Lutheran Hermeneutics—A New Contagion?

Colleagues,Now everybody's trying to get into the act! The Crossings board—way back a year ago—decides to put together an international conference on Lutheran hermeneutics (a.k.a. The "Aha!" for reading the Bible that "moved" Martin Luther into Reformer mode). It's a three-day affair here in St. Louis end of January. [There still is room.] Well, actually it's across the Mississippi River a few miles into Illinois at a spiffy Roman Catholic retreat center, "Our Lady of the Snows." [What would Blessed Martin say!? Even more, Katie Luther who "escaped" from such a place?!].

Then comes the news a couple months ago that the ELCA is putting together a task force of major leaguers to do the same thing—a long-term study.

Just before year's end comes a fancy PR piece from the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago announcing their 2007 Leadership Conference (February 2007) on the same topic: "Active engagement with challenging texts. Exploring biblical texts using the Lutheran theological tradition to discover compelling interpretations for today." Granted, that's replete with current PC boilerplate: "engagement . . . challenging . . . exploring . . . tradition . . . discover . . . compelling . . . for today." OK, so they went to the byways of Madison Avenue rather than the Biblical Maran-atha to get their PR prose But let's acknowledge the good intent. They want to talk about Lutheran hermeneutics, what's distinct about how Lutherans read the Bible. LSTC wants be helpful for Lutherans alive now.

It's hard for me to bite my tongue and NOT say "why don't y'all just come to our Crossings get-together in three weeks?"

Especially hard today, since just yesterday I said “enough already” and finished the text of my own presentation for that Crossings January conference: “The Augsburg Aha! for Reading the Bible. The Gospel is a Promise. An Honest to God Promise!” In all humility I could be more open-minded—and surely more modest. But it’s not just my shtik at the Crossings get-together. The three other plenary presenters at the end of January promise more of the same—linking that Reformation Aha! (law/promise hermeneutics) to church, world, and what should be going on at Lutheran seminaries. Added to that is the scad of small group focus-topic sessions. Plus listening to Crossings colleagues (as of today’s registration from Singapore, Ethiopia, Ghana, Australia and Germany) report on the health of the Augsburg Aha! in their local contexts.

The LSTC conference teases us to come and look at “difficult” biblical texts, texts that are “challenging.” So challenging that even “using the Lutheran theological tradition” there are “NO EASY ANSWERS.” Those are the three words in big bold type on the brochure. That’s the LSTC conference theme. And then the flyer lists eight tough texts, texts that, I imagine, will be worked on in the conference to help the participants get SOME answers, even if they are not EASY ones.

But you don’t have to wait till February at LSTC. You could do it yourself. Suppose you did utilize the Augsburg Aha! for hermeneutics on these texts, what answers would you get? Seems to me that there are, if not “easy,” then nevertheless “clear” answers, clear Gospel answers for preaching/teaching these texts. The un-ease often lies not in the difficulty of getting the message of a text, but after having gotten a text’s clear message to then follow its rubrics which regularly take the way of the cross. Dying in order to live, winning by losing, is indeed not “easy.” But it is also not impossible. We have Christ’s promise for that.

First caveat for preaching biblical texts is to remember that there is no mandate from Christ to “preach the text” or even to “preach the Bible.” Christ’s farewell assignment was “proclaim the Good News to the whole creation.” [Mk.16:15]

So the task is to do just that—and even do so when there is no Good News in the text itself. That’s dicey. Those are indeed “hard” texts, and the lectionary does not avoid them. So how to preach the Gospel from a Gospel-less text? In the Lutheran Confessions there is one article [Apology to the AC IV] that actually spells out how to do just that, how to “add” the “Gospel promise” when a text is Gospel-empty. Talk about chutzpah! That may be the most daring application of law-promise hermeneutics. Let’s look at the “No-easy-answers” texts [hereafter NEA texts] through the law/promise lenses and see what comes into focus—easy or not—including texts that are themselves Gospel-empty. Only one of these eight NEA texts gets referenced in the Lutheran confessions. So there is some precedent there for using Law/promise hermeneutics in reading them. For the remaining seven it’s untouched territory. So let’s see if we can touch it.

John 14:6b “No one comes to the Father except through me.”

The NEA quality here, I imagine, is Jesus’s “me only” claim. “So what about all other world religions and the billions of folks who have followed in their train for millennia? Don’t other world religions give their adherents connection to God?” Law/promise [hereafter L/P] hermeneutics says Yes, and then asks: “What sort of linkage? Law-linkage to God or promise-linkage to God?” That then necessitates spelling out what promise-linkage offers, and then checking the “gospel” in other religious options to see if they do indeed offer the same Good News. Luther is applying this L/P hermeneutic in his Large Catechism at the end of his exposition of the Apostles Creed, as

he reflects on other religions.

“These articles of the Creed . . . distinguish us Christians from all other people on earth. All who are outside the Christian community, whether heathen, Muslims, Jews or false Christians and hypocrites, even though they believe in and worship only the one, true God, nevertheless do not know what God’s attitude is toward them. They cannot be confident of his love and blessing. Therefore they remain in eternal wrath and damnation, for they do not have the Lord Christ, and, besides, are not illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.”

Especially in John’s Gospel, the Moses-God-connection and the God-as-Father-connection Jesus claims to offer is the point of constant conflict as Jesus moves to his “it is finished” at Calvary. Judaism’s best offer is still qualitatively different from Jesus’s offer. John is feisty in making it “perfectly clear” in his prolog in chapter 1: “Law was given (by God) through Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” That’s still the yardstick for measuring the “best offers” of world religions today.

Four of the 8 stickey-wicket texts are about ethics, living the life of faith, three of them from the mouth of Jesus, one from St. Paul.

Mark 10:21a
Sell what you own and give the money to the poor.

Mark 10:44
Whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.

Matthew 6:39
But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.

Philippians 2:4
Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

What's the NEA quality here? It can't be to understand the message of the texts themselves. They are all simple imperatives, only nickel words. The NEA aspect, I imagine, is the question: But can you survive when you live that way—turning the other cheek, tending to the welfare of others over your own self-interest, excelling by being the slave of all, radical divestment and relinquishment?

Major clue from the Augsburg Aha! on these imperatives is first of all to ask: are they law-imperatives or promise-imperatives? What's the logic/grammar of the sentences? Is it: "IF you do such and so, THEN God will do such and so?" Or is it: "SINCE God in Christ was doing such and so for you, THEREFORE you follow in the same promissory fashion in your doings."

You'll notice that the promise-paradigm "adds" the promise to the imperative. In fact, all of these four imperatives are promise imperatives in the context where we find them. God-in-Christ is the "since" for everyone of them. In Christ God was "selling" his own and giving him to us impoverished sinners. In Christ God wished to be slave/servant of us all. In Christ God was turning the other cheek, and we did indeed strike it, yes, strike him down. In Christ God was looking not to his own interests, but to the interests of others.

If the text selectors would have gone just a few more words after that "sell all…give to the poor," we would have had the "added" promise already there. For Jesus concludes the "sell/give" mandate with "then come, follow me . . . and you will have treasure in heaven."

Law/promise hermeneutics for ethical imperatives is the

foundation for Luther's reading the world, the Biblical insight about the ambidextrous deity. In the old creation God works with the left hand. In Christ and the new creation, it's God's right hand.

What makes promise imperatives sticky is that they are to be lived out in God's old creation where God's own law-regime is regnant. Law and promise are not synonyms. So tension and conflict is to be expected. Promise-imperatives finally "work" by continuing trust in the promise. That's "faith alone."

Bob Bertram had a show-and-tell way to illustrate these two hands of God. He'd put the word DEXTRA on the blackboard, the Latin word for the right hand. Then he'd hold his two hands apart and say:

> *"D is for different (the two hands are not the same)." Then bringing them together palm-to-palm he'd say:"E is for equivalent (yet they resemble each other—five fingers, one thumb)."*
>
> *"X is for the cross where God's two hands intersect" and as Bob held his hands together, his right-hand fingers would cross over into the fingers of the left hand and start overturning it.*
>
> *"T is for truss. God's right hand supports, holds up, trusses the good work of God's left hand," and Bob's right hand (fingers still interwoven) would move below the left to support it.*
>
> *"R is for replace. Slowly God's right hand operation (aka Christians at work in the world) replaces the fabric of the left-hand operation. Forgiveness replaces even legitimate recompense."*

> *A is for antiquates. “Finally God’s right hand antiquates God’s own left hand. It’s old creation—finally old hat—and the new of new creation, new covenant, new commandment, new obedience is what lasts on into eternity.”*

NEA for those ethical tests? Not really. The specs are clear. The tough part is to trust the promise while following the specs. But the added promise in the “sell/give” text is the grounds for such trust. “Follow me, even if you don’t get all the goodies. However, following me you DO get all the goodies.”

> *John 3:16*
> *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.*

I imagine the NEA here is for the implied question: why then isn’t everyone saved if God loved the entire cosmos? This text is cited four times in the Lutheran Confessions. All four are in the Formula of Concord, the last document in the collection, from 1577. The L/P distinction surfaces. In the law God wills to preserve creation by the rule of just deserts. Good work is rewarded, evil action punished. Since the incurvature of sinners is for self-preservation, more good will be done by sinners than bad. Despite the shaky basis, preservation will proceed. In the promise we encounter a different “will” of God. To be merciful—instead of retributive—to sinners. John 3:16 is cited to document that this promissory will is humanity-wide. No sinner excepted.

Why then doesn’t the world wind up non-perishing? It’s the “sola fide.” No one is forced to trust the promise. God’s offer is “Here, catch!” For mysterious reasons (the mystery of wickedness) some prefer to hang on to what they already have in

hand. Thus the “here, catch” offer falls to the ground before them. Sola fide is not a requirement. It is the correlative of the promise. When a promise isn’t trusted—in marriage, for instance—the promise fails to achieve its goal. Not because the promise wasn’t valid, but because the receiver didn’t trust it. In the Gospel God’s promise is equally vulnerable.

> *Ephesians 5:6*
> *The wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient.*

I suppose two items are the NEA of this one. What is the wrath of God all about? and who is, who isn’t disobedient?

C.S. Lewis had an “easy” answer on the wrath of God—though I don’t think he had the Augsburg Aha! in mind as he said it. “There comes a time after a sinner’s long refusal to say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ that God finally says to the sinner, ‘OK then, THY will be done.'” It’s not God being cranky. But as in Romans 1 & 2 it is God “giving them up” to their own agendas. Paul calls that (Rom. 1:18) “the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.”

Who is, who is not, “disobedient?” The Eph. 5 text is a repeat of the Romans word about God’s wrath. But when obedience is under discussion in Paul, he makes a distinction. There are two kinds of obedience and two kinds of disobedience. But before we go there, we need to note what “obedience” and its opposite are. The English word comes from Latin, “ob-audientia.” The root term is “audience,” from “audio,” listening. So “ob-audiencing” is listening “ob,” listening”toward” someone, someone’s words. Therefore the crucial element is: What message are you “ob-audiencing?” And, by now you’ve guessed it. You can ob-audinece a law message, or you can ob-audience a promise-message, and the listening-toward will be as different as the messages are. To

“ob-audience” a law message, you do what it tells you to do. To “ob-audience” a promise is to trust the “Here, catch!”—and act accordingly.

The disobedience in this Ephesians text could come under either rubric. Paul is excoriating “works of darkness,” which God’s law condemns. But here in addressing Christians Paul tells them that such behavior is also dis-obeying the promise. You can’t obey the promise and practice darkness at the same time. The two options are either/or. Here Paul actually invokes the standard “promise-imperative” paradigm (Eph. 5:8): “SINCE (though you once were darkness) in the Lord you are now light, THEREFORE live as children of light.” He grounds this ethical admonition not in the law with its sanctions and rewards, but in the promise itself: You are now “in the Lord,” so live the way you are. Both threats and rewards are out of the question.

> *Romans 2:11*
> *For God shows no partiality.*

I can’t divine what the NEA issue is here. Perhaps it’s the question: why do some get saved and others not? I’ll have to wait and see what the LSTC folks come up with.

Summa.

There are difficult passages in the scriptures. No debate there. But there is an old Reformation axiom that the “clear passages interpret the unclear ones.” “Clarity” in this axiom refers not to grammatical clarity, but to “clear” promise passages. Those “clear ones” interpret the unclear ones, the ones where the promise is hidden, or “unclear.” It’s a variation on Melanchthon’s axiom that when preaching/teaching any segment of Scripture, if the promise is absent, you add it. For the promise is clear now that Christ has been raised from the dead. In resurrecting Jesus God ratifies him and the forgiveness he

offered to sinners. This promise is God’s last word.

Law/promise lenses may not illumine every biblical text—e.g., Jude 9: “Michael and the devil disputing about the body of Moses”—but they do focus Bible-reading so that THE light shines into dark places. They refract the spectrum of God’s promissory rainbow for those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

So hurray for LSTC and their NEA conference. I hope they do indeed glomb onto “THE Lutheran theological tradition” as they “explore difficult biblical texts.” If they succeed in doing that, they will indeed “discover compelling interpretations for today.” That’s not MY promise. I’m just echoing SOMEONE ELSE’s.

Peace and joy!
Ed Schroeder

P.S. If you can’t wait till mid-February for the LSTC event, come to ours two weeks earlier. Even apart from the comparative costs—we’re less expensive—you can guess my prejudice about where you’ll get the better deal.

The Augsburg Aha! The Gospel is a Promise, an Honest-to-God Promise. A Second Look at the

Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article 4.

PART I. AN AHA! FOR INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

Thesis 1:
The Augsburg Aha! happened first at Wittenberg, an Aha! about Biblical Hermeneutics.

That is not the usual description of Luther's reformation Aha! The standard description in Luther scholarship doesn't mention hermeneutics. Here's an example from Jaroslav Pelikan, major guru for the 55-volume edition of Luther's works in English:

Luther became the Reformer, he tells us, when he was pondering the meaning of Paul's words (Rom. 1:17), "In [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" How could it be the content of the gospel of Christ, as "good news," that God was a righteous judge, rewarding the good and punishing the evil? Then he suddenly broke through to the insight that the "righteousness of God" here was not the righteousness by which God was righteous in himself (passive righteousness) but instead the righteousness by which, for Christ's sake, God made sinners righteous (active righteousness) through justification. When he made that discovery, Luther said, it was as though the gates of Paradise had opened. [THE ILLUSTRATED JESUS THROUGH THE

CENTURIES. New Haven: Yale UP. 1997. p.171f.]

Here Pelikan is drawing on Luther's own words in the year before he died, in the preface for the Complete Edition of His Latin Writings (Wittenberg 1545). But in another place—a couple years earlier—Luther describes the same Aha! and highlights the hermeneutical element in it. So which was chicken and which was egg? The Aha! about justification or the Aha! about how to read the Bible? Here's the Aha! about hermeneutics:

Table Talk #5518: Around the time Luther turned sixty someone asked him: "Qui locus primum moverit Doctorem." Literally: What was the primary Bible verse that moved the doctor?

His answer:
"Ich war lang irre, wuste nicht, wie ich drinnen war. Ich wuste wol etwas, oder wuste doch nichts, was es ware, bis so lang das ich uber den locum ad Rom.1. kam: Iustus ex fide vivet [Rom 1:17]. Der halff mir. Da sah ich, von welcher iustitia Paulus redet: Da stand zuvor im text iustitia [Rom. 1:16], da reumet ich das abstractum und concretum zusamen und wurde meiner sachen gewisz, lernet inter iustitiam legis und euangelii discernirn. Zuvor mangelt mir nichts, denn das ich kein discrimen inter legem et euangelium machet, hielt es alles vor eins et dicebam Christum a Mose. Aber do ich das discrimen fande, quod aliud esset lex, aliud euangelium, da riss ich her durch."

English translation:
"For a long time I was confused (misled, mistaken). Didn't know what I'd gotten into. I knew I had my finger on something, but didn't know what it was. Until I came to the passage in Rom. 1:17, 'The righteous one shall live by faith.' [Luther may have heard it equally translatable from the Greek: 'The righteous-by-faith (person) shall live.'] That text helped me. I saw just what sort of righteousness Paul was talking about. [Because] in

the previous verse (v.16) was the word righteousness [of God], so I connected (rhymed) the abstract concept (righteousness in God's own self) with the concrete term (an actual person righteous "by faith"). And I got clarity about what I was doing. I learned to distinguish between the law's righteousness and the gospel's righteousness. Previously I was off-base on one thing, namely, that I made no distinction between the law and the gospel. I held them both to be the same and said that Christ differed from Moses only in historical time and in degree of perfection. But when I discovered the "*discrimen*" (dividing line, interval, distinction, difference), that the law is one thing and the Gospel is something else, that was my breakthrough." [That was my "Aha!"]

So was the Aha! about the righteousness of faith, or about hermeneutics? How the righteousness of God works, or how to read the Bible? Answer: Yes. But Luther uses the "breakthrough" word for the hermeneutical Aha!

Thesis 2:
Melanchthon then took this Aha! to Augsburg in 1530-31, where it became the public hermeneutics of Lutheran confessional theology.

Here are the opening paragraphs of Apology 4 on justification:

"In the fourth, fifth, and sixth articles, as well as later in the twentieth, they [our critics] condemn us for teaching that people receive the forgiveness of sins not on account of their own merits but freely on account of Christ, by faith in Him. They condemn us both for denying that people receive the forgiveness of sins on account of their own merits and for affirming that people receive the forgiveness of sins by faith

and are justified by faith in Christ. But since this controversy deals with the most important topic of Christian teaching which, rightly understood, illumines and magnifies the honor of Christ and brings the abundant consolation that devout consciences need, we ask His Imperial Majesty kindly to hear us out on this important matter. Since the opponents understand neither the forgiveness of sins, nor faith, nor grace, nor righteousness, they miserably contaminate this article, obscure the glory and benefits of Christ, and tear away from devout consciences the consolation offered them in Christ. But in order both to substantiate our confesssion and to remove the objections that the opponents raise, we need first to say a few things by way of a preface in order that the sources of both versions of the doctrine, the opponents' and ours, can be recognized.

"All Scripture should be divided into these two main topics: the law and the promises. In some places it communicates the law. In other places it communicates the promise concerning Christ, either when it promises that Christ will come and on account of him offers the forgiveness of sins, justification, and eternal life, or when in the gospel itself, Christ, after he appeared, promises the forgiveness of sins, justification, and eternal life….

"Of these two topics, the opponents single out the law (because to some extent human reason naturally understands it since reason contains the same judgment divinely written on the mind), and through the law they seek the forgiveness of sins and justification. But the Decalogue requires not only outward civil works that reason can produce to some extent; it also requires other works that are placed far beyond the reach of reason, such as, truly to fear God, truly to love God, truly to call upon God, truly to be convinced that he hears us, and to expect help from God in death and all afflictions. Finally, it requires obedience to God in death and all afflictions so that we do not

flee or avoid these things when God imposes them.”

Note.
The “sources” of “both versions of doctrine” are not differing texts from which the doctrine is drawn—Bible only vs. Bible and tradition—but different ways of reading the agreed-upon text, the Bible. The hermeneutic is THE source for the differing doctrine. Change THIS source and you change the doctrine.

It was that way in Jesus’ own day as he debated the agreed-upon text with his critics. The same for Paul in Galatia. And ever since in church history. Gerhard Ebeling: “Church history is the history of how Christians have read the Bible.”

Thesis 3:
So was it a hermeneutical Aha? or a soteriological one? Answer: yes.

I don’t think I learned the hermeneutical aspect of this Augsburg Aha! in my seminary days in St. Louis 57 years ago. Nor even in Erlangen 54 years ago where I took Lutheran Confessions from Paul Althaus and Dogmatics from Werner Elert. I must have learned this from Bob Bertram. In the days of the LCMS turmoil about Biblical inspiration Bob wrote an essay—a mere three pages— for the LCMS’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations titled: “The Hermeneutical Significance of Apology 4.” His axiom there was: “Biblical hermeneutics is at no time separable from Biblical soteriology.” How you read the Bible is inseparable from how you think people get saved. And vice versa. That’s what Apology 4 says! Which came first, the Aha! about hermeneutics, or the Aha! about Gospel—chicken or egg?

And that’s why Apology 4 is so long.

