moral pride and lust for power or arouses its resentment for restricting its autonomy. "Positive thinking" won't work. Evangelical theology must either reckon seriously with the 'pain of the negative' or surrender its cause to moralism. We must learn again what St. Paul meant when he said: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). Or what Luther meant when he said: "To be born anew, one must consequently first die and then be raised up with the Son of Man."<sup>163</sup> We must learn again that **the total grace** flowing from the cross of Christ is **the real negation** of the Old Adam and that, in the last analysis, only those who have suffered that negation are likely to do justly and well by the world."<sup>162</sup>

### **3. The hiddenness of law, faith, and the Christian life.**

#### **1969: *The Law-Gospel Debate*.**

"The will of God is not made known to man in once-for-all fashion, least of all can man capture this will in the form of eternal principles. Rather man must learn to know God's will anew in each new situation. God's command and God's continuing creation belong together. **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."<sup>163</sup>

#### **1984: *Christian Dogmatics 2*.**

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

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<sup>162</sup> Forde, "The Power of Negative Thinking. On the Principle of Negation in Luther and Hegel," *dialog* 23:4 (1984) 256. Internal footnote 13: *LW* 31:55.

<sup>163</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 177.

to sell it and give it to the poor? Should not Jesus' disciples fast like everyone else? Why should one prefer the company of whores and sinners to polite society? **Why should a Christian participate in an assassination plot** [Bonhoeffer]? The Christian life is tuned to the eschatological vision, not to the virtues and heroics of this world. It has become something of a platitude among religious people that the Sermon on the Mount sets forth the sort of ideal life the world might aspire to and admire. On the contrary, the Sermon on the Mount is one of the most antireligious documents ever written, because of its eschatological perspective. . . . The religious and the virtuous are not on the list and in all likelihood would not wish to be. Indeed, **the attempt to break the hiddenness is precisely the dangerous thing . . . . The goodness or Christianness of one's life should be hidden even from oneself.**"<sup>164</sup>

**1988: "Justification by Faith Alone," *In Search of Christian Unity*.**

"To begin with, to state the obvious, if we are justified *sola fide* (and here the *sola* is most important) any attempt so **to describe or prescribe what is necessary for Christian existence** and the object with which such existence has to do as to make it accessible or given other than to **faith alone** is a mistake."<sup>165</sup>

**2004: "An Unguarded Essay," (Leif Grane), *By Faith Alone. Essays in Honor of Forde*.**

"Justification by faith does not make human efforts futile or unimportant, just as it would be a misunderstanding to think that a Christian point of view should involve separating ourselves from all people who want to do something in the world. On the contrary, justification by faith means the freedom to endure justification's confusion with idealism because one's life does not depend on works, and because **there are no Christian works**. . . . **Faith remains hidden to the human eye**. . . . The relationship between justification by faith and ethics does not imply a new ethic, but it makes us **free** to distinguish between good and evil and to act accordingly without any wish to obtain anything."<sup>166</sup>

- Forde, "Radical Lutheranism," *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (1987) 5-18.
- 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: Augustana College Press, 1970) 79-88.
- Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 101-15.
- Forde, *Christian Dogmatics* 2:395-469.
- Forde, "The Viability of Luther Today," *Word & World* 7 (1987).
- Leif Grane, "Justification by Faith? An Unguarded Essay," *By Faith Alone*.

<sup>164</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:440-401.

<sup>165</sup> Forde, "Justification by Faith Alone: The Article by which the Church Stands or Falls?" *dialog* 27 (1988) 264; *In Search of Christian Unity*, 71.

<sup>166</sup> Leif Grane, "Justification by Faith? An Unguarded Essay," *By Faith Alone. Essays on Justification in Honor of Gerhard O. Forde*. Eds. Joseph A. Burgess & Marc Kolden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 38-9.



## Part 4: Election through the cross alone necessarily leads to two kingdoms

### 1. Two Kingdoms (unique to Lutherans)

The doctrine of the two kingdoms is intrinsic to Lutheran theology. The two kingdoms are simply another way of stating what is meant by law and gospel. No other tradition in Christendom has two kingdoms.

At times it is claimed that the two kingdoms are simply part of the Sixteenth Century mindset. This is said as a polemic against thinking in terms of two kingdoms. But thinking in terms of two kingdoms goes back to Paul who distinguished between flesh and spirit or living under the power of sin and by the power of the gospel. Paul affirmed the use of common reason for the life one lives in this world (1 Cor 11:2-6).

What is the alternative to the two kingdoms? The common alternative is one kingdom thinking in which the Bible gives us God's eternal law. We have in Lutheran history a tendency to move toward a third use of law and a pietism which turns the gospel into a new law.

**NB:** One kingdom thinking is found in the LCMS and in much of the NALC and LCMC, especially in theological leaders including but not limited to Nestingen, Mattes, and Paulson. Contrast Forde below on common reason as the arbiter in God's left-hand kingdom with their silence on the role of reason in the Christian life.

### 2. Left-hand kingdom: Reason is primary but not an absolute without sin

#### Notable Quotes:

#### 1969: *The Law-Gospel Debate*.

"What the Christian is given is a faith that clarifies for him the nature of his existence under the law in this age. Faith tells him that the 'naturalness' of the law means that he does not have access to the will of God in the form of some eternal *law of being*, but rather that in common with the rest of mankind **he must use his reason** in the context of his situation to work out the best practical solutions to his problems."<sup>167</sup>

#### 1970: "*Lex semper accusat*," *dialog, A More Radical Gospel, The Essential Forde*.

"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 **we do not possess absolute, unchangeable laws**. If the law no longer takes care of this world, **it can and must be changed**. As even Luther put it, **we must write our own decalogue to fit the times**."<sup>168</sup>

#### 1972: *Where God Meets Man*.

"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

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<sup>167</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 211-12.

<sup>168</sup> Forde, "*Lex semper accusat? dialog* 9 (1970) 274; *A More Radical Gospel*, 49; and *The Essential Forde*, 193.

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.'<sup>169</sup>

**1984: *Christian Dogmatics 2.***

"The rejection of monastic vows, and with them the quest for one's own holiness, meant for Luther a new understanding of and love for God's commandments. What God commands takes us into the natural, created world. Here the proper place of 'natural law' is to be found. By natural law most seem to mean 'supernatural' law, a law built into the universe which, if followed, leads to eternal bliss, a kind of built-in permanent escape mechanism. Revealed law is then something like the completion, the clarification of what has been dimmed by the fall, the final extension of the escape ladder. **That is not what Luther meant by it, even when he compared and often identified the commandments of God with 'natural law.'** He meant **precisely natural and not supernatural law.** The commandments of God do not command anything contrary to life, anything supernatural or superhuman, but rather what anyone who properly consults his or her **reason** would have to acknowledge as good and right—exemplified, say, by **the golden rule.**"<sup>170</sup>

**1987: "The Viability of Luther Today," *Word & World.***

"Law is to be used for political purposes, i.e., for taking care of people here on earth in as good, loving, and just manner as can be managed. **Reason,** i.e., critical investigation using the best available wisdom and analysis of the concrete human situation in given instances, **is to be the arbiter in the political use of the law.**"<sup>171</sup>

**1990: Donald Juel, "Homosexuality and Church Tradition," *Word & World.***

"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.**

"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.**"<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 10.

<sup>170</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:454-56.

<sup>171</sup> Forde, "The Viability of Luther Today," *Word & World* 7 (1987) 27.

<sup>172</sup> Donald H. Juel, "Homosexuality and Church Tradition," *Word & World* (1990) 166-69. Here 167, 169.

### 3. Two uses of law (no third use).

Those holding to only two uses of law claim that the Bible is an important witness to how Christians have used reason in their time to work out life in the Kingdom on the left, but that this is not revelation, a matter of salvation, and that the first use of law is what governs life, including the Christian life, in this age. The first use is to restrain evil, hold back chaos, to minimize harm (Romans 13:10). The second use is that the law always accuses, that whatever we do is totally caught in sin, even as Christians. (The Formula of Concord 6 has such a title, but the Article in fact describes the first use of the law.)

**NB:** All the Reformed have a third use of law, as does the LCMS. A third use of law is implicit in the NALC's *Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures*.