The many pages of Apology 4 on Justification (60 pages in the

Tappert edition of the Book of Concord [Philadelphia, 1959], 400 paragraphs!)—Article 4 in the Augsburg Confession itself has only 49 Latin words!—are Melanchthon taking the Biblical texts that the Confutators cite—passages that seem to reject "faith alone," as the Confutators read them—and using the hermeneutic of law/promise, enunciated as "prolegomena" at the outset of Apology 4—to show that "these passages support our confession." He does so showing the two different soteriologies that are present in the two different interpretations of these disputed Biblical texts.

Needed in both ELCA and LCMS—surely at their seminaries—is a semester-long seminar devoted to these 60 pages of Apology 4. In both LCMS and ELCA the law/promise distinction is universally affirmed. But it is largely a shibboleth, a mantra, publicly proclaimed and then ignored when it comes to actual Biblical exegesis. It doesn't get "used." Most likely because people don't know how to use it. Where in the theology that comes from either place do you [ever] see that hermeneutic practiced? I don't read everything coming from these churches, but I'm still waiting to see one that does it. Melanchthon's 60 pages say: *Tolle, lege. Tolle, disce*. "Here's how to do it, how to USE it. Learn."

Thesis 4:
That leads to a number of additional Aha's.

The first Aha: There is only one alternative to reading the Bible with law/promise lenses: reading it as God telling us what to do.

The hermeneutics of "our opponents [is] of these two—law and promises—[to] select the law and by it they seek forgiveness of sins and justification." That has always been the alternative—"selecting the law and by it" remedying the human

malady. When Luther in 1518 presented his Heidelberg Theses, "Selecting the law and by it seeking justification" was at the center of the theologies of glory which he denounced. The "glory" in glory-theologies seeks God without the cross, because it is also "glorifying" human ability to achieve salvation, if "they would only get busy and DO such and so." That's with us today. Theologies of glory are achievement theologies. Some belief, some ethical work, some liturgical practice, some spiritual experience, some SOMETHING, that you COULD do if you really wanted to—is the linchpin for God being merciful to sinners.

The second Aha: Justification by faith alone is the one and only doctrine there is in the Christian Gospel.

The rhetorical role of *sola fide* in the text of the AC and in the text of the Apology is different. "Sola fide" does not appear in the AC article on justification at all! Is that a signal that the confessors didn't (yet) see that *sola fide* was the "jugular" in their conflict with Rome? The term "*sola fide*" first appears in AC 6 on New Obedience (ethics!). And here it just "slips in" (no big deal) in a quotation ascribed to Ambrose [actually Ambrosiaster] "Whoever believes in Christ shall be saved . . . not through works but through faith alone. . . "
Jaroslav Pelikan taught us this in a confessions class at Concordia Seminary in 1950: According to the AC (Art. 7) there is only one doctrine in Christian theology, the "*doctrina evangelii*," the doctrine (singular noun in Latin), namely, the one doctrine (teaching/proclamation) that IS the Gospel. The notion of "gospel in all its parts" [a favored Missouri phrase in my lifetime] is not thinking of Gospel as the AC/Apol. does. How many "parts" are there to a promise? E.g., to Christ's words: "Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven"? Promises are "simple" one- sentence offers, one-sentence commitments. "I plight thee my troth…." The Gospel is simplex, a one-something,

not complex, many parts. Jesus' words too when he passes on the assignment to us disciples: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you don't, they won't be forgiven." It's that simple.

Though only modestly present, as a technical term, in the AC, faith-alone, trusting that promise, is without doubt the cantus firmus of the entire Apology.

Third Aha: If you start with the Gospel as promise, faith-alone is the only conclusion you can draw.

Melanchthon "proves" the *sola fide* claim initially with a very simple syllogism. He starts with the simple equation: the Gospel is a promise—stated, possibly for the first time in Lutheran "systematic theology" in his LOCI COMMUNES. Promises don't "work" unless they are trusted. So, "only by faith does any promise work." The Gospel's promise too. But that syllogism only works when you've had the Aha! Namely, that the Gospel is God's Promise. Not a divine "you gotta," but an offer, a gift, a freebee, a "Here, catch!"

Thesis 5:
Even so, we can trace the flow-chart of the Augsburg Aha! —sotto voce, perhaps—through the heart of the Augsburg Confession.

It is my hunch that even when the AC was presented on June 25, 1530, the Confessors, including Melanchthon, did not yet know what the neuralgic point was that would rankle their Roman critics. Not until they read the "Confutation," the refutation of their confession by their critics, did they learn/see/know that the "*sola fide*" (faith alone) was what the fight was all about. That was clearly what the opposition said. Melanchthon

said in no uncertain terms as he composed Apology 4 that the fight was about *sola fide* – "in Articles 4, 5, 6, and 20 they condemn us for *sola fide*" – AND that the *sola fide* fight was a fight about Biblical hermeneutics. "Biblical hermeneutics is at no time separable from Biblical soteriology." Applied in this case: "*Sola fide* soteriology is at no point separate from law-promise hermeneutics." That must have been another Aha! after the confessors read the Confutation.

I suggest that all this is implicit in the Augsburg Confession itself, but not explictly focused on sola fide and law-and-promise, which then later were revealed to be the "offense" for Rome of both the soteriology and the hermeneutics of the AC.

Here's a proposed walk through the AC articles:

Article 1 says that the Christian faith is about God, the Triune God. [Note. "Triune God" is not simply the "true and correct" way to talk about the true God, but the way to talk about God and have it come out Gospel. E.g., apart from Christ, God is not "Abba," apart from the Holy Spirit there is no access to Christ. Melanchthon, possibly for diplomatic reasons, does not accentuate this in AC 1. He simply says: "We are Nicene orthodox." A sample of how Luther speaks of the Trinity as God-talk that is Gospel comes at the end of his treatment of the Apostolic Creed in the Large Catechism. Here ML runs the Trinity "in reverse." First we encounter the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit connects us to Christ, Christ connects us to God as Father.]

Monotheism without trinitarianism is NOT good news. It takes Christ to validate calling God Father. This claim is fundamental for Christian conversation with people of other faiths.

Article 2 says: with this God we're in trouble. The trouble is: all people come into the world as sinners. They do not trust

this God, they do not fear his critical evaluation, and they are "concupiscent," humans curved into themselves.

Article 3 tells about God's solution to the problem, Jesus the Christ. He is God the Son, the Word made flesh—crucified, risen, etc. as the Apostles Creed says. This Christ-solution continues working through the ages via the Holy Spirit.

Article 4 is about faith, describing how sinners (Art. 2), when they appropriate the solution (Art 3), become OK ("righteous") before God (Art. 1). The key terms are: "forgiveness, by grace, because of Christ, through faith."

Article 5 describes how this faith happens. God has set up a delivery system [the technical term here is "ministry." Ministry here does not mean the clergy.] This delivery system is Gospel-preaching and the sacraments-enacted. The Holy Spirit uses such ministry [as means, or instruments, or agencies, a "pipeline"] to bring the benefits of Art. 3 to sinners today. When this ministry happens, faith can happen.

Article 6 describes the new kind of obedience, the ethics, the "fruits" and "works," that flow from such faith. [The new in this NEW obedience is that (in St. Paul's terms) it is "the obedience of faith," not "the obedience of the law."]

Article 7 describes the church as the community of forgiven sinners formed by the ministry of Gospel-and-sacraments.

Subsequent Articles—8 to 28—channel the pulse and flow from this theological heart throughout the body of the Christian community and the individual Christian. Imagine, if you can, an old-fashioned wagon wheel: hub, spokes and rim. These articles "articulate" the Gospel Hub as it applies to a particular spoke. In fact, all 28 "spokes" of the AC are articles that articulate (pun intended) the Gospel. Even Art. 2 on Original Sin is

“Gospel-grounded.” Sin is a malady so bad that it takes “rebirth through Baptism and the Holy Spirit” to fix it. Those words “articulate” what the malady is in terms of the Gospel that heals it.

All 28 articles of the AC/Apol. “articulate” the Gospel-promise center when the radius is turned to focus on this or that specific spoke, and the “hermeneutics” of law/promise serves as the rim to keep all the spokes anchored in this hub.

Thesis 6: Central to the Augsburg Aha! is replacing the nature/grace axiom of scholastic theology (for hermeneutics and soteriology) with the Bible’s own law/promise hermeneutics and soteriology.

I am not enough of a Reformation scholar to know if Luther or Melanchthon themselves ever spoke of the law/promise Aha! replacing the nature/grace axiom that dominated scholastic theology and its hermeneutical consequences. But that is what Luther is saying in that Table-talk citation above. He used to read “Moses and Christ” as qualitatively the same—with only quantitative differences. [“…non differre nisi tempore et perfectione”] For in nature/grace hermeneutics both were revelations of God’s grace—Moses incomplete, Christ complete.

The nature/grace axiom (going back to Augustine?) was terminologically a bad idea from the beginning. There is no corollary in Biblical vocabulary for “nature.” It comes from Aristotle’s briefcase. And coming as it does as the first term in the pair, it distorts grace (a genuniely Biblical term—*chesed* and *charis*), so that grace becomes “a metaphysical medicine, revealed in the scriptures, now passed down through the sacraments of the church, to heal the damage done to human

nature by original sin." [Pelikan, in his sem class of 1950].

One grad student back at Seminex once traced the term "grace" in Apology IV and discovered that Melanchthon does indeed use it frequently, but as the 400 paragraphs unfold, "mercy" [*misericordia*, Barmherzigkeit] takes over as Melanchthon's favored term. And no wonder. If grace is not medicine, but a relationship, then "mercy" compels you to think in I-thou terms, but not about a medicine chest.

You need completely different tools, vocabulary—even "grammar," Luther said—to articulate law/promise theology in place of nature/grace. Because there is a subtle (or not so subtle) soteriology that "fits" with nature/grace. The "nature" part—damaged, but still functional—is called upon "*facere quod in se est*" [to do what it has within it] on the salvation agenda. Then medicinal grace comes in to finish what's still to be done, what damaged nature can't bring to completion. It's an easy step from nature/grace hermeneutics to the Old Adam's irrepressible *incurvatus* into Pelagianism—whether full-blown, or just the "semi" Pelagian version of the late Middle Ages.

Thesis 7:
A whole new theological vocabulary arises from this Aha! chain-reaction in Apology IV. Especially useful for "gospel-sniffing," detecting "gospels that aren't THE Gospel" and learning how to tell the difference.

Some samples from the "new" rhetoric of Apology 4.
A. God's grace is relational mercy—discussed above. Grace is "*favor dei*," God's favor for sinners, God's clean-contrary-to-

law relationship to sinners in Christ. This grace is NOT God's generic goodness encountered in the gifts from a creator's hand. Of course, creation's gifts come from God's hand. But they are gifts from God's left hand, gifts that obligate us beyond our capacity—or our willingness—"to thank and to praise, to serve and obey him," as Luther says in the Small Catechism. To make that emphatic he immediately adds the sentence: "This is most certainly true." I.e., our incapacity/unwillingness to meet the obligations that come with such lavish giving on God's part is "most certainly true."

B. "*Lex semper accusat*" (& therefore) "Christus manet mediator." The law always accuses (and therefore) Christ [needs to] remain as mediator always as well Because of the law's *semper*, Christ the mediator is needed *semper* too.

C. Rightful and wrongful addition. The Confutators do wrongful addition: adding non-Biblical "*opinio legis*" to Biblical "*lex*." [See "I" below.] Rightful adding is: Adding the Gospel to a Biblical text where there is none. The Augsburg Aha! puts a caveat to the mantra: "Just preach the Biblical text!" Not so. Law/promise lenses are needed for every text—before you preach on that text. If the promise is absent, then it is incumbant on the preacher to add it. The preacher's calling is not "preach the text," but "preach the Gospel." "Defective" texts need help. "Over and over we say that the Gospel of Christ must be added to [texts that] preach the law." [Apol 4:257, 260, 263, 287]

D. Checking the "use" of the Gospel by applying the double dipstick. Melanchthon's constant complaint in Apol 4 is that the opponents "obscure the glory and benefits of Christ, and tear away from devout consciences the consolation offered them in Christ." Misused Gospel, or preaching a non-Gospel, is both a Christological "heresy" (in "praxis" Christology) and fundamental pastoral malfeasance.

E. Checking the key verbs. Law “requires.” Gospel “offers.” The ease with which “must” becomes the operative verb in today’s preaching vitiates the Gospel offer “Here, catch!.”

F. The “saint-ly” sins. Even Promise-trusters are law-defective. “For who loves or fears God enough? Who endures patiently enough the afflictions that God sends? Who does not often wonder whether history is governed by God’s counsels or by chance? Who does not often doubt whether God hears him? Who does not often complain because the wicked have better luck than the devout, because the wicked persecute the devout? Who lives up to the requirements of his calling? Who love his neighbor as himself? Who is not tempted by lust?” [Tappert 130:167]

That places front and center before us Luther’s first of the 95 theses. When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said “Repent,” he called for the entire life of believers to be one of penitence. Consequently, every day “*Christus manet mediator*.”

G. When preaching “obedience,” the law/gospel distinction is to be operative: Gospel-obedience vs. law-obedience. “We must speak technically because of certain carping critics: faith is truly righteousness because it is OBEDIENCE to the Gospel. . . . Our good works of OBEDIENCE to the law can be pleasing to God only because this OBEDIENCE to the Gospel takes hold of Christ, the propitiator, and is reckoned for righteousness (Rom.8:1). This faith gives honor to God, gives him what is properly his: it OBEYS him by accepting his promises.” (Tappert 155:308f)

H. From that follows a distinction in worship: “Worship of the gospel is to receive good things from God, while worship of the law is to offer and present our goods to God. We cannot offer anything to God unless we have first been reconciled and reborn. The HIGHEST WORSHIP in the Gospel is the desire to receive forgiveness of sins, grace and righteousness.”

It is so easy to confuse the two yet so easy to detect the difference once you know what to be listening for. Ob-edience (ob-audiencing) is a listening-to. The verbs reveal what you are listening to—from God's side "require" or "offer," from the human side "offer to God" or "receive from God."

I. *Opinio legis*. [*opinio* = supposition, conjecture] The law "supposes" that the person it speaks to can do what it calls for. Second supposition is that if you do what is required, you merit some reward, and if you do not, then you get negative consequences. This "conjecture" constitutes the primal theology of every Old Adam, Old Eve, the chronic drive to be "right." As Fred Niedner puts it: "The most fundamental drive in human beings is not sex, but the drive to be right. If you don't believe that, just get married."

The conjecture is so compelling because it is so reasonable. It would be madness for good not to be rewarded and evil not to be punished. Law and reason are Siamese twins. Yet when they reign, Christ departs. It's an either/or.

"They teach the law in such a way as to hide the Gospel of Christ. The opponents' whole system is derived either from human reason or from the teaching of the law rather than the Gospel. They teach two modes of justification—one based upon reason, the other based upon the law, neither one based upon the Gospel or the promise of Christ." [Tappert 150:286f.]

J. In scholastic theology Paul's trio of "faith, hope and love" were the virtues that defined a "righteous" person. Obviously you could not be fully righteous with only one of the trio, the faith part. So "*sola fide*" was non-sense. You were at best 1/3 righteous with faith alone.

With law/promise hermeneutics and theology-of-the-cross soteriology this trio is redefined Biblically as relationships,

NOT as virtues, qualities now “inhabiting” a person, three distinct “*habitus*“-es, positive habits I now have that I didn’t have before.

No need to go into discussion of where hope and love (in addition to faith)—the classical
“theological virtues”—fit in. As Biblical terms they are not “virtues” at all in the vocabulary of Aristotle, but variations on trusting the promise. Melanchthon demonstrates how the three “Good News” terms—gospel, promise, forgiveness of sins—are all synonyms. Faith as the fitting response to any of these three is not a “virtue,” a moral “plus” in the responder. Faith is a “having” of something you didn’t have before—crisply stated in Luther’s epigram: “Glaubstu hastu; Glaubstu nicht, hastu nicht.” [When you believe, you have; when you don’t believe, you don’t have.] And what the person of faith “has” is Christ together with all his benefits. Luther’s other favorite synonym for faith—alongside the Pauline “*fiducia* / trust”—is St. John’s term, “Christum habere/having Christ.”

K. We need to have some sympathy for the agony of the Confutators: They knew the facts of life: if works don’t merit anything, don’t get rewarded, why will anyone do good works at all? Result: ethical chaos. But that yen to attain merit is not to be satisfied. Rather it is the chronic disease of all original sinners that needs to be exorcised, finally put to death. [Is that what St. Paul was referring to in Rom.7:7 when he tells us that it was the contra-covet-commandment which brought home to him his own sinfulness—namely, he was coveting righteousness, working hard to get it— when the law’s contra-covet commandment finally revealed to him that the very “coveting” of righteousnes—even before you got any—was already fundamental sin?] The *opinio legis* covets righteousness; it needs to be crucified. It’s an either / or. Either you keep Christ in the equation, and the yen for merit/rewards gets

excised. Or you keep rewards/merits in and Christ must be excised. It’s that simple.

“By this rule . . . all passages on works can be interpreted.” I.e., not excluding Christ the mediator. [Tappert 164:372]

L. Commending Works Without Losing The Promise.
“The rule I have just stated interprets all the passagaes they quote on law and works. For we concede that in some places the Scripture presents the law, while in others it presents the Gospel, the free promise of the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake. But by their denial that faith justifies and by their doctrine that because of our love and works we receive the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation, our opponents SIMPLY ABOLISH THE FREE PROMISE. [Tappert 132:185ff] If the forgiveness of sins were conditional upon our works, it would be completely unsure and the promise would be abolished. Therefore we call upon devout minds to consider the promises, and we teach them about the free forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation that comes through faith in Christ. Later we add the teaching of the law. And we must distinguish between these, as Paul says (II Tim.2:15). We must see what the Scriptures ascribe to the law and what they ascribe to the promises. FOR THEY PRAISE WORKS IN SUCH A WAY AS NOT TO REMOVE THE FREE PROMISE.”

“We cannot set any works of ours against the wrath of God, as Paul clearly says (Rom.5:1).” [Tappert 134:195]

PART II. AN AHA! FOR INTERPRETING THE WORLD

Thesis 8:

If this hermeneutical/soteriological change signals different theological universes, it will inevitably have equally tectonic consequences for “interpreting the world,” the “stuff” that fills our world(s). IN BOTH BIBLICAL LANGUAGES—HEBREW & GREEK—GOD’S WORD AND GOD’S WORK ARE SYNONYMS. DABAR. LOGOS / RHEMA

God is at work in the world with two regimes, as the ambidextrous deity of the Scriptures. Lutheran “Two Regimes” language is about “THEO-logy,” about how God operates in our world. It is not initially about “ethics,” how humans are to operate in this world. As with all God- operations in our world, our human position is that of responder. We are second in the line-of-action sequence. Key here for responding to both of these diverse God-actions is to respond “responsibly,” a response from us that is “fitting” for the differing divine initiatives that come from God’s left and right hands. Since the two initiatives are different, the same is true for the “fitting” responses.

PART III. AN AHA! FOR FOLLOWING CHRIST IN THE WORLD.

Thesis 9: Distinctively Lutheran ethics build on law/promise hermeneutics in “reading” both the Scriptures and God’s

ambidextrous work in the world. The PROMISE always has the last word, even as the LAW of God is on the screen. Bob Bertram's DEXTRA acronym signals the relationship between God's two hands: different, equivalent, cross-over, trusses, replaces, (finally) antiquates. The reigning rubric is Melanchthon's: to commend good works without losing the PROMISE.

Possibly Professor Keller will touch on this in his keynote address. Why? Because Werner Elert's THE CHRISTIAN ETHOS is unique among Lutheran ethics textbooks in making this divine doublet—law and Gospel—the blueprint for his entire book. Results: 1) Any "third use of the law" is jettisoned. Why? It inevitably "loses the promise" while commending good works. 2) The ethical imperatives in the Bible need distinguishing: Law imperatives and Grace imperatives differ fundamentally because of the differing "grammars" of Law and Promise. 3) In place of the law's third use comes a "second use of the Gospel" (for ethics). This second use of the Gospel commends good works without losing the Promise. 4) Important for Augsburg theologians today is Elert's deconstructing the "orders of creation" confusion that surfaces over and over again when that term appears in theological discourse today – either to be praised or to be damned. Here too law/promise hermeneutics brings clarity.