#### Notable Quotes:

##### 1983: "Fake Theology," *dialog*.

"At the same time, **a theology seduced by nomism** (all too often the case in the church) is ill equipped to do battle with antinomianism. Since it has already compromised the eschatological gospel, it can fight only from the position of law and charge its opponents with the 'terrible heresy' of being anti-law. Thus, the term 'antinomian.' One gets the impression that whereas other heresies are relatively mild, being antinomian is about the worst thing one could be! At any rate, to defend itself, **nomism** appeals to already given anti-gospel sentiments, compounding the confusion. **So the general victory of nomism over antinomianism in the church is hardly cause for celebration.** Nothing is solved. No insight into the nature of the problem is gained. The war of words is only inflated and the issues obscured."<sup>173</sup>

##### 1984: *Christian Dogmatics*.

"Nomism is ill-equipped to counter antinomianism with evangelical weapons, because it has already compromised the eschatological gospel. **Hence it can fight only from the position of law and charge its opponent with the sin and heresy of antinomianism.** The victory of nomism over antinomism in the church is therefore hardly cause for celebration. True opposition can be launched only from the position of a faith which has been grasped by the eschatological justification. If justification exposes sin and upholds the law against sin at the same as it grants fulfillment, one cannot speak of a temporal or spatial end to law in *this* age. The end is eschatological: anticipated in faith and given in full only at the Parousia. **The remedy for antinomianism is not nomistic but eschatological.**"<sup>174</sup>

"The debate about the '**third use**' of the law shifts the argument to the other pole of the eschatological dialectic. If the former controversy [antinomianism/nomism] was about the use of law *before* faith, this latter is about use of law *after* the eschatological event. The question is whether one can or should speak of a 'third' use of the law in addition to the political use (to restrain evil) and the theological use (to convict of sin): a use of the law by the reborn Christian *as* Christian, in which law functions as a 'guide to the Christian life.' One can see immediately

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<sup>173</sup> Forde, "Fake Theology: Reflections on Antinomians Past and Present," *dialog* 22 (1983) 246-51, here 247.

<sup>174</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:448-49.

that the issue is still the eschatological one: **What difference does the eschatological event make vis-à-vis the law?**"<sup>175</sup>

"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."<sup>176</sup>

"Formula of Concord (Article VI) vacillates on the issue. On the one hand, it speaks of a third use of the law to be applied to the regenerate, but then it goes on to say it is necessary because regeneration is incomplete in this life. **It is an attempt to have it both ways and thus threatens only to obscure the issue.**"<sup>177</sup>

#### 4. The "two kingdoms" in Forde, 1969-2004.

##### Notable Quotes:

##### *1969, The Law-Gospel Debate.*

"**The theological systems which result from these two ways of defining law are also quite different.** In the first instance, law 'in its essence' remains the basic structure of the system. . . . In the second instance there is a decisive break. The law comes to its *end* in the eschatological event, the *res* which the law demands breaks in and brings the law to an end. This means that in place of a one-membered eternal scheme, **a two-membered dialectical scheme governs the system.** Only by participation in the eschatological event does the law come to its end for the believer. This gives the terminology of the system a basically different thrust, even though that terminology may in many instances be the same."<sup>178</sup>

"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."<sup>179</sup>

"The Lutheran also realizes that theology can only work with the 'systems' or **the thought forms of this world.** He insists, though, that 'working with the thought forms of this world" **be strictly**

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<sup>175</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:449.

<sup>176</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:450.

<sup>177</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:460, fn.3.

<sup>178</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 185. See also 193-94, 211, in addition to quotes below.

<sup>179</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 222.

**adhered to**—that is, that these be recognized as **the thought forms of this world** and not of some other world. For the promises of the **new age is given in Christ only to faith, not to 'sight'**; this is so because the Christ event itself makes it so. The Christ event is the bearer of absolute judgment and absolute grace; indeed, it is one only because it is also the other. The fact that it is absolute judgment means that **man cannot attempt to anticipate the eschatological vision** or to translate himself prematurely into the new age. But the fact that it is also absolute grace given here and now means that there is no need for such an attempt. Under the sign of this absolute judgment and grace the believer can be content to remain in this age until God sees fit to change things. Thus, Lutheran theology by its very this-worldliness reflects **its belief in the other world, the new age.**

"Christ enters in the form of *this* age, 'under the law. He takes the 'form of a servant.' For the time being man has access to the gospel only under this form. But the gospel also involves the fact that Christ could enter the form of this world only to die and **to break the bonds of this form by the resurrection.** Christ became the *end* of the old form, and he now offers to faith **the promise of a new 'content.'** But because of the nature of Christ's appearance in this world, faith enjoins man to live for the time being where he is and to become **a proper steward** of the form of this age."<sup>180</sup>

**1970, "The Revolt and the Wedding," *The Reformation and The Revolution.***

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

"The eschatological vision makes it clear that **the secular is our sacred task.** It tears the mask from our pretensions and bids us become human beings. That, I think, is the real significance of Luther's resistance to the Peasant's Revolt, whatever we may think of his final action. He saw quite clearly that if one is to apply this principle, then there could be absolutely no exceptions. Not even those who undertake revolutions for the sake of so-called 'Christian principles' can be excepted. **Nobody,** Prince, Peasant, Preacher, President or what have you, **carries out a revolution or a political program in the name of Christ.** That is so first of all because Luther categorically refused to allow Christ to become a club with which to beat anyone (a 'New Law' as he called it), and secondly because revolutions and political programs can be carried through only in the name of humanity **without appeal to either myth or religion.** Luther means that quite radically. You don't need Christ, or even the Bible, necessarily, to tell you what to do in social matters. You have a reason, use it!<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 214-15.

<sup>181</sup> Forde, "The Revolt and the Wedding: An Essay on Social Ethics in the Perspective of Luther's Theology," *The Reformation and the Revolution* (Sioux Falls, S. Dak.: Augustana College Press, 1970) 85-86.

### 1970, "Lex semper accusat?" *dialog.*

"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."<sup>182</sup>

### 1972, *Where God Meets Man.*

"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....

"Luther considered **a careful distinction** between the world to come (God's kingdom of grace) and this world (God's creation or kingdom under law) essential to faith. Without the kind of distinctions we have been outlining above, Reformation faith—indeed faith in the gospel as such—simply collapses. If God's kingdom does not come **by grace alone** then all is under the tyranny of law. At the same time the relationship between the two kingdoms must be noted carefully. The kingdom to come does not separate men from this world or teach them to despise it, it rather opens up the world to them as the place in which to express the joy and hope of their faith. It is **faith alone** that enables us to see the world as *God's* other kingdom.... Faith gives back to us the world we lost through sin."<sup>183</sup>

"The line between this world and the next is drawn by God's grace. This establishes the world as a place **under the law** in which man can live, work, and hope. It should establish a sphere in which law can be seen as a good rather than a bad thing.... Hope in the world to come creates the faith and patience to life in this world; it gives this world back to us by relieving us of the burden of our restless quests. Freedom from the world makes us free for it. Just so faith in the gospel does not despise the law or destroy it, rather **it places the law for the first time on a solid basis.**

"This world is run by law. When the law is limited by the gospel of God's kingdom to come we can see that it has its proper and just place in the world. . . . We begin to see that its purpose is not to get us to heaven, but to help to take care of this earth, to be used as **a weapon in the**

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<sup>182</sup> Forde, "Lex semper accusat?" *A More Radical Gospel*, 49.

<sup>183</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 100-102.

**battle against the tyranny of the devil.** So it was that Luther insisted that governmental officials too were God's magistrates on earth. **The political realm is ordained by God** in that sense to take care of human beings and to restrain the power of evil and the devil. . . . **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.** But men do have **the gift of reason and the accumulated wisdom of the ages as well as the Bible.** Here is the task for man's **reason and created gifts.** Once cured of religious and mythological ambitions, they can be put to work as they ought: taking care of men. For in the final analysis, all man's vocations are to be enlisted in the battle against the devil."<sup>184</sup>

#### **1984, *Christian Dogmatics.***

"The question of the relationship of **the two kingdoms** is really the macrocosm of what we have already seen in the microcosm of the relationships between **law and gospel,** and between justification and sanctification. The attempt to synthesize law with gospel is disastrous. Likewise the attempt to synthesize the rule or kingship of Christ with that of this age and its ambitions will be disastrous and ultimately destructive. **In the microcosm of individual piety it produces either despair or presumption.** It drives to self-destruction: either despair over self and failure or pride in the ability of the self to deny itself and come as close as possible to suicide without actually committing it. In the macrocosm it produces tyranny, oppression, imperialism, genocide, and murder. One or another of the world's false eschatologies is enforced and sanctified with the name of Christ and the gospel."<sup>185</sup>

"The gospel as the unconditional promise of the kingdom **humanizes and naturalizes the law.** No doubt we can say even that it "contextualizes" the law—as long as we realize that the gospel does this and not just the passage of time or historical expediency. The distinction between **the two kingdoms** or kinds of rule is made precisely to foster such **humanization.**"<sup>186</sup>

#### **1986, "The logic of moralism vs. the eschato-logic of the Gospel," *Lutheran Partners.***

"We should not forget that the church too could gain the whole world only to lose its soul. It has happened before; it can happen again. **The church exists to prophesy before the world that 'there is a river, the streams whereof make glad the City of God,'** that there is a Kingdom in which peace will reign and justice be done freely and spontaneously because God is in charge. When I go to church, I do not expect to hear the same thing I hear on television or read in the newspapers. I want to hear something about why I should bother. I want to hear something, that is, to counter those unconditional anxieties eating away at my heart and that of the entire human enterprise."<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 110-12.