One example of ignoring the Aha! for ethics and thus losing the promise is the ELCA's recent report from the sexuality task force. Law/promise hermeneutics is affirmed in shibboleth fashion, but then ignored as the two "sides" of the debate come

to expression.

PART IV. AN AHA! FOR BEING THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

I defer to Strelan’s and Kleinhans’ presentations.

Useful resources for me on this topic are R.R. Caemmerer’s THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD and Part III of Elert’s THE CHRISTIAN ETHOS: “The Objective Ethos of the Body of Christ.”

CONCLUSION

The Gospel is a promise, an honest-to-God promise. Promises work by “faith alone.” Today there is lots of talk in our midst about “people of faith.” In America it is a “pc”-term for believing anything that qualifies as spiritual or religious. Not so the faith that rebirths sinners into God’s beloved kids. Augsburg confessors need to be saying that loud and clear. Christian faith is case- specific, Christ-specific. And not some “generic Jesus” either, but the cross-marked one offering forgiveness: “Young man, you’ll be glad to hear this. Your sins are forgiven.” “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” Christ-specific faith trusts Jesus as “wording” God’s own voice to us when he offers forgiveness. Should there be some doubt about Jesus’ authority for such a task, on Easter God ratifies Jesus as God’s own voice for forgiveness.

Because human sin and human death are Siamese twins, in order to save folks from one you have to save them from the other. So forgiving sinners and undoing death are equally yoked. St. Paul is emphatic about that (I Cor. 15): If Christ didn’t trump

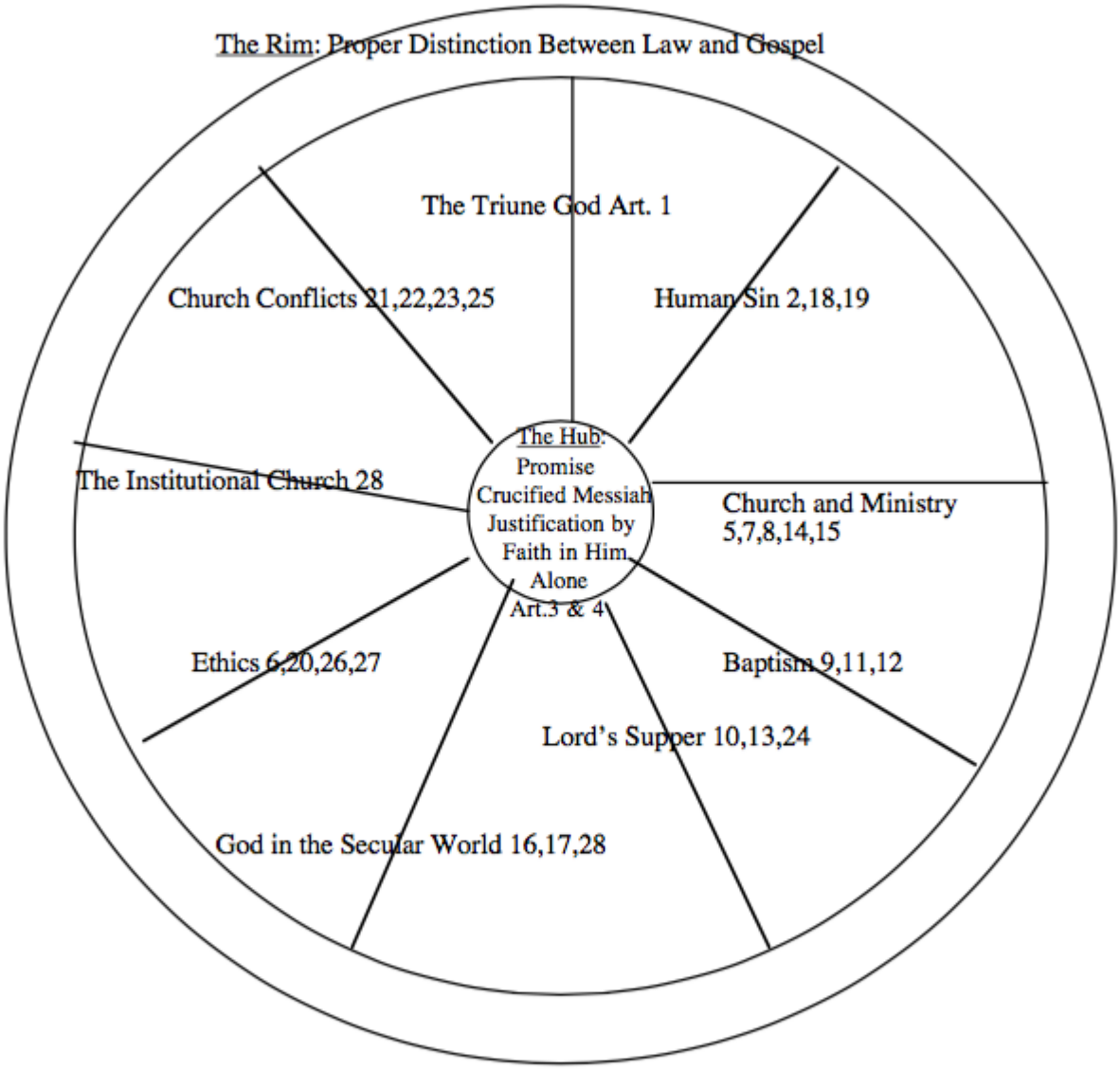
death, then sin isn’t trumped either. No resurrected Jesus, no forgiven sinners, and any faith in such forgiveness is fiction. Sin, death, law are the DNA triple helix of the “first Adam, a man of dust.”

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead. The last enemy IS destroyed.” The second Adam now has death behind him. So do those who trust him. “God gives us this victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” His post-Easter DNA gets swapped for ours—by faith alone, of course. It’s a new triple helix in the genetic code of Christ-trusters: forgiveness of sins, life that lasts, an honest-to-God promise.

We have God’s Word for it.

Edward H. Schroeder
St. Louis, Missouri
January 2, 2007

The Theological Paradigm (The System) of the Augsburg Confession of 1530



The Spokes: Articulations of the Gospel,
The One and Only *Doctrina Evangelii*

K1_Schroeder_Augsburg_Aha (PDF)

How the Distinction of Law and Gospel Shapes My Preaching

Title in Conference Brochure:

How the Distinction of Law and Gospel Shapes My Preaching

Title in "Conference at a Glance"

Preaching the Augsburg 'Aha!'

Frederick Niedner, Valparaiso University

One of the most helpful things I ever learned about preaching has to do with the importance of cultivating imagery and metaphors. I also learned from the late Walter Bouman to start any talk with lighthearted things. So, some metaphors and similes, supposedly gleaned from high school papers by composition teachers behaving as humor-vultures. I got these from colleague Matt Becker; hopefully, he hasn't already used them here.

• His thoughts tumbled in his head, making and breaking alliances like underpants in a dryer without Cling Free.

• Her vocabulary was as bad as, like, whatever.

• From the attic came an unearthly howl. The whole scene had an eerie, surreal quality, like when you're on vacation in another city and Jeopardy comes on at 7:00 p.m. instead of 7:30.

• John and Mary had never met. They were like two hummingbirds who had also never met.

• Shots rang out, as shots are wont to do.

• He spoke with the wisdom that can only come from experience, like a guy who went blind because he looked at a solar eclipse without one of those boxes with a pinhole in it and now goes around the country speaking at high schools about the dangers of looking at a solar eclipse without one of those boxes with a pinhole in it.

Those may or may not have any application to my topic, but at least these are pretty clear, self- explanatory.

There seem to be two titles for my presentation, neither of which I can remember offering myself, which probably means I didn't meet a deadline, and our program coordinators then scrambled to provide something. Both are good enough titles. I'll talk about both subjects.

The first title could refer to history: How did the law-gospel distinction come to shape my preaching? Or, it could refer to method: How does this distinction continually function as a shaper of my preaching?

For as long as I can remember, I knew there was a distinction between law and gospel because the language of law and gospel was common parlance where I grew up—in a parsonage, in a small town full of Lutherans (and Catholics, who only cared about law, we were told). But in truth, I didn't *know* the distinction, nor did I really *know* the gospel. I grew up believing that we were right, and the Catholics (along with everyone else) were wrong. That was my good news, and also my faith. We were right, thank goodness. We had the correct doctrines and the right code word. (I was taught in parochial school that LCMS people wouldn't be

the only people in heaven; others who mistakenly, or perhaps defiantly, believed LCMS doctrine would be there, too, even if they were officially and ostensibly Methodist or Catholic. But somehow, and for whatever reason, you had to affirm Missouri doctrine to be saved.) What was that doctrine? It had six chief parts: Inerrant Bible. Six-24/hr-Day Creation. Infant Baptism. Real Presence. Absolutely no dancing! And I didn't know it at the time: Women Kept in their Place.

The whole thing also seemed like a code-word game. God had established a secret code word, somewhat as it happened on the old Groucho Marx show, "You Bet Your Life," when the rubber chicken would fall from the ceiling when someone unsuspectingly said the magic word, but more like the codes that spies and soldiers use when crossing battleground perimeters. The code word was "Jesus." Unfortunately, others thought it was "Buddha," or, "Mohammed," or whatever. So blessed we were to know the code-word!

That made preaching work like this:
LAW: You're lousy, no damned good, a poor miserable sinner.
GOSPEL: Jesus died for your sins. You've got to believe in Jesus! (And the six chief parts, which I eventually learned we call "the gospel and all its articles.")

It was also apparent that going to church was at the center of everything. There were Lutherans and Catholics, all right. But also those who went to church, and those who didn't. It was hard to tell which were worse off, Catholics or those who didn't "go to church." Just as today, it was sometimes hard to tell popular religion from official Lutheranism.

To be honest, I don't know what folks meant to teach me. But that's what I learned. And I went off to LCMS's notorious "system schools" to learn how to convince others that we were

right, they were wrong. “Come, join us. See things our way!”

I know this curious indoctrination still happens. I recently had an LCMS high school senior in my office, visiting as a prospective student, and he informed me that he will be the next St. Augustine. So, he will come to VU be a pre-seminary student. But, he wondered, where were our courses in polemics (which he pronounced po-LEEM-ics) and apologetics? He wanted to learn how to do battle, and to prove that he was right.

I suspect now that I would never have known what the gospel was, or how to distinguish it from law, or preach it, without several things having happened to me.

1. I lost my faith. Walking, talking, real-live catechismthat I was, I discovered that I new all the answers, but not all the questions. Moreover, I wasn’t right about everything. This happened at Concordia Senior College. Among many small steps on way to being found: Fritz Rusch momentarily revealed his doubts one day, almost by accident. A paper assignment for a history class at seminary thatbrought me into contact with the Fritz article in LCMS’s 75th anniversary volume, in which the author tells of confessing to then-president C. F. W. Walther the loss of his faith.

2. All these finally taught me from experience what I’d memorized as a child: “I believe that I cannot. . .believe. BUT. . .” (Small Catechism, Third Article explanation.) If there’s any hope for my connection to God, it’s God who must hold on. I cannot.

3. I fell, fortunately, under the influence of Robert Bertram. Back then, what you now call
“crossing,” he taught as “programming a pericope.” We did diagnosis and prognosis. And I gradually learned that we had never, ever finished diagnosis until we got ourselves to the

point of recognizing we were not only cussers, drinkers, church-skippers, and whore-mongers, but we were dead as ducks in self-righteous God-supplanting. Moreover, we sad, lost souls were not only victims of the world's nasty cliques and machinery, we had misled ourselves into the darkest alleyways of despair by insisting on finding our own way out of the mire. Then, when the diagnosis said "dead on arrival," we could do prognosis, and prognosis always began with the cross. But in my own mind, I was still mostly doing "theology about the cross," not yet "theology of the cross." I did soteriology in a typical way. Jesus death was a transaction that started the reversal of death under the law toward life under the gospel. I've learned theology *of* the cross since then, but more on that later. And always in Bob Bertram's treatment there was an *image*, a prevailing metaphor, that dominated the "programming" of the pericope. We inhabited a wilderness story; or we had a clothing problem; or had begun a misguided building venture.

4. I took a turn teaching the Lutheran Confessions early in my Valpo career, and it finally dawned on me how central to everything in that collection are the assumptions of Apology IV. And since that article is about knowing the gospel when you see it, it's about preaching. I cannot help but ask two things of every sermon—does it waste the death of Christ, or honor it as necessary and sufficient for reconciling us to God? And does it comfort penitent hearts?

5. A Phyllis Trible lesson became important, too—one must wrestle a text like Jacob did the night stranger, asserting: "I will not let you go until you bless me." I may limp, but I'll leave with blessing and a new name. (Or as Ed said last night, our task is more than preaching the text; it's preaching the GOSPEL!)

All of this has made me one of those insufferable sermon critics

(most of the time working secretly). I cannot quit diagnosing, then looking for signs of prognosis in others' sermons. And I cannot avoid a critique of the master image or prevailing metaphor of a sermon. And I can't help asking whether I've heard anything that necessitates Christ, or whether I've been thrown back on my own devices.

I hear plenty of preaching these days that lacks gospel. Why? I theorize that either folks don't know the gospel (like my young students, many of whom think and talk much as I did at their age) or they don't believe it, or they think it's irrelevant and too small a thing to waste time preaching (which seems the case with many of my LCMS and ELCA preaching peers). My students still think that the gospel is: "We must try harder to be better Christians!!!" It's *opinio legis*, but perhaps they have grown up listening to preachers who are mostly frustrated CEO's of small not-for-profits, angry that no one seems to care as much as they do about the work of the church.

Summaries of recent sermons I've heard:
On Epiphany (at afuneral; LCMS preacher) – We don't follow the light very well. Louis followed the light. So should we.

Epiphany 1 (ELCA preacher) – We don't show up very well in the world as God's people. We have resisted the light and not proclaimed God's mercy effectively. Why? Life is tough. So, here's the solution: we should wear our faith on our sleeves.

Two days ago, on Epiphany 4, I heard two sermons: 1) Christ's words to Nazareth folks stripped them naked, exposed their self-centeredness, and infuriated them. Gospel: Christ clothes them, and us, in himself. 2) Christ's teaching show us our selfishness and our insistence that God's blessings be ours alone, or at least ours first. How dare God love others! Gospel: God loves everyone. You must believe that!

In some circles and places I hear mostly politics. I think it is proclamation that grows out of liberation theology. It proclaims justice. Often it's called "gentle justice," but it's justice nevertheless. The primary point is that somebody else is messing up the world and throwing it into a pit of injustice. The poor are suffering, and God prefers the poor over the rich. Ergo, we must be on the side of the poor, and we must become the agents named in Mary's *Magnificat* who cast the mighty down from their thrones and send the rich away empty. (Ed Schroeder sent around an example of such a sermon a few months ago—it had many paragraphs decrying the shortages of food in various countries, including areas in our own, and a final paragraph that said, exactly this briefly, "But God loves us, Jesus died for us, and that alone will change and heal us. Go and feed Lazarus."

Such things make me think that many preachers today consider the gospel and the forgiveness of sins as just silly, out-dated concerns that we don't have time for because economic problems are so grave we must take care of them first. If there's time and energy left over, perhaps we might talk a little gospel. (If nothing else, I find this sorely patronizing, as if the poor have no concerns save economic ones. They aren't real people like us, with complex hearts and minds that need diagnosing and prognosing; they're just victims of the system who need a check, land, or power.)

I still believe that the gospel calls church into being. *Only* the gospel calls the church into being. The law, like the law of liberation theology, calls political movements into being, and such movements play the games politicians always play—I'm right, you're wrong, and the more quickly I get power from you and exercise it my way, the better off the world will be. That's the true nature of the community that much of what says it is church today has actually become.

Gospel is always a surprise. An ‘Aha!’ Augsburg or otherwise. In a way, so is the law, when radically applied. When we really, finally hear it, even the law surprises us, because we’ve been so busy denying and resisting it that we couldn’t listen. We’re dead! In trespasses and sins! We have made (for) ourselves gods. And to hell with the true God!

And right there, in hell, comes the surprising moment, at least for me, when and where gospel can finally be heard. When we finally land, as we inevitably do, in hell. The ‘Aha!” comes when we find you-know- who there.

It’s not only a great surprise, of course, but foolishness. A joke! Please remember this. The gospel is nothing if not a really big joke. This evening I’ll play with my favorite scene of gospel comedy, the oddly humorous conversation among the crucified fellows in Luke 23, those guys up there making plans for their future while fixed to crosses outside Jerusalem.

I have learned the gospel through the experience of wrestling certain texts. Among the more revealing, personal moments I’d list. . .
An encounter with John 13:31-35, an Easter season gospel lesson, which begins, “When he had gone out. . .” and continues with the teaching of the “new commandment.” He, of course, is Judas. With him out there betraying us, we can’t rely any longer on the old commandment that we love our neighbors as ourselves. No, we need to love as Christ does. Despite what John thinks of Judas, Jesus’ new commandment, requiring that we love as God loves, not as we love ourselves, sends us out where Judas roams. To hell perhaps. Because we might end up as Judas. Indeed, each of us plays the role of Judas to someone, and not only to Christ.

Isaiah 25:6-9, another Easter season lesson, continued on to verses 10 and following, provides a revelation about what’s at

the bottom of the mountain. The great feast still finds the Moabites eating our feces and swimming in our urine while we share wine and other delights up top. Where in this picture would we find the crucified Christ? How long does it take to get ancestor Ruth's Moabite blood out of his system?

Matthew 25, a Christ the King lesson in the parable of the last judgment, and the question concerning where the members of the body of Christ belong in the division of flocks and herds in that judgment scene. And, of course, where does the Christ himself, who taught us to go where the condemned are, ends up in that scene? Won't the tireless Shepherd of Matthew 18 have to keep on looking for every last lost one before the party can start?

So here is a piece of my method: "WHERE DO WE FIND THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST IN THIS PICTURE?" I must ask. If we find him, we may find the gospel surprise.

Theology of cross is not finding a way to describe some transaction that happens in the crucifixion. Rather, theology of the cross, which lets us see things as they really are, recognizes that each of us gets crucified—in baptism, and then all through life in place after place as we're nailed by the law. But lo, and behold, look who we get for company when we end up crucified! In his company, hell is unhelled— though it is still not pretty, at least as the world judges things.

Preaching in this way demands rigorous honesty about our condition, and the deceptive twists and turns of our hearts, minds, and libidos. I have had the curse-become-blessing of getting nailed for lots of things. It's no longer hard to see that I'm wrong about everything. I repent of it all, every day, except for my baptism.

But it has blessings you can't know until living in repentance.

For one thing, we are, like Christ himself, the veteran of Golgatha, blasphemy proof – once you've been crucified, what else could someone do to you? Laugh at you? Mock you? Make a joke of you?

People also ask of *theologia crucis* preachers, "But where is your joy?" I say, listen to us sing.

H4_Niedner_Distinction (PDF)

What Drives My Life? A Study in Law and Gospel

John G Strelan

1. The Word of God

Incarnate
Inscripturated
Proclaimed
A textbook?
A life-style manual?
Static or dynamic?

2. The dual action of the Word of God

Demands from us (=the law)
Gives to us (=the gospel)

3. The law-driven life (slavery)

Threat
Fear
Guilt and shame

4. The theological & pastoral problems involved here

5. The gospel-driven life (freedom)

re-creation in Christ: baptism
a new relationship with God: faith/trust
a new attitude to the neighbour : love

6. Biblical examples

Paul's letters
Specific texts
Doing what is 'fitting' or 'proper'

John G Strelan
St Louis
January 2007

H3_Strelan_My_Life (PDF)

Today's Debates on How to Read

St. Paul-1

Stephan K. Turnbull

Introduction

The topic I've been asked to present to you in these breakout sessions, and the topic which I'm glad for the opportunity to address especially among a group of confessional Lutheran colleagues, is "Today's Debates on How to Read St. Paul." Looking back five and half years to my graduation from Luther Seminary, I recall a young man eager to preach the same gospel that St. Paul proclaimed in a time and place far, far away, but I don't think I was more than vaguely aware that there really were any serious debates on how to read St. Paul, other than, perhaps, whether he could be conscripted into service for or against the third use of the law. Such was the condition of my Lutheran myopia.