<sup>185</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:456.

<sup>186</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:459.

<sup>187</sup> Forde, "God's rights. The logic of moralism vs. the eschato-logic of the Gospel," *Lutheran Partners* (1986) 17.

**1987, "Radical Lutheranism," *Lutheran Quarterly*.**

"Precisely because the declaration is unconditional we are turned around to go into the world of the neighbor to carry out our calling as Christians. The works of the Christian are to be done in the world, but not as conditions for salvation. **The persistent and nagging debate about the two kingdoms among Lutherans arises mostly out of reluctance to be radical enough.** Precisely because the gospel gives the Kingdom of God unconditionally to faith, this world opens up and is given back as the place to serve the other. Will it be so given? That depends, of course. It is not a static affair. To the degree that one is grasped and set free by the unconditional gospel, to that degree one can be turned from the sort of life created by the self (and its supposed free but actually bound will) to the world of the neighbor. To the degree that the **theological use** of law comes to an end in Christ, to that degree **a political use** of the law for others becomes a possibility."<sup>188</sup>

**1987, "The Viability of Luther Today," *Word & World*.**

"Does justification by faith alone spell the end to the human quest for justice? By no means! We establish the law! But if justification proceeds by way of negation it demands **a distinction for the time being** between what can be seen as God's **two ways** of fostering justice: the way of the law and the way of the gospel.... Here the controversial and variously interpreted '**Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms**' comes into view.

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

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

"**Thirdly**, I believe it can be argued that **justification by faith alone** itself and **the freedom it creates**, drives to utter concreteness in praxis. Luther's view of the concrete vocation of the Christian proposes just such concreteness. If the negation is complete, one is in the first instance **set free from the tyranny of all universalisms and absolutisms** and placed back in time to become **a truly historical being**, to wait and hope for the coming of the promised Kingdom."<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Forde, "Radical Lutheranism," *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (1987) 16-17.

<sup>189</sup> Forde, "The Viability of Luther Today," *Word & World* 7 (1987) 29.



**1993, "Luther and the *Usus Pauli*," dialog.**

"For a proper eschatology, law belongs strictly to **this age**. Christ and the gospel promise of **the new age** are to rule in the conscience. Where law is not limited to its proper sphere by gospel faith, it invades the conscience and takes one away from Christ into one's own self. Then one becomes imprisoned in one's own despair and remorse.

"Paul believes that the death of Christ brings **a new age** in which there is no more law, not even that of non-violence or love, because it is not necessary. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters at all, but a new creation. Paul believes in the justification, we might say, even of the violent and that this is the only real cure. Where the distinction between moral and ritual law allows the moral to survive, eschatology loses and moral tropology triumphs.

"The proper *usus Pauli* therefore is to preach Christ as the end of the wrath of God, the end of the law, the death of the old being, and the dawn of **the new creation**. Only so does God remain God."<sup>190</sup>

**1993, "Called to Freedom," Presidential Address to the International Luther Congress.**

"First of all, Luther's understanding of freedom through the gospel of Jesus Christ in fact gives us an entirely new world, the world of the neighbor. It is a sheer gift. It is what Luther called the world of the 'outer man.' **The world of the neighbor, the 'outer world' or the left-hand rule of God**, is never just completely 'there' like the physical, empirical world. It is a world given back to faith. . . . For every possibility that one might turn inward on one's own projects is excluded by the fact that Christ is the end of the law. All the space in the 'inner world,' the conscience, is occupied by Christ. There is no room for a self that wants to feed only on its own self. One is turned inside out. **The law** cannot get in there anymore. It can only be **turned back to the world where it belongs**, to be used to do what it is supposed to: take care of people and not tyrannize them."<sup>191</sup>

**1993, "Lutheranism," *Blackwell's Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*.**

"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**

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<sup>190</sup> Forde, "Luther and the *Usus Pauli*," *dialog* 32 (1993) 278, 280, 282.