But indeed very serious debates had been raging for at least several decades, and continue unabated, and they have to do with an entirely different level of alleged Lutheran myopia. It has become more the rule than the exception now in scholarly debates about Paul to refer to "the Lutheran misreading of Paul" and to expect that readers and auditors alike will nod in knowing agreement and wait for the next point. Though many of these kinds of disparaging references demonstrate a deep ignorance of what Lutheran theology really is, there is enough substance to their accusations and to their expositions of Paul, that the heirs of the Reformation must sit up and take serious notice. In the brief time allowed in this format I will have no opportunity to plumb the full depths of this debate nor to resolve even the key issues in a responsible fashion. I have distributed a handout with some brief bibliography for further reading for

those of you who would like to work through the issues more completely, and I hope that will be many of you. In the time that we have here, I would like to pursue two tasks that I hope will put the primary issues on the table and set us up for some probing discussion. The topic assigned is so large that I fear it may feel at times as if I'm backing up the dump truck and dropping far too much load far too quickly. I ask your forgiveness in advance and hope that our discussion time may give us at least some opportunity to sort through the trash and find the treasure.

The first and briefer of the two tasks is to introduce the shot across the bow launched by E. P. Sanders with the publication of his magisterial monograph *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* in 1977.1 It is true that there is nothing new under the sun, and Sanders was preceded in much of his work by the great Albert Schweitzer and even by Krister Stendahl, a Lutheran bishop with serious misgivings about the Lutheran retrojection of the "introspective conscience of the West," to use his term, onto the apostle to the Gentiles.2 Nevertheless it was Sanders who moved the inertia of the debate forward, and a presentation like this one would be incomplete without at least a short introduction to his work.

The second task, on which I intend to spend more time, and which I hope will draw us into a discussion of the primary text when I have finished this paper, is the comparison of two different exegeses of Rom 3:21-31. Since this passage contains the exposition of the righteousness of God where Luther made his famous breakthrough (his Augsburg Aha?), I don't imagine that I need to point out how much is at stake for Lutheran theology in the correct exegesis of this passage. We will compare N. T. Wright's treatment of this passage in his 2002 commentary in the New Interpreter's Bible3 with that of Roy Harrisville in his1980 commentary in the Augsburg New Testament Commentary series.4 Hopefully the contrast will be instructive for us, with Wright

representing a kind of “new perspective” interpretation of Romans and Harrisville representing traditional Lutheranism.

The contributions of E. P. Sanders

We begin with E. P. Sanders, limiting ourselves for the present context to three general points that represent the thrust of his work. First, Sanders spends the lion’s share of *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* reconstructing the pattern of religion in Palestinian Judaism, and this historical reconstruction has a very polemical edge. He argues against the long tradition of reading 2nd Temple Judaism as a religion of petty legalism, producing individuals somehow both arrogant because of their self-achieved legal standing before God and yet hopelessly anxious because of their need to achieve it. Jews of that period have been imagined to be individuals on their own, facing a god whose demands overshadowed his mercies, whose promises to the patriarchs mattered little or not at all, and who counted or weighed each person’s deeds to determine their eternal fate. For many Lutherans, this may sound like a description of “life under the law.” Such a presentation of ancient Judaism, however, rests on “a massive perversion and misunderstanding of the material” according to Sanders. It is, in fact, one of his stated goals “to destroy the view of Rabbinic Judaism which is still prevalent in much, perhaps most, New Testament scholarship.”5 And Sanders has succeeded to a large degree. New Testament scholarship in what is often referred to as “the post-Sanders era” does now usually have to account for the character of 2nd Temple Judaism very differently than it did earlier in the 20th century and before.

Sanders’s alternative proposal for understanding the Judaism of Paul’s day, which has been countered but never yet effectively refuted, is summed up in his term “covenantal nomism.” Jewish

religion was the religion of a graciously made covenant of election that included essentially all Israelites in the group of the saved.6 This covenant also came with a law to which God required obedience, but obedience did not imply legalistic perfection. Jews regularly transgressed the law and were required to repent and make sacrificial atonement for their sins.7 Certainly Lutheran ears will be tuned to hear this as a concession to a “works-based” soteriology, but it must be said that the Rabbis who wrote Mishnah, for example, never understood their obedience as earning the grace of the covenant. In Sanders’s view, to equate the necessity of intra-covenantal obedience with legalistic works righteousness that earns God’s favor requires the importation of a foreign interpretive framework and a rejection of the Rabbi’s own interpretation of their religion. The Jewish religion of Paul’s day, then, was not a tortured legalistic systemfrom which Paul is likely to have wished for an escape, which he then happily discovered in Jesus the herald of grace and conqueror of law.

All this brings us to our second point from Sanders, which may be the most fundamental and controversial, i.e. that Paul’s theology did not run from plight to solution but from solution to plight. The biographical aspect of this contention may already be clear. Paul very likely did not think there was problem with his Jewish religion that God needed to fix, at least not one of legalism. He was not plagued by feelings of terror or guilt but probably had rather normal feelings of covenantal security. His assertion in Philippians 3 that his life before Christ could be characterized as “blameless” with respect to the law confirms this picture. Paul probably thought that he sinned only rarely, and when he did, he repented and made atonement for his transgression. Sanders argued for this conclusion not only biographically but also on the basis of Paul’s letters.8 First, Paul’s references to his own preaching,

though truncated, seem to indicate that Paul's message was more about God's action in Christ than the human need for it, referring to his proclamation with summary phrases like "word of the cross," "Christ crucified," "Christ raised from the dead," and "Christ is Lord."9 Second, passages like 2 Cor 3:10 ("what once had splendor has come to have no splendor at all because of the splendor which surpasses it") seem to indicate that there was no problem with the law before the coming of Christ. Sanders explains, "It appears that the conclusion that all the world – both Jew and Greek – equally stands in need of a Savior *springs from* the prior conviction that God had provided a savior."10 (There may be some in the audience who may understandably be wondering whether this is really an objection to or confirmation of Lutheran theology.)

The third and final point from Sanders for this presentation is likely to be the one most challenging for Lutheran exegetes and theologians. Having identified two sets of soteriological terminology in Paul, the forensic terminology of justification and righteousness by faith and the participatory terminology of dying, living, and rising with and in Christ, Sanders argues that the righteousness or justification by faith terminology is secondary and derivative.11 It is not righteousness by faith that drives Paul, but rather, "the real bite of his theology lies in the participatory categories."12 This may be seen by at least the following four considerations: 1. The descriptions of Christ's death are more frequently and typically participationist than expiatory, and they appear in his sacramental and paranetic passages. 2. Paul's juristic language is defective, i.e. it lacks a discussion of repentance and atonement. Even in Romans 3:9, at the end of a long discussion of sin as transgression, Paul's conclusion is not that all humans are guilty but that they are "under sin." 3. Transgressions like sex with a prostitute or partaking of idol

meat are not condemned as transgressions but as wrong unions. 4. Paul's juristic language is sometimes pressed into participationist meanings (e.g. 1 Cor 6:11, Rom 6:7).

I am well aware, especially in the present context, that these are fighting words, and I sincerely do hope that you will want to fight about them and engage Sanders's book in detail. There is much more to his work than I have been able to address here, and it deserves a response. There will no doubt also be some time and necessity to clarify these issues a bit in the second half of our session together.

Luther's "Breakthrough" or Breakdown? Two Readings of Rom 3:21-31.

At this point, however, I wish to move on to what I think is even more interesting and important, a close exegetical examination of Romans 3. The differences between the commentaries by Wright and Harrisville that we shall be comparing will become clear in the presentation of their exegeses, but you may also note substantive difference between Sanders and Wright as we go along. Though both are often lumped together in the movement usually called "the new perspective on Paul," they, like other scholars so identified, differ widely in their interpretations of Paul. What they generally share are (1) a basically positive evaluation of 2nd Temple Judaism, akin to Sanders' description summarized above, accompanied by a commitment to read Paul in that light and (2) a suspicion that the Reformation traditions have distorted Paul's theological emphases to a greater or lesser degree. I shall proceed at this point to present Wright's and Harrisville's readings of Romans 3 independently of one another, trying to walk step by step, as neutrally as possible, through their exegetical decisions and trying to clarify their representations of what Paul is really

up to in this passage. Finally having presented each of these two representative figures, I shall try to flag up some key points of comparison that may serve our ensuing discussion.

Wright on Romans

The righteousness of God, the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah, and the restoration of the covenant people. These are the building blocks of Wright's reading of Romans in general but especially of Rom 3:21-31. "But now (nuni. de.)," Paul begins 3:21 with these words to announce his news, not a new religion or a new ethic, "but an event through which the world…had been changed forever."13 That event was the revelation of the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Two of these terms especially require explanation, i.e the righteousness of God and the faith(fullness) of Jesus the Messiah. Wright explains in the introduction to his commentary that he understands the phrase dikaiosu,nh qeou/ in Romans, which he translates as "the righteousness of God," to be trivalent; it evokes notions of Covenant, Lawcourt, and Apocalyptic.14 It denotes first of all God's loyalty to the covenant with Israel, his faithfulness to the promises made to the patriarchs. This covenant loyalty includes God's commitment not only to Israel but ultimately to all of creation, the covenant with Abraham having been made in the first place to deal with problem of Adam. Connected to this covenantal meaning but distinct from it is the image of the lawcourt, wherein "righteous" is the adjective used to describe both the successful party in a suit as well as the necessary character of the judge. "Acquitted" is not quite a good synonym for righteous because it only applies to a successful defendant. "Vindicated" may be better. Such images of the lawcourt are necessarily involved in questions of God's righteousness or justice because

of the reality of sin's offense against God and His creation. God will have to deal with sin, both to render his verdict on it and eventually, somehow, to overcome it. Finally, the righteousness of God also bears an apocalyptic character because Paul's discussion of it includes "a way of writing that uses highly charged and coded metaphors to invest space-time reality with its cosmic or theological significance," in the tradition of 2nd Temple Jewish apocalyptic literature. To speak of the righteousness of God being revealed is to speak of God acting within history to vindicate Israel, right in the face of other would-be vindicators or lords.

Translating dikaiosu,nh qeou as the "righteousness of God" instead of the "righteousness that comes from God" only foreshadows the even more controversial decision to translate forms of pi,stij Cristou/ (e.g. in 3:22, 26) as "the faithfulness of the Messiah" instead "faith/belief in Christ." The literature on this debate is extensive, and Wright does not argue for the point in detail.15 He notes that it is coheres better with the general thrust of the argument and that it makes better exegetical sense of the relationship between 3:22a and 3:22b, which would otherwise be basically redundant ("the righteousness of God which comes through belief in Christ to all who believe").

Verse 22 concludes that this revelation of righteousness to those who believe makes no distinction. All, Jews and Gentiles alike, sinned (h[marton, aorist active indicative) and fall short (u`sterou/ntai, present active indicative) of the glory of God. Wright sees here a reference to Adamic humanity with the simple aorist tense of the verb "sinned" (*contra* the perfect tense translations in nearly all English editions) and the reference to the loss of God's glory, a theme prominent in Rabbinic writings about Adam and sin. The problem that all humanity is "in Adam" (a theme Wright sees developed in Rom 5)

is the problem that God's covenant with Abraham was meant to solve. Because Israel itself suffers the same liability, God's faithfulness to all creation is revealed finally in the only faithful Israelite, the Messiah Jesus who plays the role of faithful Israel in himself.

In v. 24, all those who believe (referred to in v. 22) are being justified. Both the covenant and lawcourt connotations of justification and righteousness must be maintained in reading this word.16 The judge declares that all these believers have good standing as members of his covenant people. This justification happens "freely," "by his grace," and "through the redemption which is in Jesus the Messiah." Wright emphasizes "by his (God's) grace" against conceptions of Jesus persuading an angry God to accept these pitiful sinners whom he would otherwise be predisposed simply to destroy. This act is an act of God's own grace. The disposition of Jesus should not be played off against the disposition of God.

Wright spends more time, though, elaborating on Paul's use of the term "redemption." It evokes the slave-market to be sure, but the redemption of slaves would resonate for Paul and any of his contemporary Jewish readers deeply to the story of the Exodus, the example *par excellence* of God's covenant loyalty to his people. It is not, therefore "a metaphor chosen at random as another bit of street-level color for the meaning of Jesus death," but it coheres tightly with Paul's argument for the revelation of the righteousness of God in the faithful death of the Messiah throughout this passage.

Verses 25-26 are exceptionally tightly woven, and Wright himself notes that nearly every word and phrase contained therein has been the subject of much debate. He begins with the conclusions drawn in v. 25b-26 to clarify the meaning of what Paul says 25a that leads to those conclusions. In v. 25b-26 Paul speaks of a

demonstration of God's righteousness in the present time in the face of previous sins that have been passed over in God's forbearance. In this present demonstration of his righteousness, God is shown to be both just (di,kaioj) and the one who justifies (dikaiou/nta), and the object of this justification is, literally, "the one out of the faithfulness of Jesus" (to.n evk pi,stewj VIhsou/), which Wright explains periphrastically as "the one whose status rests on the faithful death of Jesus."

Verse 25a then must give rise to these conclusions in v. 25b-26. Paul must there explain "how it is that God has now dealt with sins on the one hand and declared 'the one out of the faithfulness of Jesus' to be in the right on the other." Paul's explanation is heavily sacrificial, the first time, Wright observes, that such language appears in Romans. Paul says that Jesus was put forth as a i`lasth,rion (*hilasterion*). There is no question that this is a cultic reference, but we *are* forced to ask, "How does the sacrifice of Jesus mean that sins have now been dealt with, creating a 'righteous' people and leaving God's righteousness unimpeachable?" as vv. 25b-26 require us to see.

Wright traces this train of thought to the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant in Lev 16:2, with its importance for the Day of Atonement, to the notion of vicariously efficacious martyrdoms in 4 Maccabees, and ultimately to the righteous sufferer in Isaiah 40-55. In Isaiah in particular Wright sees "a sustained exposition of the righteousness of God, focused more and more tightly on a suffering figure who represents Israel and fulfills YHWH's purpose of being a light to the nations and whose sufferings and death are finally seen in explicitly sacrificial terms." In other words, "[w]e have…exactly that combination of elements that we have observed, and that are otherwise puzzling in exactly that combination, in Rom 3:21-26."

Wright clarifies that Jesus' righteous and vicarious suffering

on behalf of the people of God functions at least in part to propitiate the wrath of God over human sin. In spite of those who are put off by such notions, Wright maintains that the wrath of God has been in Paul's view since 1:18. This propitiating sacrifice is done "through faith" and "by means of his blood," which Wright reads as independent modifiers of i`lasth,rion, taking faith again to refer primarily to the faithfulness of Jesus unto death.

Wright infers from Paul's "therefore" (ou;n) in 3:27 that Paul is now drawing the conclusion that he has had in mind since 3:21 and answering the question he has had in mind since at least 2:17, that of the "boasting" of "the Jew." Now we see that such boasting is excluded. Paul, Wright says, is "not addressing the more general 'boast' of the moral legalist whose system of salvation is one of self-effort, but the ethnic pride of Israel according to the flesh, supported as it was by the possession of the Torah and the performance of those 'works' that set Israel apart from the pagans."

Wright reads each of Paul's uses of the term no,moj in these verses as a reference to Torah rather than as a general kind of "principle" as is sometimes argued (for 3:27 in particular). So Paul then is distinguishing between the Torah characterized by works and Torah characterized by faith, with analogies to his references to a bifurcated Torah also in the opening verses of Rom 8. Explaining the Torah of faith, Wright says, "the Torah is to be fulfilled through faith; in other words, where someone believes the gospel, there Torah is in fact being fulfilled, even though in a surprising way."

In v. 28 Paul states his position that human beings are justified by faith apart from works of the law, a position for which, Wright notes, Paul has not actually argued up to this point. He will argue for it in Rom 4, but at this point it is

merely part of the argument against Jewish boasting. With reference to this verse Wright also clarifies his view that being justified is not synonymous with being converted or becoming a Christian. Paul's word for that is more likely "called," as in his *ordo salutis* recited in Rom 8:30 (called…justified…glorified). Justified is the "declaration that certain persons are members of the covenant people, that their sins have been dealt with." So justification by faith means that the boundary marker for God's covenant people is no longer the distinctive works of Torah but rather the "law of faith."

Reading 3:27-28 in this way allows one to see clearly why v. 29 follows next. Recalling the Shema, Paul insists that God is one, that he is the God of Jew and Gentile alike. It is, in fact, a matter of God being justly God that he act for the salvation of all creation. This recalls what, from Paul's point of view, Israel was likely to forget, that "the god who made the covenant with Abraham is the creator of the whole world and that the covenant was put in place precisely in order that through Israel God might address the whole world." Because God is the God of the whole world, he will justify both the circumcision and the uncircumcision on the basis of faith. "Only faith can have this role" of marking out the new covenant people of God, "not because faith is a superior type of religious experience to anything else, nor because faith is an easier substitute for 'works,' putting it within the range of the morally incompetent…but because faith – this faith, to be defined in 4:18-25 and 10:9 – is the appropriate human stance of humility and trust before the creator and covenant God…"

Does this work of God overthrow the Law? Of course not. If it is to be a demonstration of God's righteousness, naturally we expect, as Paul says in 3:31, that it serves to establish to law, fulfilled of course through faith.

Harrisville on Romans

Roy Harrisville also begins his exegesis of this same passage by calling attention to the “but now” at the beginning of 3:21. Just as it does in all its other occurrences in Romans, Harrisville explains, this phrase is used to draw a contrast with what precedes. In this case Paul is beginning to draw a contrast between two types of existence, an existence according to the law and an existence apart from the law.

Harrisville, following the translation of the RSV in accordance with the practice of the Augsburg Commentary series,17 notably takes Paul’s key phrase dikaiosu,nh qeou/

as the “righteousness of God” instead of “the righteousness that comes from God,” but he does not explain precisely what he takes this phrase to mean. Given the contrast that he sees being introduced in 3:21, the righteousness of God presumably is the divinely given condition that makes possible the existence apart from the law.

In spite of a demonstrated inability in the history of interpretation to come to grips with Paul’s phrase “apart from the law,” Harrisville explains that Paul took it very seriously. God never did “intend for the first covenant with its law to the ultimate expression of his will.” To that end, God paired it with a promise (a point Harrisville substantiates with reference to Gal 3) that “pointed to the end of life ordered according to judicial decree.”

Harrisville’s treatment of 3:22b-26 is very brief. He takes 22b (“for there is no distinction”) as explaining why faith is for all. Verse 23 is simply a summary of the argument in 1:18-3:18. Verse 24 “turns the other side of the coin.” “If righteousness is not effected by works,” then it must be a gift. Furthermore, the “means or instrument” of God’s righteousness must be the

redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Harrisville then glances at some exegetical details in 3:25-26, asking whether their substance might be from a hand other than Paul's, perhaps together with the doxology in 16:25-27. He also tentatively suggests that "expiation" in v. 25 (which he takes as parallel with redemption in v. 24) should perhaps not be read in light of the mercy seat sprinked with blood on Yom Kippur but instead with the Maccabaean martyrs of 4 Macc 17.

Harrisville's treatment of 3:25b-26 is not very systematic but he does sketch some lines of connection between the demonstration of God's righteousness and the sacrificial death of Jesus. In fact, the reason that Jesus was set forth as a propitiation18 was "to prove that (God) himself was righteous."

In the interpretation of vv. 27-31 Harrisville translates no,moj alternately as "principle" or "law." Boasting is excluded on the principle of faith because law is excluded from the revelation of righteousness, "for we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law."

In his interpretation of v. 29, Harrisville paraphrases, "Or…would you prefer a tribal deity, seeing that the law erects barriers between Jew and Gentile." Instead God will justify them all "through the instrumentality of faith" (Harrisville's periphrastic translation of the two prepositional phrases in v. 30).

In v. 31 Harrisville sees Paul saying that this position "upholds" the law, "not as a means to justification but as an agent of the knowledge of sin (3:20)." The law is kept by faith, but "a law kept by faith, without constraint and thus without division in the self, a law 'upheld' and to the point of an exhaustion of its possibilities in a radically new existence, is to Paul's mind a radically different sort of law."