<sup>191</sup> Forde, "Called to Freedom," *The Preached God*, 267-69.

**kingdoms doctrine; see Hertz, 1976)** and the Christian's vocation in society and the world (Wingren [1949] 1960)."<sup>192</sup>

**1995, "The Law and Sexual Behavior." *Lutheran Quarterly*.**

"Some in the church like to argue that since **the church has changed its mind** on matters like **divorce** or **ordination of women** it seems consequent that it could change its stance on sexual behavior as well. But in questions of **the civil use of law** it is not legitimate to argue that one example of change justifies another. **Each case has to be argued individually.**

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

"If genital sexual relations between people of the same gender are to be approved and/or blessed, the only way that could be done would be to bring them within something akin (at least) to the estate of marriage. **Can this be done in terms consonant with our understanding of the uses of the law? The thesis of this paper is that it cannot.**"<sup>193</sup>

**1997, "The One Acted Upon," *dialog*.**

"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

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<sup>192</sup> Forde, "Lutheranism," *Blackwell's Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, Ed. Alister McGrath (Cambridge, MA; Blackwell, 1993) 357.

<sup>193</sup> Forde, "Law and Sexual Behavior," *Lutheran Quarterly* 9 (1995) 8-9, 18. *The Essential Forde*, 155-56.

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."<sup>194</sup>

### **2004, *The Captivation of the Will*.**

"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.**"<sup>195</sup>

"The only way to overcome the problem of the hiddenness of God not preached is by God preached. **But that will not happen by attempting to infer God's will from the law.**"<sup>196</sup>

## **Part 5: Be prepared for those who say**

### **1. "If you do not hold to inerrancy, you will fall into gnosticism"**

The attack will be that unless you assert Scripture is verbally true and verbally inerrant, you will fall into gnosticism.<sup>197</sup> **No, the cross and resurrection of Jesus is God acting in history.** Through the "word" of this history (which is part of this history) God creates faith, as Paul writes: "Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ" (Rom 10:17; cf. 1 Thess 2:9, 13; 1 Peter 1:23-25). This is what is meant by the "truth" of the gospel (Gal 2:5, 14).

### **2. "It threatens people's faith to mention difficulties in the Bible"**

We take the Bible very seriously, including its difficulties, in order to show that the Bible is the manger in which the Christ Child lay, and that God works in our history with all its roughness and brokenness, not confusing the manger with the Child.

### **3. "The Bible only appears to have conflicts because we don't understand it yet"**

This claim presupposes the Bible is the prior miracle that must give us this kind of guarantee because we expect this.<sup>198</sup> Forde: "For if I say, 'If the Bible contains errors I cannot believe,' I am in effect saying to God that unless he provides me with the kind of guarantee which I expect and

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<sup>194</sup> Forde, "The One Acted Upon, *dialog* 36 (1997) 61.

<sup>195</sup> Forde, *Captivation of the Will*, 74.

<sup>196</sup> Forde, *Captivation of the Will*, 76.

<sup>197</sup> This is the claim in the NALC/LCMS/LCC's "Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures," Part 2.4. An *inerrant book* 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. . . ."

<sup>198</sup> This claim is found in the NALC/LCMS/LCC's "Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures": Part 2.2. *A book inspired by God*. C. "For Lutheran theology, it is a self-evident truth that God's revelation of Himself in the sacred Scriptures is always perfectly consistent with itself."

want, I cannot believe. It is dangerous because it might just be that God has not *in fact* provided us with that kind of guarantee.”<sup>199</sup>

#### 4. “All we need is to hold earnestly and simply to the Bible”

Everyone has a hermeneutics. The trick is often found in the use of the words “clear” and “simple” and “plain.” Whenever those words are used, grab for your wallet. However couched appeals to the Bible as simple, plain, self-evident are veiled appeals to inerrancy (and Biblicism, which is merely a confused appeal to inerrancy.) What is clear, simple, plain, self-evident is the Gospel, not the epistemology of the text.

#### 5. “Our Confessions say the Bible is ‘sole rule and norm’”<sup>200</sup>

But *The Book of Concord* does not say that what norms norms is *sola scriptura*. Rather, it uses a variety of phrases to convey that **the plumb line which sorts out Biblical texts is justification by faith alone.**<sup>201</sup>

Moreover, Lutherans have not held to the Confessions in a simplistic way. We know there are exegetical and historical details that are inaccurate: CA 23:14: “The world is growing worse and weaker.” SA 1:4: “Mary, ever virgin,” etc.