Comparing Wright and Harrisville

1. Harrisville represents a venerable tradition of reading Romans when he sees Paul distinguishing between two kinds of human existence in this passage, one kind that is characterized by law, performance, and "judicial decree" and one kind that is characterized by grace. Harrisville's reading centers on this issue, and Wright almost completely ignores it, except for his very brief comment on v. 30b that faith is not to be understood as a "superior kind type of religious experience."

2. dikaiosu,nh qeou. Both Wright and Harrsiville translate the term as "the righteousness of God." Wright explains very carefully what he means by this term with extensive reference to Paul's Jewish milieu. Harrisville does not pause to explain what he thinks this term means, but it seems safe to infer that he is understanding it differently from Wright, something very closely connected to the new grace-based existence that he understands Paul to be introducing in these verses.

3. Harrisville takes redemption and "expiation" in 3:24-25 as essentially synonymous and interprets both with reference to 4 Macc 17:22 where the death of the martyrs is viewed as a "propitiatory offering." Wright hears echoes of the Exodus in the language of redemption and discerns here another hint at the importance of God's covenant faithfulness. Also, Wright insists on "propitiation" as the translation of i`lasth,rion (not expiation) and makes thus a connection to the wrath of God over human sin and the treatment of that topic in Rom 1:18-3:18.

4. Harrisville and Wright are miles apart on the translation of no,moj. Wright thinks that Paul is concerned with Torah throughout. Harrisville sees Paul using the term with various denotations within this passage. Sometimes it is best translated as "law" and sometimes as "principle," and under the translation

“law” Harrisville seems to make yet one further distinction. Sometimes law means specifically the Jewish Torah; sometimes it designates the broader kind of nomistic existence of which Jewish Torah-keeping may be the best possible example.

5. Wright and Harrisville interpret boasting differently. For Harrisville, boasting about deeds done is excluded because deeds are excluded from justification. For Wright, Jewish boasting about ethnic privilege (an idea drawn from Rom 2:17) is excluded because God is one and justifies Jew and Gentile both.

6. Wright and Harrisville seem not to be very far apart on vv. 29-30, both reading Paul’s insistence that God is not a “tribal deity,” to use Harrisville’s term. And both follow Paul’s logic similarly that justification for all creation will necessarily have to be justification by faith, though Wright goes to greater lengths to explain why it should be by “faith” in particular. This emphasis on Israel’s God being also the God of the Gentiles fits naturally into Wright’s account of the covenant God whose real aim has all along been to put the whole creation to rights. Harrisville does not explain how the emphasis on the oneness of God in these verses coheres with Paul’s primary point about different kinds of human existence or the exclusion of boasting about deeds.

7. It is probably quite obvious that Wright and Harrisville diverge in their translations and interpretations of the pi,stij Cristou/ phrases. Wright opts for a subjective genitive reading, “the faithfulness of the Messiah,” in both full occurrences of this phrase and also sees the Messiah’s faithfulness referenced in 3:25. Harrisville never acknowledges the possibility of such a reading and takes all of Paul’s references to pi,stij as descriptions of human faith or belief. It should be clarified that Wright does not exclude human belief. Especially in vv. 27-31 Wright identifies human faith as the appropriate response

to divine faithfulness.

8. The Christology that Wright sees in this passage is highly messianic. Everything in his interpretation hangs on Jesus' role as Israel's Messiah. As Messiah he is both Israel's representative and God's. Wright explains, "Though it would not be strictly accurate, it would not be a very great hyperbole to say that, for Paul, 'the righteousness of God' was one of the titles of Jesus the Messiah himself. God's saving justice walked around in Galilee, announced the Kingdom, died on a cross, and rose again. God's plan of salvation had always required a faithful Israelite to fulfill it. Now, at last God had provided one."19 It is not evident that Messianic categories are important to Harrisville's understanding of Jesus as he is presented in Romans 3.

Where do we go from here?

As we transition from this formal presentation to the time of discussion that is its real goal, it seems to me that there are at least two related but separate tasks that lie before us, not only for the next half hour but far beyond that. First, it behooves us to discern who has gotten the better of the argument. Does Wright offer a more persuasive account of Paul's argument or does Harrisville (or for that matter any other faithful exponent of the Lutheran tradition)? Let us not kid ourselves; there are real differences, and the differences of interpretation result in differences of proclamation. Wright is, of course, perfectly aware that his reading of Romans is a direct challenge to the exegesis of the Lutheran Reformation. In his opinion, an anxious 16th century monk who concludes on the basis of Romans that the "performance of Christian duties is not enough" is actually recognizing a legitimate and important "overtone" of Paul's statements, but that overtone is not the

fundamental note.20 Write warns, “If we play an overtone, thinking it to be a fundamental, we shall set off new and different sets of overtones, which will not then harmonize with Paul’s original sound.” Thus the exegetical challenge.

Finally, it may be worth asking to what extent the proposals that understand themselves to be challenges to Lutheran theology have really found their mark. Is it, for example, actually un-Lutheran to suppose that Paul thought from solution to plight? The Lutheran systematicians that taught my seminary classes years ago explained to us that we understand the real depth of human alienation from God not on the basis of counting transgressions but because the solution required was the crucifixion of the Son of God. Examples like this could be multiplied. On the other hand, even while admitting that Wright’s discernment of Paul’s fundamental note is substantively different from Harrisville’s, a Lutheran could be forgiven for wondering if some Lutheranism’s deepest convictions are not still upheld in Wright’s picture of Romans, even as others are called into question. Even as the righteousness of God is understood differently and pi,stij Cristou/ is retranslated as the faith of Christ instead of faith in Christ, one should ask, “But has the relationship between law and gospel actually changed?” Does Wright’s articulation of Paul’s gospel in terms of God’s saving faithfulness acted out in Jesus on behalf of the whole world adulterate that gospel with law? Scores of additional questions follow upon this one, but at this point, we should turn to some live questions and discussion among us.

References:

1 E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977).

2 Krister Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective

Conscience of the West," in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 78-96.

3 N. T. Wright, *Romans* (NIB X; Nashville: Abingdon, 2002).

4 Roy A. Harrisville, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980).

5 Sanders, *Paul*, xii.

6 Sanders, *Paul*, 147-50.

7 Sanders, *Paul*, 157.

8 Sanders, *Paul*, 442-47.

9 Sanders, *Paul*, 446.

10 Sanders, *Paul*, 443; emphasis original.

11 One notes that Sanders was famously anticipated in this conclusion by Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (trans. W. Montgomery; New York: Macmillan, 1956), not to mention by earlier streams of Christian thought, especially in the eastern tradition.

12 Sanders, *Paul*, 502.

13 The reader will find it frustratingly redundant to read page number citations for each of Wright's points in the summary that follows. The reader should refer to Wright, *Romans, ad loc* throughout. Citations to specific pages will continue to be made whenever I refer to parts of the commentary outside of 3:21-31.

14 Wright, *Romans*, 398-406.

15 A good entry point into this debate is Richard Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). In addition to the main content of the book, see especially the

appendix including counterpoint essays by Hays and James D. G. Dunn.

16 The difference between justification terminology and righteousness terminology in English obscures the important fact that both are translations of dik- roots in Greek.

17 For which Harrisville himself served on the editorial committee.

18 Note that Wright distinguishes between propitiation and expiation whereas Harrisville uses the terms interchangeably. Cf. Wright, *Romans*, 476.

19 Wright, *Romans*, 470.

20 Wright, *Romans*, 464. Wright makes this comments in his reflections on Rom 3:9-20, but they apply equally well to our passage.

H2_Turnbull_St_Paul (PDF)

Today’s Debates on How to Read St. Paul

Romans 3:21-31
21 Nuni. de. cwri.j no,mou dikaiosu,nh qeou/pefane,rwtai marturoume,nh u`po. tou/ no,mou kai. tw/n profhtw/n( 22 dikaiosu,nh de. qeou/ dia. pi,stewj vIhsou/ Cristou/ eivj pa,ntaj tou.j pisteu,ontaj) ouv ga,r evstin diastolh,( 23 pa,ntej ga,r h[marton kai. u`sterountai th/j do,xhj tou/ qeou/ 24 dikaiou,menoi dwrea.n th/| auvtou/ ca,riti dia. th/j

avpolutrw,sewj th/j evn Cristw/| vIhsou/\ 25 o[n proe,qeto o` qeo.j i`lasth,rion dia. th/j pi,stewj evn tw/| auvtou/ ai[mati eivj e;ndeixin th/j dikaiosu,nhj auvtou/ dia. th.n pa,resin tw/n progegono,twna`marthmatwn 26 evn th/| avnoch/| tou/ qeou/( pro. j th.n e;ndeixin th/j dikaiosu,nhj auvtou/ evn tw/| nu/n kairw/|( eivj to. ei=nai auvto.n di,kaion kai dikaiou/nta to.n evk pi,stewj vIhsou/)  27 Pou/ ou=n h` kau,xhsij* evxeklei,sqh) dia. poi.ou no,mou* tw/n e;rgwn* ouvci,(avlla. dia. no,mou pi,stewj) 28 logizo,meqa ga.r dikaiou/sqai pi,stei a;nqrwpon cwrij e;rgwn no,mou) 29 h’ vIoudai,wn o` qeo.j mo,non* ouvci. kai evqnw/n* nai. kai. evqnw/n( 30 ei;per ei-j o“ qeo.j o[j dikaiw,sei peritomh.n evk  pi,stewj kai. avkrobusti,an dia. th/j pi,stewj) 31 no,mon ou=n katargou/men dia. th/j pi,stewj* mh. ge,noito\ avlla. no,mon i`sta,nomen)

Romans 3:21-31 (RSV)

21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; 23 since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; 26 it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus. 27 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On the principle of works? No, but on the principle of faith. 28 For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith.

31 Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

The brief annotated bibliography below is obviously far from complete. Careful students of Paul who wish to engage the contemporary debate thoroughly will find this list merely to be a starting point. Reading the works below would provide a helpful primer on the major issues.

Harink, Douglas. *Paul among the Postliberals*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003.

> Of particular interest for the present context is Harink's first chapter, "Justification: Beyond Protestantism," wherein he chronicles the demise of the traditional Protestant reading of Paul in the latter decades of the 20th century, including such provocative subtitles as "'Faith in Jesus Christ': History of a Bad Translation" and "The Gospel without Justification by Faith: Paul's Call." Harink is a theologian by training more than an exegete, but his summary of the relevant research is helpful.

Hays, Richard. *The Faith of Jesus Christ: the Narrative Substructure of Gal 3:1-4:11*. 2nd edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

> The second edition of Hays's dissertation includes his forceful original work as well as appendices aimed specifically at expanding the debate about the translation of Paul's pi,stij Cristou/ phrases. The body of Hays's work is really much broader than an argument about the translation of those phrases, but his argument that Paul's letter to the Galatians rests on a story of Jesus' faithfulness unto cruciform death and alludes to that story by means of key phrases is consistent with the translation that he calls not just the "subjective genitive" interpretation but the

Christological interpretation.

Sanders, E. P. *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977.

In the first and much larger half of this pioneering work, Sanders lays out the reconstruction of 2nd Temple Judaism that caused such an important shift in subsequent Pauline scholarship, including his famous description of Jewish religion as "covenantal nomism." Sanders does *not* think that Paul was also a covenantal nomist. Sanders describes Paul's religion as "eschatological participationism."

Westerholm, Stephen. *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998

Westerholm engages the positions of the so-called new perspective and responds in ways that have been described as neo-Lutheran. See also now Westerholm's more recent *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

Wright, N. T. *Paul, in Fresh Perspective*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005.

This is Wright's most current and thorough treatment of Paul to date, pending the further volume in his *Christian Origins and the Question of God* series. Wright describes Paul's theology in terms of Christological redefinitions of the central Jewish doctrines of monotheism, election, and eschatology. Wright concludes with a short but important section relating his view of Jesus and Paul and explaining their coherence, against the frequent critical objections that Paul founded a new religion having only nominal connections with Jesus' own mission. See also Wright's *Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis:

Fortress, 1991).

H2_Turnbull_St_Paul_2 (PDF)

Using Law-Gospel to Interpret Scripture

Robert Kolb

The proper distinction of law and gospel is a popular mantra, a much-used tool, a commonplace so common that we hardly need to stop and reflect on it. And yet it is precisely such commonplaces that we tend to take for granted. Therefore, a little practice at doing it cannot hurt since the distinguishing is a skill that we learn only in the school of experience and from the Holy Spirit. Basic to our actually putting the distinction to use is our employing it in our own reading of Scripture, and that will form the focus of our time together.

“Law” means many things, some quite benign. It is a frequently used translation of “Torah,” the general term for all of God’s instruction of his people. There are, as Luther notes in discussing such things in the preface to his Galatians commentary, several kinds of righteousness, including those expressed in ceremonial laws, civil laws, and moral laws. Those can all bring benefits of various kinds to society, church, and individuals. Gospel, too, according to the Formula of Concord, can have more than one meaning, for instance, in its usage in Mark 1:1, as a term for all that Jesus said and did.

However, when taken together, in the manner of Luther and Melanchthon and their students, and placed in contrast to one another, the terms “law” and “gospel” in distinction provide a hermeneutical principle, which, as the Formula of Concord comments, is “a particularly magnificent light, which serves to divide the Word of God properly and to explain and interpret the writings of the holy prophets and apostles in their true sense” (FCSD V, 1). As a hermeneutical rule, the proper distinction of law and gospel tells us how to parse the grammar of faith. When God is at work to save, it is gospel. When God is at work to condemn, it is law. When we are receiving Christ from the Word, it is gospel. When we are being evaluated as to our performance, it is law. When the burden falls on us, whether it falls on us trying to live our humanity in defiance of God or living out our humanity with the aid of the Holy Spirit, it is law. When the burden falls on Christ, it is gospel. That is the hermeneutic of the distinction of law and gospel. At the same time these two terms also denote two ways in which God communicates with his people, about two distinct subjects: how he behaves over against sinners as he comes to us as Jesus of Nazareth, and how expects us to behave as the people whom he has created as the ones to exercise responsibility for the care of his creation. As the voices of God, as descriptions of God at work, especially in the process of bringing sinners to repentance and forgiving their sins, law and gospel perform God’s most important tasks in a fallen world.

The proper distinction of law and gospel rests on several presuppositions. The first is that the Creator who brought all things into existence is a God who likes to talk. He proves himself in the first chapters of Genesis to be a God of conversation and community. He talks his way through the entire Scripture from Genesis 1 to Revelation.

Word is his instrument, and his words of law and gospel do

things. Luther's concept of God's Word as his active and living tool for accomplishing things came from his Ockhamist instructors. His definition of God's Word went beyond what modern linguistic scholars call "performative" speech. It was and remains "creative" speech.

The Wittenberg professor explained to his students in 1535, as he began his decade-long lectures on Genesis, "by speaking God created all things and worked through his Word. All his works are words of God, created by the uncreated Word."1 "God speaks a mere word, and immediately the birds are brought forth from the water," he commented on Genesis 1:20. "If the Word is spoken, all things are possible." The creatures of God, Luther believes, are "nothing but nouns in the divine language." God's Word is the instrument of his power. That power expresses itself in promises to his people, the professor told his students: "We must take note of God's power that we may be completely without doubt about the things which God promises in his Word. Here full assurance is given concerning all his promises; nothing is either so difficult or so impossible that he could not bring it about by his Word."2 Throughout these lectures, as he had often done earlier, he insisted that God's re-creation of sinners into his own children parallels this creative activity in Genesis 1.

This identity-defining Word of God was often described by the term "doctrina" in Wittenberg parlance, and modern Melanchthon scholar Peter Fraenkel has called that term a "verbal noun," that is, a term that refers both to specific content and to the action that the content demands. Both law and gospel demand proclamation, and proclamation in the sense of Gerhard Forde: the direct address, the "I-thou" confrontation, of primary discourse. God wants his Word spoken face to face, lips to ears, piercing minds and hearts in order to kill sinners and bring his reborn children to life.

It is a daring venture to try to give summary definitions of law and gospel in the sense of the distinction to this kind of group. I would like to make one observation about the law of God, his design for human living, in two dimensions, loving him with heart, soul, strength, and mind, and loving neighbor as self. We are speaking, when we speak of law in the distinction, as a law that we have said will always turn its accusing finger against sinners. Some years ago, as I was thinking of the distinction as an evangelistic tool, I realized that few people in our society stop to listen to the accusation. Another insight of Luther in the Smalcald Articles takes us to a deeper level of the law's theological use and at the same time helps us recognize a wider field for its application with our hearers, those outside the faith and those in the daily struggle of the dying and rising of repentance. Luther noted that the law is like "the thunderbolt of God, by means of which he destroys both the open sinner and the false saint and allows no one to be right but drives the whole lot of them into terror and despair. This is the hammer of which Jeremiah speaks: 'My word is a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces' . . . " (SA III:iii,2).

More than just accusing, the law always crushes [lex semper conterens]. If we take seriously Luther's definition of what is really wrong with human beings in sin, as he sets it forth in the exposition of the Ten Commandments in the Small Catechism, then we see that beneath or behind our disobedience against each specific commandment from two through ten lies the fundamental rejection of God, the doubt that defies God, the failure to "fear, love, and trust in him above all things." That means that any action of the law that deprives us of the pretense that we or any other created object, human or animal, mineral or vegetable, can serve as our God, can control our lives, does the theological work of the law. It crushes our pretension, it crushes our defiance of God, it smashes to smithereens our idols

of every kind.

That means that we can use the commandments to show those who cannot yet admit their own guilt that the very fact that they are victims of other people's evil actions demonstrates the inadequacies of their false gods, their need for the true God. That seventh graders make a mockery of God's gift of sex with dirty jokes invites God's accusation. That seventh graders are the object of sexual harassment by other seventh graders or eighth graders also reminds them that their ways of keeping order in their world fall short, and that they need the love and protection of their Creator and Redeemer. Whether we encounter our own inability to function well as the source of our own identity, security, and meaning for life in our own disobedience or in someone else's – in our own defiance of God, or the defiance of our neighbor that brings havoc and fear to our lives –, we encounter the crushing power of the law. That crushing power brings with it fear: fear of our own inability to control the evil within us, and fear because of our inability to control the evil that threatens us from outside.

However we are crushed, we finally, under the law's sentence, realize that death is inevitable; it is necessary. Our false gods must die, and we must die as sinners. There is no other way to receive life than through death. For sin pays but one wage: death (Rom. 6:23a). And sin is an honest employer. It never cheats its servants. It always compensates those in its employ. The law does not offer bargain rates on liberation and life. It cannot liberate us nor give us life. It can only evaluate. It can only judge. Its sentencing procedure is not complicated. It is either guilty in even the tiniest degree or not guilty. Only to the dead does God give the gift of life (Rom. 6:23b).

The gospel of Jesus Christ – and there is gospel for sinners only in the one who has assumed our sinfulness, died our death,

and reclaimed our life in his own resurrection – alone makes alive. Only the Word of God created what exists, and only his Word made flesh re-creates those dead in sin into those dead to sin. The law has several uses and functions. The gospel, I have long argued, has only one use. It makes sinners who have been buried with Christ alive in him. The gospel is a single word, "Arise." Or, "your sins are forgiven you, for the sake of Jesus Christ." This word of the Lord bestows a new identity at the same time it buries the old one of sinner, rebel, doubter. It creates anew children for the family of God. For the gospel that takes our sin away, takes our old life enslaved to idols away, does not bring the former sinner, recreated through the Word of the Lord (in the flesh, in the absolution), to some neutral ground between corrupted humanity and restored humanity. It takes us out of death, into life; out of idolatry, into trusting the Creator who has come as Jesus of Nazareth and who breaths new life into us as God's Holy Spirit. In fact, I have recently come to question whether I was right in insisting that there is only one use of the Gospel since I found a passage in Luther in which he talks about two uses. Luther then explained that Christ helps sinners in two ways. First, he takes our part against God and serves as "the cloak that is thrown over our shame – ours, I say, the cloak over our shame because he has taken our sin and shame upon himself – but in God's sight he is the mercy seat, without sin and shame, pure virtue and honor. Like a brooding hen he spreads his wings over us to protect us from the hawk, that is, the devil with the sin and death that he causes. God has forgiven this sin for Christ's sake."3 But the gospel does not only speak of the forgiveness of sins. It also provides the power and strength to live as the children of God. God has bestowed this new identity as his children on sinners by means of that forgiveness. "He not only covers and protects us, but he also wants to nourish and feed us as the hen nourishes and feeds her chicks. That is, he wants to give us the Holy Spirit and the

strength to begin to love God and keep his commandments. When Christ demanded that the man give up everything to follow him (Matt. 19:16-25), he was saying that keeping God's commandments involves knowing and having Christ.4 Luther's formulation of two dimensions of the gospel's activities illustrates his efforts to hold justification and sanctification distinct but inseparable. God's gracious bestowal of the new life that identifies sinners as his children brings with it expectations for Christian living. The Wittenberg reformer could also talk about the Gospel of Jesus Christ as forgiving, consoling, and empowering. Luther's functional definition of the Word of God in Jesus Christ proclaimed what Christ had done for his people "lately."