Finally, Lutherans have not been woodenly tied to the Confessions. In 1952 the LWF accepted one of the Batak churches on the basis of its own confession, which dealt with Scripture and ancestor worship. The LWF Assembly agreed that the Batak Confession was equivalent to the *Augsburg Confession*. In 1958 the LWF accepted other Batak Churches.

#### 6. “You must first have an ontology”

One does not establish the cross by first establishing an ontology. Apologetics has a place but only to show the errors of trying to undergird faith by appealing to other authorities. Theories of causality, no matter how modern and sophisticated, do not help, but actually allow a little bit of rebellion to remain. Finally we are not “*non posse peccare*.”

As Luther writes: The Holy Spirit alone “calls, gathers, **enlightens**, and sanctifies” (Small Catechism, Explanation to the Third Article of the Creed). We are always tempted to help out, to try to supplement this work. It is very tempting to proclaim a “rationale” for the cross.

#### 7. “Theology must have conceptual coherence”

There are many questions that do not lend themselves to a concern for coherence. Three examples: First, Chalcedon (451) said that Christ is truly God and truly man, “unmixed and undivided,” and do not speculate beyond this. They set limits, excluded options, but that is it.

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<sup>199</sup> Forde, “Law and Gospel as the Methodological Principle of Theology,” *Theological Perspectives*, 56.

<sup>200</sup> *Formula of Concord, Epitome, Preface* 1, 2, 7; Tappert, 464-65; Kolb/Wengert 486-87.

<sup>201</sup> “The Confessions themselves therefore assert both a *quatenus* and a *quia*, both that the Confessions should be acknowledge only in so far as (*quatenus*) they agree with the Scriptures and then also because (*quia*) they agree with the Scriptures” (Theodore Tappert, “The Significance of Confessional Subscription,” *Essays on the Lutheran Confessions Basic to Lutheran Cooperation* [1961] 30.) See also Käsemann, “Justification and Salvation History” *Perspectives on Paul*, 75-76, footnote 115 above, and see *The Book of Concord’s Key to Itself*, [here](#).

Second, what about Matthew 25:46 over against Romans 5:18 and 11:32? Third, what of the *total* passivity of faith against semi-Pelagianism, the *alien* righteousness of Christ?

## 8. "The early Luther is not as important as the later Luther"

Playing the young vs. the mature Luther is a well-known game and can be answered. In the abyss of the *Weimar Ausgabe* you can find Luther saying "unLutheran" things, such as good works are evidence of true faith. If you can find Luther quotes that support works-righteousness, does that mean Luther had no coherent stance? No.

Paul, Luther, and Forde are for the most part consistent, although at times when they are fighting on one flank, they leave another exposed, or at times each of them wrote an occasional piece of advice that was never intended for all times and all situations.

When looking at the total Luther (or the total Paul, or the total Forde), it is evident that his theology (the cross alone; the bondage of the will, the freedom of the Christian, and the like) has a dynamic that is consistent from the young Luther to the older Luther in spite of what he may have said in a particular sermon on a particular occasion.

## 9. "Trust us. Forde was open to inerrancy and eternal moral law."

### Notable Forde quotes in response:

"We are fighting for the restoration of the gospel. It must be made absolutely clear here that it is *not* dedication to historical-critical research, it is *not* dedication to science or any other human endeavor which decides the matter. It is purely and simply dedication to the gospel. For the twentieth century the burning question is the question "how do you know?" and **one cannot compromise** on this question today without compromising the gospel. **It is not possible** to hold both these methods [inerrancy and law/gospel] today, or **to compromise between them without compromising and hence distorting the gospel.**"<sup>202</sup>

"**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.**"<sup>203</sup>

"The surrender of **biblical inerrancy** to various versions of "truth as encounter" and other existentialist ploys seemed to lack the bite of the older views of biblical authority. Perhaps it was that something of the offense was gone. **Yet there was no way back.** Older views of **biblical inerrancy** were not an offense, they were just **intellectually offensive.**"<sup>204</sup>

"Imagine: theology, which has been exhorted all these long years **to strive for precision**, is now, apparently, to cultivate deliberately **the art of ambiguity.**"<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Forde, "Law and Gospel," *Theological Perspectives*, 67.