That word, "Your sins are forgiven you," means "take up your bed and walk" (Matt. 9:6). The gift of new life means new living. Some distinguish the forgiving use of the gospel from the empowering use of the gospel, and the gospel does indeed function to comfort us with assurance of our new identity through Christ and to enable us to live as real human beings through our new-born ability to serve and please him. But essentially it is just one simple Word from God. You are my child! We understand that he follows that up with a gentle parental "So act like it!" But the one word that bestows our new identity brings with it the expectation of our heavenly Father that we will live out our identity in the performance of his will.

There are a thousand ways to say the gospel, but they all contain the name "Jesus Christ." God has good news for us in his creation, but for upwardly fallen sinners Jesus Christ is the name of life and salvation. The heart of the gospel he is and brings lies in the forgiveness of our sins, which is the restoration of our humanity. Believers have recognized a variety of ways of expanding on "your sins are forgiven" to proclaim the liberating power that Jesus' death and resurrection have

fashioned. But one example of a good overview of the variety of ways to talk about the Lord's saving work is J. A. O. Preus's Just Words.5 The liberating power of forgiveness, or reconciliation, or adoption, or atonement, resting upon what Christ has done for us, has brought us back to being real human beings. That is the identity he has given us, and from that identity flow the works that make his love and his will real in our world. But the proper distinction of law and gospel reminds us that identity and the performance that it produces are two very distinct things. C. F. W. Walther reflected Luther's and Melanchthon's conviction that this distinction was the key to the sacred Scripture. We can test that proposal by looking at some familiar and some not so familiar passages.

We discuss:
1. John 3:14-18
2. Romans 6:1-11 3. Matthew 5:1-12 4. Micah 7:8-20
5. John 15:1-17

References:

1 Genesis lectures, 1535, LW 1:47, WA 42:35 or 36.

2 "Genesis Lectures," 1535-1545, LW 1:49; WA 42:37,5-24.

3 WA 45,153,33-154,14.

4 WA 45:153,15-154,36.

5 J. A. O. Preus, *Just Words, Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2000).

H1_Kolb_Interpret_Scripture (PDF)

Luther’s Reading of the Human Condition

Robert Kolb

Who am I? What does it mean to be human? On the one hand, those are questions that most people in human history have spent little time thinking over. On most days we take it for granted that we are living a human life, perhaps labeled good or bad, better or worse, but something no one needs to think twice about. Few societies in the world’s history have had the luxury of being able to permit individuals to spend a lot of time in introspection. That ours does – indeed seems to revel in it – has not brought us much progress. Introspection is seldom an ultimately entertaining or satisfying art for sinners.

Erik Erikson has identified “identity” as a primary category for assessing what it means to be human and what it means that I am I. His version of human development may or may not have reflected something of North American realities in 1950 when he first published his analysis of our humanity in eight stages; it did in fact create a way of looking at ourselves that shapes our perceptions, and therefore, our realities a half century later. So it is little wonder that theological anthropology has become a major theme for theologians and that we have access to many aspects of biblical teaching through anthropological questions as we try to convey the gospel of Jesus Christ to our North American contemporaries.

Therefore, it is surprising how little attention has been paid to Luther’s anthropology. It has been observed that the topic “on the angels” gets more attention in Franz Pieper’s dogmatics

than “on the human creature.” That reflects a long-standing Lutheran dogmatic tradition in spirit if not always in fact. Most of Lutheran anthropology has focused on the issue of the bondage or freedom of the will (in fact, two quite distinct issues) and has only implicitly treated and not always actually used Luther’s definition of humanity in two dimensions, usually called “the two kinds of righteousness.” The parallel hermeneutical principles of the proper distinction of law and gospel and of the two realms have gotten much attention in Lutheran circles, the former in the period following Luther’s and Melanchthon’s deaths and on and off throughout Lutheran history, the latter particularly in the last hundred twenty-five years. “Two kinds of righteousness” was presumed but not always given right of impact among Lutheran theologians.

Luther actually began with three kinds of righteousness, paralleling three definitions of sin. In 1518 and 1519 he composed two treatises, “on three kinds of righteousness” and “on two kinds of righteousness.”1 It is likely that the former is the prior piece. It outlined three kinds of sin, criminal, actual, and essential, to which corresponded three kinds of righteousness, hypocritical, actual, and essential. In the latter treatise, which appeared probably within x months of the former, the first kind of righteousness, which constituted what he would later label “civic” or “civil” righteousness, the external conformity of those outside faith in Christ to God’s plan for human living, disappeared. In fact, Luther encountered probably fewer than a couple dozen people who were not baptized in his entire life, and therefore addressing the external disobedience to God’s law, which makes society work better rather than worse, was not a primary concern for him. He wanted to address the baptized, who had been given essential righteousness, which he labeled “passive” righteousness, or identity as the chosen children of God, and who, he expected,

would perform “active” righteousness, that is, new obedience, the fruits of faith.

More than a decade later Luther launched his second series of lectures on Galatians. In introducing the book to his students, the professor commented, “This is our theology, by which we teach a precise distinction between these two kinds of righteousness, the active and the passive, so that morality and faith, works and grace, secular society and religion may not be confused. Both are necessary, but both must be kept within their limits.”2 Luther recalled in the autobiographical statement in the preface of volume one of his Latin works that he had come to hate the righteous God who punishes sinners; a secret, perhaps blasphemous anger against God possessed him, and he “raged with a fierce and troubled conscience.”

> At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, “In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’” There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith . . . . Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God. And I treasured the word that had become the sweetest of all words for me with a love as great as the hatred with which I had previously hated the word

„righteousness of God.” Thus that passage in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise.3

This statement places Luther’s rejection of a medieval anthropologies that ultimately based their definitions of human identity or righteousness upon human performance, at one critical point or another in the sinner’s coming to terms with his or her sinful expression of humanity in its context. Both his pious upbringing in his home and his university education had convinced him that his performance of God’s law either caused God to give him grace or proved that God had given him grace. In either case he had learned that he was righteous in God’s sight on the basis of his deeds. God had created him in such a way that he was to exercise total responsibility for carrying out God’s will in this world. That put salvation beyond the reach of the super-conscientious, scrupulous Martin Luther. However, even though his Ockhamist instructors had convinced him of the importance of the performance of God’s commands for defining his humanity, they also taught him that God was his omnipotent Creator. Permeating their instruction was the dictum of Duns Scotus that William of Ockham had echoed: nothing created has to be accepted by the Creator. The absolute, unconditioned will of God determined all for Scotus, even though he developed a description of the process of salvation that focused on human performance. Nonetheless, Luther gained from this way of thinking significant elements for his concept of God, elements that emphasized his absolute power and his responsibility for all that exists and happens in his creation.

Luther’s definition of our humanity as consisting of two distinct but inseparable dimensions, our relation to God and our relation to other creatures, above all human creatures, presumes the absolute distinction between Creator & creature, between God and his human creatures. As creatures human beings can never grasp nor control the Creator: he will be what he wants to be,

and he will be the One who defines us and determines what we are to be. Dietrich Bonhoeffer noted the grand offense of Genesis 1 and 2. “In the beginning” God was and was speaking his creation into existence. Behind or beyond that beginning that embraces also the initiation of humanity no human being has ever gone and can never go. God is the almighty Creator, and almighty means that all might and power rest in his hand. Luther insisted that in Jesus Christ we have come to know him as Father, and that his righteousness – that which makes him who he is – is revealed on the cross. And, it turns out, his righteousness is mercy and self-sacrificing love. But letting God be God, and then insisting that the human creature be and remain the human creature, was key to Luther’s anthropology.

Jesus defined humanity when in Matthew 22:37-39 he told the rich young man which the most of God’s commands for his human creatures is. “Love the Lord your God with all your mind, heart, soul, and strength” might be translated, “fear, love, and trust in God above all things,” or “have no other gods before me!” The second element that constitutes humanity is loving other human creatures as ourselves. Luther believed that loving God arises out of the very person we are. It is not something we produce but rather the fundamental trust we have toward that which ultimately and absolutely gives us our identity, our sense of safety or being secure, and our meaning or sense of worth for life. It is the response to God’s claim upon us that he has reissued in the death and resurrection of Christ. It is, Luther said, passive righteousness, a righteousness that is total gift. Thus, being a truly human being in God’s sight means first of all that he regards us as righteous, that he has identified us as righteous, that our identity rests alone upon his unconditioned and unconditional mercy and love, his joy at having us as his children. Second, it means that we regard him as our God, as our loving heavenly Father, as the one in whom we

can put our trust. Our passive righteousness consists in God’s regard for us as his people and our regard for him as our God.

Those who have received a new identity in Christ and have had their old identity as sinner put to death are so identified as the children of God, with the result that they live loving neighbors as selves. Parents give children life and identity freely, without condition. Once given, your identity as their child, deposited in your DNA, abides. But parents do have expectations of their children. They count on their children to perform in accord with those expectations. They anticipate and claim fulfillment of their expectations from the actions of their children. To put it in the terminology of the God who likes to talk, from Genesis 1 on, they listen to their parents. In Hebrew □□□ means both “hear” and “obey;” in Greek υπακουω is an intensive of ακουω, and in German those who “hören” will certainly “gehorchen.” The English word that captures this best is the word “hearken.” Children of the heavenly Father just naturally hearken to him. That they do not always – the mystery of the continuation of sin and evil in the lives of the baptized – is a major, abiding, preoccupation of Luther throughout his life as reformer, and he never ceased cultivating the life of daily repentance, the repetition of God’s baptismal turning and re-creation of sinners into his children. Repentance involves the restoration of the trust that is the human expression of passive righteousness. It also involves moving God’s reborn children to the active righteousness of new obedience or the fruits of faith.

Four illustrations may help clarify Luther’s distinction of the two dimensions of our humanity. The first is the conversation that your parents had with you nine months before you were born. You remember: when they called you to the kitchen table to offer you conception and birth in return for a promise to clean up your room, help with the dishes and taking out the garbage, and

supporting them in their old age. That conversation never happened. That is not the nature of the origin of human life. Parents give the gift of life freely and without condition. But they do have expectations of their children.

Second, do you remember how long the probationary period was that Adam and Eve had, after they had been shaped from the dust of the earth and received the breath of life, to demonstrate that they could do enough of the human things to do well enough to receive the label “human” from God? Six days? Six weeks? Six months? The correct answer, of course, is that there was no probationary period. God made them human apart from any merit or worthiness in them. He did so because he wanted them to be his children. No probationary period to prove their humanity – but indeed expectations for the performance of what God had designated and designed as the human way to live.

> A third illustration, from Luther’s Galatians lectures:
> As the earth itself does not produce rain and is unable to acquire it by its own strength, worship, and power but receives it only by a heavenly gift from above, so this heavenly righteousness is given to us by God without our work or merit. As much as the dry earth of itself is able to accomplish and obtain the right and blessed rain, that much can we human creatures accomplish by our own strength and works to obtain that divine, heavenly, and eternal righteousness. Thus we can obtain it only through the free imputation and indescribable gift of God.4

That leads the Christian conscience to say,

> I do not seek active righteousness. I ought to have and perform it; but I declare that even if I did have and perform it, I cannot trust in it or stand up before the judgment of God on the basis of it. Thus I put myself beyond all active

> righteousness, all righteousness of my own or of the divine law, and I embrace only the passive righteousness which is the righteousness of grace, mercy, and the forgiveness of sins.5

Finally, a fourth illlustration:

Although by the definition of his own theology Thomas Aquinas had sufficient merit to proceed directly to heaven, without having to work off temporal punishment in purgatory, the Dominican saint dallied along the way, visiting old friends and doing research among those who still had purgatorial satisfactions to discharge there. He arrived at Saint Peter's gate some 272 years after his death, on February 18, 1546. After ascertaining his name, Saint Peter asked Thomas, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" "Because of the grace of God," Thomas answered, ready to explain the concept of prevenient grace should it be necessary. Peter asked instead, "How do I know you have God's grace?" Thomas, who had brought a sack of his good deeds with him, was ready with the proof. "Here are the good works of a lifetime," he explained. "I could have done none of them without God's grace, but in my worship and observation of monastic rules, in my obedience to parents, governors, and superiors, in my concern for the physical well-being and property of others, in my chastity and continence, you can see my righteousness – grace-assisted as it may be." Since a line was forming behind Thomas, Peter waved him in, certain that Thomas would soon receive a clearer understanding of his own righteousness. The next person in line stepped up. "Name?" "Martin Luther." "Why should I let you into my heaven?" "Because of the grace of God." Peter was in a playful mood, so he went on, "How do I know you have God's grace? Thomas had his works to prove his righteousness, but I don't see that you have brought any proof along that you are righteous." "Works?" Luther exclaimed. "Works? I didn't know I was supposed to bring my works with me! I thought they belonged on earth, with my

neighbors. I left them down there." "Well, " said Gatekeeper Peter, "how then am I supposed to know that you really have God's grace?" Luther pulled a little, well-worn, oft-read scrap of paper out of his pocket and showed it to Peter. On it were the words, "Martin Luther, baptized, November 11, in the year of our Lord 1483." "You check with Jesus," Luther said. "He will tell you that he has given me the gift of righteousness through his own blood and his own resurrection."6

Luther's anthropology rests upon this presumption that the human being has two distinct though inseparable dimensions. Actively, we relate to God through the psychological characteristics of faith, while passively we relate to him as recipients of his gift of the faith that claims him as the God and Father he promises to be in Jesus Christ. Actively, we relate to our fellow human beings with the love that reflects God's love for us and conforms to his plan for being human, while passively we are moved by the Holy Spirit to a life that is sanctified by faith. With this framework for defining our humanity we approach the people whom God has called us to serve.

For discussion:

1. How does this two-dimensional definition of what it means to be human aid us when dealing with those suffering shame because of their being abused as children?

2. How must we answer the apostolic question, "If God is really as gracious as indicated in Romans 3, 4, and 5, cannot Christians sin the more so that grace can abound" in view of God's creating us in the two dimensions of passive and active righteousness?

3. Does it make any difference whether you have Luther's view of two kinds of human righteousness or Aquinas's view of one kind of human righteousness if you, like Aquinas, make sure that

God’s grace stands behind the human performance?

4. In 1569 three of the then-future authors of the Formula of Concord composed the following “absolution” for worship in the newly reformed churches of Braunschweig- Wolfenbüttel. Identify those elements which speak of passive righteousness and those which speak of active righteousness, and relate each element to the proper distinction of law and gospel:

> The Almighty God has been merciful to you and through the merit of the most holy suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, His beloved Son, He forgives you all your sins; and I, as an ordained servant of the Christian church, proclaim to all you who truly repent and who through faith place your trust and minds on the merit of Jesus Christ and who order your lives after the commands and will of God, the forgiveness of all your sin in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. On the contrary, however I say to any impenitent and unbelieving, according to God’s Word and in His name, that God has held your sin against you and this certainly is punished.

5. If you are raising “typical American” teenagers, is it more important for you to be paying attention to their passive righteousness or their active righteousness?

References:

2 *Dr. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883-) [henceforth WA] 40,I:45,24-27;
Luther’s Works (Saint Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1958-1986) [henceforth] LW 26:7. For a summary of Luther’s definition of „righteousness,“ and bibliography, see Bengt Hägglund, „Gerechtigkeit. VI. Reformations- und Neuzeit,“ *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* XII (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984): 432-434, 440.

3 „Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings," 1545, WA 54:186,3-16; LW 34:337.

4 WA 40,I: 43,18-25; LW 26:6.

5 WA 40,I: 42,26-43,15; LW 26:6.

6 Cited in toto from Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness. Reflections on His Two- Dimensional Definition of Humanity at the Heart of His Theology," *Lutheran Quarterly* 13 (1999): 449- 466, and *Harvesting Martin Luther's Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 38-55.

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Attending to the Care and Redemption of All that God Has Made

Uniting the Concerns of Theology and Science
through the Lens of Luther's Distinction between Law and Gospel
and in a Meta-Narrative of Stewardship

Steven C. Kuhl

I. Introduction: The conflict between Theology and Science is an opportunity to save Theology and Science from their respective ideological captivities, left and right.

1. Theology (properly understood as “claims about God”) and science (properly understood as “claims about the world”) dominate our life in the 21 Century. I can’t imagine a day going by without encountering claims of one kind or the other being made, here or there, in the routine of daily life: whether it be in the newspaper, on the TV, in the work place, in the home, in church, in a visit to the doctor, in conversation with strangers and friends. The world in which we live is at once, theological and scientific. Indeed, we can’t live without coming to terms with both these dimensions of life.

2. Even so, much of the time we live either, on the one hand, as though “never the twain shall meet,” as though theology and science are, as Paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould has called them, “nonoverlaping magisteria” (NOMA)1 or, on the other hand, as though the relationship of the two were easy and self-evident, that God is a benevolent, supreme being who has created a world that is good and intends my good. But just when we get comfortable in one or the other of these opinions about the world and God, then enters the so-called “war between theology and science” which wakes us from our dogmatic slumber.

3. While there are numerous fronts on which the war between theology and science is being waged, no front is more contentious than that being fought in the biological sciences

with its desire to understand the origins and mechanisms of life in the universe. Therefore, I will arbitrary focus my discussion with that battle front in mind and as it relates to Christian Theology and its chief, ecumenically received sources and symbols, the Old and New Testaments. The extreme boundaries of this "battle front" are defined by the "Scientific Creationists" (and their more refined cousin, "Intelligent Design theorist"), on the one hand, and the "Philosophical Naturalists" or "Materialists," on the other. What is striking about these two camps is their common assessment of "human reason," understood as the ability to grasp reality as a continuous chain of causal events, i.e. instrumental reason. There is no inherent paradox in reality. Claims about God and claims about the world are fully adjudicated in the court of reason. Therefore, neither believes in anything like Gould's "Nonoverlapping Magisteria." The problem is that "reason" now appears to be a divide court. That true even though the civil courts have officially decided that Scientific Creationism and Intelligent Design are not purely scientific theories but religious ideas about the nature of the natural world that are outside the "magisterium" of the courts and out of place in publicly sponsored education. (By the way, I agree wholehearted with that verdict, and we can talk about it more later if you wish.)

4. When Scientific Creationists (including, Intelligent Design theorists) look at the created world, they see evidence of a natural world that is so complex and orderly ("irreducibly complex" is the term Michael Behe uses for it2) that there is only one *logical* conclusion: Someone who transcends this world created this world and predetermined its purpose. This world is the "creation" of an Intelligent Designer. This logical conclusion concerning the natural world confirms for them two essential points. First, it means that "modern science" is wrong to restrict itself to "methodological naturalism,"3 the idea

that “science” by its very nature must restrict itself “to explaining the workings of the natural world without recourse to the supernatural.” Scientific Creationists believe that supernatural causes are as accessible to instrumental reason as natural ones and can be given scientific status. Second, it means that the message of the Bible, including its message about human origins and the purpose of life, morality, authority, etc., is scientifically sound. The Bible is the textbook of everything (for both theology and science, and all the domains of life, morality, politics, etc.) that is to be read literally. Reason and science, properly exercised, and the Biblical message, literally read, are one. Moreover, Creation Scientists and Intelligent Design Theorists do not deny “evolution” on a micro- level, the only level, by the way, on which evolution has been observed. Things change, even as the Bible attests. But they do deny evolution on a macro-level. The mechanisms of evolution as described by Darwin, they argue, even when synthesized with modern genetics (the so-called “modern synthesis” or “Neo-Darwinism” that emerged in the 1950s) cannot account for the origin of life or its present diversity. The meaning of the Biblical phrase that God created each species “according to its kind” is a scientific statement that refutes macro-evolution and common descent.