<sup>203</sup> Forde, "Luther and the *Usus Pauli*," *dialog* 32 (1993) 278.

<sup>204</sup> Forde, "The One Acted Upon," *dialog* 36:1 (1997) 57-58.

<sup>205</sup> Forde, "Lutheran Ecumenism with Whom and How Much?" *LQ* 17 (2003) 125-42; *A More Radical Gospel*, 174.

## 10. “No one holds to Forde’s post-liberal Lutheranism today. He is the odd-man out”

To the contrary, Forde’s theology, summarized in “radical Lutheranism” (1987) and “post-liberal Lutheranism” (1989), is a vital contribution to the international recovery of Luther’s own theology by scholars of the Twentieth Century Luther Renaissance.

Forde was renowned here and abroad because of his ground-breaking research on law/gospel and his leadership in the U.S. Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue in which some of the most creative theology of the Twentieth Century was done. He became the *de facto* Lutheran quarterback on the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue because his fellow scholars regarded him as trustworthy and creative. His view of Lutheran identity is not an oddity but found throughout scholars of the Twentieth Century Luther Renaissance.

### Notable Forde Quotes:

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

“Do these hermeneutical alternatives define the parameters of our fate today? Are these the only possibilities available to us? I believe not. But I do think that **if there is any fire left now, it will have to come more from Luther** than our Melancthonian tinged pietism.”<sup>206</sup>

“The ‘post-liberal Lutheran’ is, of course, something of a shadowy, if not menacing, figure on the contemporary scene, perhaps not yet clearly defined, often a puzzle to both friend and foe, usually mistaken simply for a hard-line conservative confessionalist or orthodoxist. But that is seriously to misread the situation. **A post-liberal Lutheran** is one who has been through the options spawned since the Reformation and realizes that they have all been used up. **Least of all does infallibilism or reactionary conservatism of any sort provide an answer.**”<sup>207</sup>

“I believe in a policy of ecumenical openness with a concomitant theological tough-mindedness. Our biggest problem, here and in the church in general, is theological integrity. Basically, I have come to reject the principle of making exhaustive agreement in doctrine and polity a condition for intercommunion. From reading Luther and the Reformers, that is a quite un-Lutheran idea. Indeed, in most instances of churches confessing the triune God, there exists enough common ground for us imply to declare ourselves to be in the fellowship that already exists. This is especially true in those instances where we have had considerable dialogue and have arrived at mutual understandings. Certainly this is the case in light of the Lutheran/Reformed dialogue and the Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogue. (The fact that Roman Catholics do not want to recognize

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<sup>206</sup> Forde, “*Satis Est? What do we do when other churches don’t agree?*” 11-12. Unpublished lecture given at the 1990 ELCA Conference of Teaching Theologians. Available at [crossalone.us](http://crossalone.us), under Forde.

<sup>207</sup> Forde, *Promoting Unity*, 72.

such fellowship, since they reject the validity of Lutheran orders, is their problem. **We need not give in to their views and play their game.**"<sup>208</sup>

**"So, Lutherans should quit playing the game according to everyone else's rules** and simply be about the business of stating what is the case according to our own lights. This is simply that Christ is the head of the church, that he makes Christians by grace alone through preaching and the sacraments. Since Christ creates the community, all human arrangements devised by denominations must be in the service of the head of the church and his gospel. The churches are of human provenance this side of the eschatological line."<sup>209</sup>

"One who seeks to pursue difficult questions is something of a pariah. Documents that state issues sharply and cleanly have to be edited and toned down so as not to be too offensive. As Henry Chadwick once put it, the genius of ecumenical statements lies in their **ambiguity** – the art of stating things in such a fashion that no one could possibly disagree. Imagine: theology, which has been exhorted all these long years **to strive for precision**, is now, apparently, to cultivate deliberately **the art of ambiguity.**"<sup>210</sup>

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**Forde: "My biggest fear in the present is that the eschatological two-age structure of theology is once again simply being lost."**<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Forde, "Lutheran Ecumenism: With Whom and How Much?" *A More Radical Gospel*, 172.

<sup>209</sup> Forde, "Lutheran Ecumenism," *A More Radical Gospel*, 173.

<sup>210</sup> Forde, "Lutheran Ecumenism," *A More Radical Gospel*, 174.

<sup>211</sup> Forde, "The One Acted Upon," *dialog* 36 (1997) 61.