5. When Philosophical Naturalists (especially, people like Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett) look at the world they see something very different. To be sure, the biological world that has evolved is very complex: it even has aspects that are elegant, beautiful, and awe-inspiring to believers and non-believers in God alike. Nevertheless, the existence of that elegance is not the whole story, and if science is anything, it is open to being responsible for all the data, even those stubborn facts that mess up a nice hypothesis. The Creationists, they charge, do not look at all the data. The world is not

simply the nice, neat, harmonious “creation” that Scientific Creationists make it out to be. First, on a purely technical level, there are a lot of “design flaws” and useless biological structures in various species that an “Intelligent Designer” would never have incorporated. Second, on a deeply emotional level, the preponderance of evidence for “natural selection,” a euphemism for the cruel term, “survival of the fittest,” as a dominate (though not the only) force behind evolution in the natural, biological world, along with the problem of pain and suffering, argues not for a world created by and governed by a beneficent deity, but for something else. For the Philosophical Naturalist, theodicy (the righteousness of God) is a key issue and atheism is not simply a reasonable answer, but a pious one. The methodological naturalism that informs modern science begs also, they insist, philosophical naturalism. Nature is all there is. For, if God is the author of this cut-throat creation and, therefore, cut-throat himself, why should he be worshipped? Hasn’t religion been the great inspiration of much of the world’s *chosen* violence? Even more important, if there is no God, if this world is the result of natural, random change, then we human beings who are the lucky by-product of nature must make use of our evolutionary good fortune (our possession of wisdom, knowledge, compassion, justice, etc.) and use it *now* to direct evolution and nature’s future. For most of its evolutionary history, humanity looked for a God to rescue it from its problems. The truth is, argues the Philosophical Naturalist, we have to do it ourselves. 4

6. As you can see this is one contentious fight between two Grand Narratives ostensibly designed to make the most of the scientific data and the phenomenon of religion. In general, Scientific Creationists believe their scientific evidence confirms the old Biblical Creation Narrative as positive history and scientifically correct; Philosophical Naturalists believe

their scientific evidence confirms the new Enlightenment Narrative as represented by David Hume, Friedrich Feuerbach and the like that sees religion and belief in God as an illusion whose evolutionary function is quite understandable but now passé. I think both are wrong, not on modern scientific grounds, rooted in methodological naturalism, but on theological grounds, rooted in a popular but fallacious doctrine of God. The Scientific Creationists do not adequately represent the God of the Biblical Narrative (which I will stand by) nor do the Philosophical Naturalists properly represent the theological challenge of David Hume and the Enlightenment (which I also find compelling). Indeed, both parties are endangering the role of science by holding it captive to their respective ideologies. By so doing they refuse to let science do its job of learning more about the nature of the created world by bracketing all religious and metaphysical question.

7. Interestingly, both the Scientific Creationists and the Philosophical Naturalists read the Bible through the same hermeneutical or interpretive key—i.e., literally, as though it is a straight forward scientific account of the world and that God's relation to and activity within this world is simple and monolithic. Specifically, they operate with the same monolithic view of God, as that one who is unambiguously benevolent and whose existence *de facto* guarantees consolation and meaning regardless of circumstance.5 The difference is that one believes in this God and one doesn't. Here is my point. That is not the biblical God and that hermeneutical key will not unlock the meaning of Scripture or life in this world.

8. In this paper, I argue that the hermeneutical key for understanding the Biblical message about God and God's relation to the world today is the law-gospel hermeneutic, as Luther (re)discovered it from reading Paul and as Ed Schroeder described it in the Opening Address of this Conference. Calling

this key a hermeneutic and not a doctrine or loci or topic is important. A hermeneutic is not simply one concept or doctrine or topic among many but a meta-concept for organizes everything. The basic premise of this hermeneutical key is that God's being and action in the world is twofold and that those actions relate paradoxically: On the one hand, God's wrath (or law) is executed/revealed *on* all ungodliness in a hidden, obscure manner through the things that are created (the mask of God as Luther called it), whether they believe it or not (Romans 1:18-25). On the other hand, God's mercy (or gospel) is executed/revealed *for* the ungodly in the world in a revealed, clear manner through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to those who believe in him (cf. Romans 5:6-11). Distinguishing between these two paradoxically related kinds of activities and beings of God (variously described as the distinction between law and gospel, old creation and new creation, creation and redemption, God hidden and revealed, death and life, judgment and promise) is the key to both interpreting Scripture and living meaningfully in the world. It is with this hermeneutic in mind that I will now turn to the Creation and Fall stories in Genesis and show how this Great Narrative need not be a stumbling block in theology and science debate, but real help to overcome the ideological captivity that Scientific Creationists and Philosophical Naturalists would impose on science.

II. God, Creation, and the Human Steward: Genesis 1 and 2.6

9. The Great Narratives of Creation in Genesis 1 and 2 are statements of faith. More pointedly, they are "crossings." They are the work of some unknown story tellers and compiler(s) who attempted over a long period of time to *relate or cross* the "faith of Israel" with the popular "science" or understanding of

the world as it exists. Indeed, as modern, historical critical scholarship has taught us, the popular "science" of the day did not simply emerge from within the faith community of Israel itself but from their engagement with the ideas of other peoples and powers. Key among these peoples was the great and powerful kingdoms of Egypt and Babylon, who were both the intellectual and cultural wonders of their day and Israel's greatest nemesis. The so-called wet (Priestly) creation story of Genesis 1 (which may have had Babylonian myths of origins in mind) and the so-called dry creation story of Genesis 2 (which may have had Egyptian myths of origin in mind) are crossings of two very different accounts of life as it is from peoples that Israel encountered in its daily life—specifically, a life in bondage. Two important implications emerge from this. First, we have access to the faith of Israel or the Word of God *only* in these crossings form. Distinguishing, then, what is normative in the text and what is conditional is essential to understanding them. Comparing the texts can be very helpful in this regard. Second, the ongoing process of crossing the "faith of Israel" (by which I mean to include its Christian developments) with new understandings of the world, like modern science presents, is not therefore contrary to the biblical concern but integral to it. Now let us turn to the text of Genesis 1 and 2 themselves. I'm going to assume that you all have a basic knowledge of them.

10. "And God Said"—*Creatio Ex Nihilo*. First, what is most striking about the two Biblical Accounts of Creation is now "un-mythical" they are in nature—poetic and metaphorical, to be sure, but not mythical. Indeed, their account might best be described as an existential account of creation, creation as they experience it day to day. In that sense they are not so much a description of the "origins" of the Created World, but its "ground of being," to us Tillich's term. They take the world as they observe it as a *fact*, as a relational whole, intimately

interconnected, and assert that it is the good creation of God. To be sure, the accounts are not “scientific” in the modern sense of the term. They do not seek to explain natural processes or there origin with any kind of scientific sophistication. But they do honor the created world as God does—as “good.” In effect, there is only one teaching concerning the origins or grounds of the created world asserted in these biblical texts: namely, the idea of *creatio ex nihilo*, that God simply called the world into being “out of nothing.” Nothing, too philosophical should be made out the imagery of God’s speaking (the “and God said”) other than that God creates without dependence on anything else, and that nothing exists—*even now*—unless God brings it into being. It is a way of describing God’s transcendence or otherness from the Creation. To be sure, in so far as the claim that God creates *ex nihilo* is also a claim about the natural world, it is a claim that is subject to scientific investigation. Here the interests of theology and science overlap. The present day scientific consensus about the BIG GANG THEORY (a theory that it is certainly compatible with, though does not prove, an absolute “beginning” to the Creation) is certainly compatible with creation *ex nihilo*, even though it would never have crossed the minds of the biblical writers. As I said, the Big Bang Theory doesn’t prove the existence of God. Scientists cannot get “behind” the bang, at least not yet, and if they do they will never get to God, who transcends Creation.7 At least, that is the “faith of Israel.” Any “god” that is “scientifically” graspable by humanity, in the modern sense of the term, is not the God of Israel. Nevertheless, that modern discovery of the Big Bang is no small matter. One of the big issues in the Middle Ages was the stark contradiction between Aristotle’s notion of the world as eternal (Aristotle’s natural philosophy was the cutting-edge “science” of the time) and the Biblical notion of the world as temporal. What this proves, if anything, is that Aristotle’s Natural Philosophy isn’t “science”

in the modern sense of the term, but a philosophical/religious assumption masquerading as such.

11. "And God Blessed Them … Be Fruitful and Multiply"—*Creatio Continua*. Second, the biblical faith is not deistic. God creates *ex nihilo,* not only "in the beginning," but in every moment. Connected with the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, therefore, is the idea of *creatio continua*. The God who transcends the Creation, and who is totally other from the Creation, is also the God who is intimately at work in and through the Creation. What the biblical writers observe is a fruitful creation, a continuing creation. That fact is not a sign of the autonomy of the Creation from God but God's on-going creative activity in and through the things that are created, what the text calls "blessing." The fruitful operations of nature as they are observed by the eyes of faith do not conflict or compete with the idea of God as Creator but confirm it. Again, the text offers no "scientific" explanations of the fruitfulness of creation, in the modern sense of the term. That, the natural processes of world, it leaves as a open question, free for human investigation. But more on that later.

12. *"In the Image of God"—Humanity as the Creation's Representative before God and God's Steward of the Creation*. One of the most contentious features of the Theology-Science debate is the nature and status of the human creature, not only vis-à-vis the rest of creation but also God. A central issue is the interpretation the phrase "the image of God." Because the phrase is a hapax legomenon, a phrase that only occurs once in the biblical text, its meaning must be carefully delineated in light of what else the narratives of creation say about humanity. First of all, the term most definitely does not mean anything like that which the Gnostics (ancient or modern) say about humanity, namely, that humanity has a "spark" or a part of the divine within. Humanity is totally and thoroughly a *creature*

whose existence, like all creatures, is depended totally on God and on God's placement of humanity within the Creation as an organic whole. Not only does the very Hebrew word for humanity make this clear, *adam* means earthling, one who is of the earth8, but the description of the creation of humanity in Genesis 2 creation account also makes this clear. There is no essential difference in the way humanity is created from that of the rest of the Creation, specifically, the animal world. Concerning the creation of humanity, I quote: "the Lord God formed *adam* from the dust of the ground (*adama*), and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the human became a living being (nephesh)" (Genesis 2:7). Now concerning the creation of the animal world, I quote: "out of the ground (*adama*) God formed every animal … and whatever the man (adam) called every living being (nephesh), that was its name" (Genesis 2:20). Humanity together with all living animals is called "nephesh," "living being." Concerning the phrase "breath of life," this is the term Genesis 1:30 also uses to describe animals in general, anything that has breaths. It is not a unique thing like the Greek notion of the "soul," for example. In short, the text is existential in outlook. The idea that humanity was created in the "image of God," means that humanity stands in "correspondence" with God, to use the word that Athanasius used in his "On the Incarnation of the Word." Humanity is that part of creation that is aware of itself as creature (self-consciousness). As such, humanity is beholden to and responsible to God, representing all of the Creation before God. Therefore, as the human fairs before God, so fairs the whole creation. This is Paul's assumption in Romans 8:19-25 and why the redemption of humanity is central to the redemption of the whole Creation.

13. But there is more to this concept of the "image of God." Humanity, as that creature who lives in correspondence with God, is also God's designated steward of the Creation. This is a

central affirmation of the texts as expressed in Genesis 1:26, when it states that humanity has been given “dominion over” all living things, and in Genesis 2:15, when it asserts that humanity is created to “till [the garden] and keep it.” “Dominion over” is to serve not the exploitation, but the care of the Creation. Accordingly, in this concept resides what I would call the “scientific imperative” given to humanity by God, including the modern sense of the term. True, the Biblical Narratives on Creation do not give us a scientific account of Creation or how this imperative arose, but they do assert *as a matter of fact* the capacity on the part of humanity to “do science,” to grow in our understanding or comprehension of the created world, and to do so for the sake of our calling to be good stewards of it. This notion of dominance, I would argue, is compatible with modern science’s insistence on “methodological naturalism,” of restricting its investigation to the natural world. Humanity can understand, control and safely probe only that which it has dominion over—and that is the natural world—and it exercises dominion appropriately by giving due respect to and care for the delicate created nature of the Creation.

14. The nascent development of this capacity to understand and “till” the earth and participate in its fruitfulness, the practice of stewardship, is already evident in the text. When the biblical account recognizes that all creation, on the one hand, consist of “dust,” and yet, on the other hand, exists each according to its own “kind,” defined by its capacity to be fruitful and multiply—they are simply engaging in the age old practice of taxonomy. The text makes no scientific claim in the modern sense of the term about how the kinds emerged or about the eternal stability or instability of the “kinds.” Indeed, the idea that “kind” here means “special creation,” i.e., that the species emerged on the scene by fiat, is a Medieval

interpretation of the text based on correlating it with the assumption of Aristotle about the stability and, hence, the know-ability of the world in terms of natural law. Aristotle argued this against the Greek atomists who said the world is in constant flux and hence ultimately, unknowable and unpredictable. Aristotle, the first champion of natural philosophy, rejected both the idea that world is created by God and that it is in flux or evolving. The Order of Nature is simply eternal, constant, changeless in essence because of the eternal forms that give them order, at least at the level of species or kinds.9 The church, wanting to affirm the "scientific" potential in Aristotle's thought, justified it by reference to the Genesis notion of "kind."

15. While Genesis is adamant about humanities dominion over the Creation, it is equally as adamant about God's dominion over humanity. Accordingly, God is always in control and as such always allusive, mysterious, unfathomable, and incomprehensible, except on God's own terms, as God reveals God' self to humanity. In giving humanity dominion over the Creation, God does not relinquish God's own dominion over the Creation or over humanity, but authorizes humanity, as a steward, to participate in God's creative enterprise. While humanity's basic relationship to the Creation is rooted in its ability to know and control the natural world, its relation to God is rooted in its ability to trust God and to rely on God always. Strictly speaking "to know" something is to be able to make it an object of control; "to trust" someone is to be totally dependent on their trustworthiness. This defines the fundamental difference between theology and science in the modern sense of terms: Theology seeks to increase faith in God and science seeks to increase knowledge of the Creation. While on the one hand, they are very different kinds of enterprises, on the other, they find their unity in the idea of Humanity as God's steward of God's

Creation. As God's steward of Creation, humanity stands between God and the Creation, constantly looking (metaphorically speaking) in two directions: *up*wards towards the God from whom it receives dominion and to whom it is accountable; and *down*wards to the Creation of which it is a part and over which it is to be steward and care taker.

16. *"It is good"—Freedom not Telos Marks the Essence of Creation*. Significantly, the biblical account as an existential account of Creation presupposes no blue print to be follow or no preconceived goal or telos to be achieved. This is in stark contrasts to the Creation Myths of Israel's neighbors who told their story of creation/origins in such a way as to justify their political and social order as the goal of the divine—ancient versions, perhaps, of Hegel's own philosophy of history or America's doctrine of Manifest Destiny. In essence, their telling of Creation was deeply ideologically laden. The Creation as described in Genesis is at root a "natural order," not a "political order," and it is marked by freedom and joy. The "it is good" which punctuates every level of the natural ordering of creation in Genesis 1 is an aesthetic judgment on the part of God. It is a stretch, therefore, even to say that God created a "moral order," if by "moral" we mean a deontological or legal system of ruling through "oughts." The world is a natural order that has no "need" at this point for criticism, no experience of God's wrath or anger that is inherent in the use of the term "law" in its strict theological sense and in the hermeneutical notion of the distinction between law and gospel. This is also true of the "it is not good" concerning the personal aloneness of *adam* (Genesis 2:18). That, too, is an aesthetic judgment that is intent on showing the meaning of humanity's differentiation into male and female. First, sexuality is that quality of the creature that allows it to participate in God's continuing creation of itself, its kind.

As such, at its most basic level Creation is a relational reality. This is true for humanity, too. Humanity like all the other “kinds” of creatures is by nature a relational “kind,” male and female, even as Genesis 1:27 asserts when it says “in the image of God he created them/male and female he created them.” Second, and more importantly, there is no sense of domination of one gender over the other, no sense of gender roles defined in social, political or economic terms. Humanity isn’t male or female, but male- and-female, a kind defined by partnership and, therefore, the quintessential expression of humanity is marriage as a natural phenomenon, as a bodily phenomenon, where the “two become one flesh.” Wherever, men and women come together in a natural, bodily way there is marriage, there is humanity, revealed as a relational reality, as a partnership of equals who complement one another in living out God’s call to be stewards of the Creation.

17. Given the fact that the Creation is a “natural order,” is it any wonder that when modern scientists look at the natural world, including the human world, it sees no defined end goal, no grand purpose, only the continual, free interaction of natural processes and responses over time? There is none! If we can lay aside our ideological lenses for a moment and look at the Creation accounts afresh, what we see is a dynamic, natural order, existing as an organic whole, marked by freedom and joy. There are no preconceived notions of progress, no grand goals to strive for, no operating rules given as to what faithful stewardship should look like. To be sure, humanity is free to organize its life politically, to nurture itself intellectually, to express itself artistically, to develop the fruitfulness of the Creation economically, and to worship (correspond with) God honestly, openly, without fear. Indeed, given the way humanity is created, one cannot imagine humanity doing anything but these kinds of things as it lives out its calling to be God’s steward

of God’s Creation—for such stewardship exercised in freedom is its joy.

III. God, the Fall, the Law, and the Human Steward—Genesis 3

18. The “faith of Israel” is not naïve. It is quite aware that the world as it now exists is not simply the “good” creation of God, although traces of that aesthetic judgment still is evident, and evident to believers and non-believers alike. No. Something is awry, and no amount of ideological manipulation can cover over that fact. That, too, is evident to believer and nonbeliever alike. Existentially speaking, the freedom, faith/trust, and joy that marked the Creation “in the beginning” has given way to compulsion, fear/suspicion, and despair; and no creature is more aware of that fact than humanity. Why? Because humanity is deeply implicated in this change of condition. Therefore, on the heels of the Creation story comes the story of the “Fall,” as Augustine first called it.

19. This condition is often discussed under the category of “the problem [or origin] of evil” and coming to terms intellectually and personally with the fact of this fallen state of affairs is an inescapable part of the human condition. Every culture, every religion, every philosophy wrestles with it because every human being encounters it in the course of daily living. One predominant way of dealing with this fact is dualism: positing this existential awareness to the clash of two metaphysical principles (good and evil, light and darkness) with humanity as the victim caught in between. That essentially was the intellectual strategy of the Babylonians in Israel’s day and has been an essential strategy of religion and cultures down through the ages, whether in the form of Marcionism, Manichaeanism or all manner of Gnosticism and New Age Spirituality ancient and

modern. Another dominate approach has been Philosophical Materialism, which denies the existence of evil as an illusion rooted in a misunderstanding of the natural processes. Neither of these, as we will see, is the outlook of the "faith of Israel. True, evil is a thoroughly "natural" phenomenon, it is nature—specifically, natures steward—turned away from, or better turned, against its Creator and Lord, but it isn't merely material. It is also God turned against nature—specifically, nature's recalcitrant steward—and that makes it a spiritual phenomenon as well, one marked by wrath, anger. The only way to get at this dynamic is through narrative. So let us now turn now to Genesis 3 and the way the "faith of Israel" deals with it.

20. What is most incredible about the Fall Narrative, given the mythical predilections of its neighbors and captors, is how un-mythical it is. To be sure, like the Creation Narratives, it is filled with symbolism and metaphor, but it is not mythical. Rather, it, too, is existential in nature, giving an account of the depth dimension of "evil" and "sin" in daily life *now*. It is not a scientific account, in the modern sense of the term, of the origins or evil but a theological account. Why? Because the nature of "evil," like the nature of the Creation, is *not* purely natural, though it has naturalist elements to it, but it is also theological, it has to do with the present relationship that exist between the God and God's steward. It is the theological component of humanity's struggle with sin, death, fear, suffering, and conflict that the text seeks to illuminate. Therefore, like Creation, it is talking about a mystery. Mystery here does not primarily refer to that which is unknown, but that which is not under our control, not in the reach of our instrumental powers to reason, that which is beyond our grasp what but God discloses it to us, because the reality of evil is intimately wrapped up in the reality of God.

<u>"Did God Say…?"—The Mystery of Evil and Mistrust of God (Genesis</u>

3:1-7)

21. Significantly, the Fall Narrative begins with the description a “creature” and not a metaphysical concept or mythical being. That creature is a serpent who is described as being “more crafty than other wild animal the Lord God had made” (Genesis 3:1) and who is the symbolic nemesis who tempts humanity to fall away from God. While biblical scholarship is divided on how to interpret this passage, I take it to be a symbol of the way evil (understood as whatever is in opposition to God) works. This, then, is not a mythical tale of the origin of evil. That remains forever a mystery. Rather, it is a phenomenology of evil, a narrative description of how evil works at a deep level—at the level of the human heart and at the level of humanity’s relation to God. Moreover, the serpent is a highly familiar symbol of the age. The serpent itself is a symbol of wisdom, and historically, of Egypt—one of the most ancient, powerful, wise, and sophisticated cultures the world had ever known until then—and also Israel’s major nemesis! Therefore, in one sense the text has something of a polemical edge to it. But it is not ideological; rather, it is simply illustrative. For it is not written to justify the State or Kingdom of Israel vis- à-vis Egypt or any other nation, but to confess the state or condition of humanity in general (Israel included) as implicated before God for the evil that is in the world. The whole of human history is marked by this condition.

22. The nature of evil is complex but Genesis 3 seeks to rendered it accessible through a deceptively simple narrative form: the first half of the Narrative (verses 1-7) being a phenomenological examination of temptation and fall and the second half (verse 8-24) being a theological description God’s relationship to fallen humanity. The essence of evil is rooted in doubt (or disbelief), not about God’s existence, but about God’s Word and humanity’s call to be God’s steward.10 The

Genesis narrative for describing this is clear. Humanity knows God's Word, the question is do they trust it? Was God keeping humanity down by designating them as steward and by instructing them not to eat of the symbolic "tree of the knowledge of good and evil"? Or, was God keeping humanity safe and giving them what they needed, God's self as protector and guide? The serpent (symbol of the wisdom of this world) asserts the former. Humanity believes the serpent and eats, holding onto the serpent's promise that they will be like God, meaning, that they will call the shots on what is good and what is evil (Genesis 3:5), no longer existing as mere stewards but as lords themselves of their life and of the Creation. Evil or sin, then, is rooted in humanity's attempt at a coup d'etat of sorts over God. It is the breaking of the created order of things at its most critical point: the relationship between of God and God's designated steward of Creation. Because humanity represents the Creation to God, humanity is also, we noted, the point at which the Creation becomes aware of itself as Creation, the consequences of this break reverberates throughout the Creation itself, as Genesis 3:14-19 asserts. This broken order is what Augustine and Luther mean when they describe the human condition of sin (the classic notion of original sin) as humanity "turned away from God" and "turned in on it's self," respectively. In its heart, humanity puts itself in the place of God. But, as the text also makes clear, the serpent's promise doesn't pan out. That's because it is based on a lie about reality as God creates it. Accordingly, rather than self-confidence, the human creature is filled with a deep seated sense of meaninglessness and shame (symbolized in nakedness), to which the only apparent solution is self-deception, the illusory attempt "cover up" the truth with something of their own making (Genesis 3:7).

<u>"What is this that you have done?"—The Law as God's critical Response to Sin (Genesis 3:8-24)</u>

23. But that’s not the whole story. The Fall Narrative is not only about humanity’s changed approach to God, but God’s changed approach toward humanity—and that is what Genesis 3:8- 24 is all about. Attending to the sequence of the drama is crucial to the meaning of the text. Remember, up to this moment the Creation Narratives assumed a very “natural” correspondence between God and humanity as integral to the created order of things. Now God is depicted as walking through the garden at the time of the evening breeze; no doubt to converse with his steward. But now God notices that something is awry. The steward is hiding from God. The free, joyful, open correspondence is gone. What is significant is that God will not relinquish his Creation to the rebel stewards. The spiritual condition that humanity now finds itself in after the Fall is not that God is absent, that’s what the hiding tried to accomplish. On the contrary, God is quite present, but present now as critic, as the questioning judge toward a recalcitrant steward. The series of questions that God delivers at humanity and their incriminating answers are like a scene out of “Law and Order,” including the defendants turning on one another in a desperate, illusory, last ditch effort to save themselves.

24. Luther, in his Genesis Commentary, notes the irony in this passage. The evening breeze which before the fall was a *comforting* sign of God’s presence has now become a *threatening* sign of that same God, evoking fear (Genesis 3:10) like those things that go thump in the night. Now permeating the Creation is not only God’s word of blessing, which sustains the natural order in its fruitfulness, but God’s word of criticism and its corresponding curse that affects not only the human steward but everything the steward touches (Genesis 3:14-24). As the steward of the Creation fairs, so fairs the whole Creation (Cf. Romans 8:19-23). This critical dimension that is now introduced by God into the order of things because of sin is the notion of “law”

as Luther's law-gospel hermeneutic uses the term. Significantly, after sin, humanity not only continues to participate in the creative processes of God as steward, but also participates in the critical processes of God. The interlacing of these two processes, the creative and the critical, now informs every aspect of humanity's vocation as God's fallen steward of the Creation and creates a world of profound paradox. In so far as the critical process exposes sin and carries out the death of every steward as a sinner, we have what Luther calls the theological function of the law. In so far as this critical process creates sufficient fear to restrains sin and compel cooperation with the creative processes of God, we have what Luther calls the civil function of the law.11

25. Of course, this theologically laden concept of law is not unique to Luther. The reality of law as that which "makes sin known," as Paul defines it, or that which "always accuses" (*lex semper accusat*) as the *Apology to the Augsburg Confession* describes it, permeates the Old and New Testaments, becoming especially focused in Paul as the counterpoint to the gospel, and has been a crucial datum for doing law-gospel theology throughout the ages, in such a line of notables, Irenaeus (against the Gnostics), Augustine (against the Pelagianists), Luther (against , Kierkegaard (against the Hegelian Systemizers), Walther (against Schmucker and the *Definite Platform*12), Bonhoeffer (against the pseudo-Lutherans), Elert (against both Schliermacher and Barth), to name a few, though the line may be a thin one. It is significant to note that this notion of law is not positive law. It is not some divinely, preconceived, a-historical list of "dos" and "don'ts" that God prescribes regardless of context—although at any instance they certainly do appear in concrete, commandment form as Bonhoeffer was wont to emphasize, just as they appear here is Genesis. Rather, like the "it is good" of the Creation, this notion of

Law is God’s living, evolving, responding critique of the ongoing engagement of God, humanity and the rest of Creation.

26. This reading of the Genesis account is significant for the present engagement between theology and science. Recall the charge that the Philosophical Naturalists made against the doctrine of God of the Scientific Creationists. If there is a God, then why is there such a pervasive sense of meaninglessness in the world? The short answer can now be given: Because of sin and God’s judgment, God’s anger, upon it. God does not exist, after sin, as that unambiguously benevolent Someone whose existence *de facto* guarantees consolation and meaning regardless of circumstance. With Paul, the “faith of Israel” knows God as that good Creator and Lord of all who is humanity’s critic, intent on driving every human being out of its ideological hiding place and ridding it of its illusion of righteousness, so as to face the reality of sin. And if people will not face that reality in their consciences, they will face it in the flesh. This, theologically, is the meaning of death, quite apart from all the physiological elements that may coincide with it.

27. Note: Genesis is clear that science (especially, in the modern sense of the term, as learning more about the natural world for the sake of being good stewards of it) still remains a key intellectual and practical part of the human calling to till the earth, even after the Fall. God doesn’t simply pull the plug instantly on the Creation. That’s because God wants also to redeem this Creation, as the Flood Narratives of Genesis 6-10 suggests and the whole history of Israel attests. But more on that later. Nevertheless, the scientific imperative is frustrated and deeply complicated by the reality of sin. Not only is it frustrated when ideologues pervert and subvert the scientific enterprise to seek their own selfish, twisted ends (Eugenics and Social Darwinism as extreme cases for example), but also when God refuses to bless the fruitfulness of Creation

to frustrate humanity’s sinful designs.

III. God, Christ, and the Redemption of Creation—Romans 8:19-18-25

28. I hope it is clear by now that theology and science are not opposed to each other when properly understood. Science proper is not called upon to investigate God, but the natural world for the sake of humanity’s call to be God’s stewards of that world. By contrast Theology proper is not called to advance our knowledge of the natural world but attend to the Word of nature’s Creator/owner/Lord. Humanity as God’s steward of the Creation is a creature that lives by looking in two directions: upwards to its Creator and Lord and downwards to the Creation it has been called to tend. They are not competing forms of knowledge but distinct, autonomous, complementary activities that find their unity in the human vocation of stewardship.

29. But as we have also seen, the human call to be God’s steward is complicated by sin and God’s law, given so “that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God” (Romans 3:19). Sin, therefore, cuts two ways, having ramifications that are both spiritual ad material. Not only does the Fall story make this clear in the “curse” that now resides on the Creation because of humanity, but our ongoing, present human experience still attests to this fact. The advance of scientific knowledge—and the increased control it has given us over all kinds of natural processes—has not only revealed the fruitful potential of the Creation, but it has also revealed the fragility and vulnerability of the Creation in the hands of a presumptuous steward that is “turned in on itself,” that is, more interested in exploitation than cultivation.

30. In light of this fact, it is no wonder that Christian

theology historically places emphasis on one other aspect of God's activity in the world: "the redemption" of the whole Creation through the redemption of the human steward. This concern for the redemption of the world is the what "the gospel," in Luther's law-gospel hermeneutic, is all about. The biblical God is the God who acts in history Creator, Critic *and* Redeemer. Creation is the presupposition of law and gospel, which knows of Creation as under God's judgment and in need of God's redemption. With regard to the "problem of evil," then, you might say that there at least two problems: the problem of origins, knowing exactly why and how it emerged in the midst of God's good Creation, and the problem of solutions, how it is overcome. While Christian theology is very modest (finally pleading, we don't know) concerning the issue of evil's origins (theologically and scientific), it has been very bold with regard to the issue of evil's solutions. God has acted in the world to bring forth salvation, justification, reconciliation, redemption to the broken Creation (the images are legion) through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. One passage in Paul is especially telling with regard to the linkage of redemption of the whole Creation to that of the human steward of Creation, Romans 8:18-25. It is worth quoting here at length.

> I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of

> our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

31. Several things are worthy of note. First. The whole creation is “subject to futility,” emptiness, meaninglessness and “subject to decay” not because of what the non-human part of Creation did, but because of the recalcitrance of its human steward. The whole Creation is caught up in the God-human conflict, the Fall, the falling out between God and God’s steward, that we discussed above at length. Second. Creation is not without hope, however, that hope is linked to the “revealing of the children of God,” that is, to humanity redeemed by participation in God’s saving act in Jesus Christ, the concern the dominates Paul’s Romans and which is labeled as justification (the participation in God’s act of making things right) by faith. Third. The principle as the human steward fairs before God so the whole creation fairs is key here because there is no absolute divide between anthropology and ecology, humanity and the Creation. The Creation is an organic whole. However, how the human steward fairs before God is the subject of theology proper, because it is the root problem that afflicts life as we experience it. Fourth. As Ed Schroeder noted in his keynote address, drawing on the thought of Bob Bertram, all Christian theology, therefore is ultimately rooted in Christian soteriology, the redemption of the Fallen world, just, as we might say, that all medicine is ultimate linked to heath. Distinguishing, the problem—the world under judgment—and the solution—the world united to Christ—informs every aspect of life, including that al1-pervasive aspect of life in this world called science, for the sake of the salvation of all.

32. At the beginning of this paper, I identified the two camps at the center of maelstrom in the public conflict being waged between theology, so-called, and science, so-called: the

Scientific Creationists and Philosophical Naturalists. It should now be clear that the war is fueled by a false understanding of both theology and science to the detriment of both and to the demise of our stewardship of this Creation. Theology and science are two dimensions of our human vocation to be God's steward of God's Creation. Theology proper looks "up" to God, who, one the one hand, executes judgment (law proper) on the Fallen world, a judgment hidden in the conflicts and struggles of daily (Fallen) life, and, yet, who, on the other hands, promises to overrule that judgment gospel (proper), bringing the promise of new life for the whole Creation through participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (gospel). This two-fold character of God's activity in the world (as law and gospel) is the hermeneutical or interpretive key (the method, so to speak) to reading both scripture and daily life from a theological point of view. Science, by contrast, looks "down" to the created world and employs its God-given dominion over the Creation in order to understand nature's processes better for the sake of fruitfulness and integrity of the whole Creation. Its method can rightly be described as methodological naturalism. It is not interested in investing God *per se*—God *en se* is out of the reach of scientific investigation—but the Creation, as God created it, on its own terms, according to its "kind." Science, in order to be science, must be free from the ideological captivity of left and the right, of theists and atheists. The law-gospel hermeneutic provides a framework for showing how theology and science are at once distinct activities, yet, in mutual service to one another as humanity struggles with it's calling to be God's steward of the Creation. This notion of stewardship is stated ever so clearly in one of the Offertory Prayers of the Lutheran Book of Worship. Let us pray it: "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the care and

redemption of all that you have made, for the sake of him who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

References:

1 See Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999): "Science tries to document the factual character of the natural world, and to develop theories that coordinate and explain these facts. Religion, on the other hand, operates in the equally important, but utterly different, realm of human purposes, meanings, and values – subjects that the factual domain of science might illuminate, but can never resolve. Similarly, while scientists must operate with ethical principles, some specific to their practice, the validity of these principles can never be inferred from the factual discoveries of science."

2 Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 39-40, 42-45.

3 "Methodological naturalism" is the idea that scientific knowledge of the natural world can advance only by only a strict observation of natural or material causes, the natural chain of cause and effect, which requires the suspension of any idea of supernatural causes or special intuition. It does not necessarily deny the existence of the divine or the supernatural, but rather asserts that the supernatural is not subject to the same scrutiny as the natural. "Philosophical naturalism," on the other hands, denies the existence of the supernatural (it is atheistic in outlook) and assumes that everything can be ultimately understood in terms of material, natural causes. See for example, Ronald L. Numbers, "Science without God: Natural Laws and Christian Beliefs" in *When Science and Christianity Meet*, edited by David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003),

266, 282.

4 One of the most thoroughgoing exponents of this position is Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster: 1995).

5 For a more thorough explanation of this see Steven C. Kuhl, "Darwin's Dangerous Idea … and St. Paul's" in *Creation and Evolution* edited by Robert Brungs, S.J. (St. Louis: ITEST Faith/Science Press, 1998), pp. 77- 104 and 174-177.

6 Helpful texts for getting at some of the scholarly ("historical critical") debate and consensus on the biblical texts include Bernard W. Anderson, editor, *Creation in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), John Reumann, *Creation and New Creation: the Past, Present and Future of God's Creative Activity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1973), Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), and Claus Westermann, *Creation,* John J. Scullion, S.J. translator (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974).

7 This touches on the relationship of Physics, cosmology and theology. An excellent discussion on the variety of issues relating to modern Physics and Theology is available in Mark William Worthing, *God, Creation, and Contemporary Physics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

8 See, for example, Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

9 Edward L. Larson, *Evolution: The Remarkable History of a Scientific Theory* (New York: Random House/Modern Library Edition, 2004), p. 12-13.

10 In a very basic way, the biblical message sees no fundamental difference between atheism (disbelieving in the *existence* of God altogether), idolatry (replacing God with the things of this world), and religion that uses the name of the true God "in vain," that is, that uses God's name or being to advance one's own aims rather than God's. In the end, all of these are strategies to place some kind of human aim over God's aim.

11 The civil function of the law represents that aspect of the critical process out of which secular authority emerges and evolves. It is itself steeped in paradox. Humanity as a whole is drawn into participating in its own self-criticism, a reality symbolized in the Genesis text by Adam and Eve's reciprocal critique of one another. Today, Critical Social Theory stands as one expression of secular thought and philosophy that is especially focused on this dynamic. See, for example, Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1987).

12 See, Erich W. Gritch, *A History of Lutheranism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 194. It is perhaps an oversimplification to say that Walther's work "On the Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel is directly against Schmucker. It presupposes Walther's engagement over the course of his career with many issues including debates over the nature of election and the office of the Ministry. What is significant is that the proper distinction of law and gospel stands out as the key hermeneutic for adjudicating issues of theology. In that sense it is not one doctrine among many but a hermeneutic. See also https://crossings.org/archive/ed/CFWWalther.pdf for a discussion of Walther's theses on Law and Gospel as they relate to the issues that were stirring in the Missouri Synod controversy of the 1970s.

W2_Kuhl_Creation_Redemption (PDF)

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM AND THE CHRIST OF THE CROSS

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"Honest-to God-Gospel for a Dying World" is no joke. Its urgency was impressed on me during the sabbatical that I took during the 2005-2006 academic year. For the first six months, July – January, I lived in the West Bank, three months in Bethlehem and three months in East Jerusalem. During my time in Bethlehem I was a participant in the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, or EAPPI. This program was initiated in 2002, when the heads of the churches in Jerusalem requested that the World Council of Churches send international observers to the West Bank. EAPPI is the WCC's response to that call. In my second three-month term I was no longer with the EAPPI but I was working as a visiting scholar with Bishop Munib Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land. He asked me to research and write a document about the city of Jerusalem, intended for use by adult study groups in American churches. I did complete the paper and it is now finding a publisher. The Palestinian Christian churches are unanimous in their hopes for Jerusalem, which they see as the key to resolving the entire conflict. Their hopes are also in agreement with Muslim and Jewish leaders and organizations that are working for a just peace in the area. They would like to see the status of Jerusalem negotiated in a way that involves five

parties: representatives of two nations, Israel and Palestine, and representatives of three religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. They envision West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and East Jerusalem as the capital of a future state of Palestine, with all the sites holy to any of the three religions administered by representatives of those religions with open access always, both to local believers and believers from around the world.

In order to help you see the urgency of the situation, I will share with you some pictures from my time there, focusing on the Bethlehem area and what is happening there now. [In the presentation at the conference, I gave a small slide show about the realities on the ground in the Bethlehem area of the West Bank, especially regarding land loss and home demolitions as the separation barrier is built.]

Israelis refers to this mess as “The Situation.” What are we to make of the situation theologically? If prophecy is reading the situation through the lens of God’s Law and God’s promise, what is the prophetic word here? If we are to be prophetic, then (to use Crossings terminology) how do we diagnose this situation and what prognosis can we give?

Christians do not answer these questions in the same way, and my argument will be that the most prominent answer given by American Christians is wrong, deadly wrong. It is a misreading of the Bible in which the confusion of Law and the absence of Gospel has fatal results. I am talking about Christian Zionism. I will contrast with it the prophetic understanding of the local Palestinian Christian community, who center their faith on the Christ of the Cross, a much more promising reading, both of the situation and of the Bible, that keeps the Law clear and the Gospel alive.

First I will give you this little exercise on Christian Zionism, which has infused our culture and formed many of our assumptions about what the Bible says and what is going on international politics today. Take a few minutes to read through these statements, made from a Christian Zionism viewpoint. Mark the ones that you have heard before or that are familiar to you.1

1. When God promised the land to Abraham and his descendants, God was predicting the modern State of Israel (Genesis 12:1-3, 15:7-21, 17:8).

2. Since Palestinians are Arab immigrants to the land of Israel, they should move back to the countries surrounding Israel so that Israel can reclaim its ancient God-given land.

3. The terms “The West Bank” or “The Occupied Palestinian Territories” are improper, since the biblical names for these regions are Judea and Samaria, and they are part of Israel.

4. God’s promise to Abraham is a Law that overrides all international laws regarding human rights.

5. Prophetic books like Ezekiel link the ancient Jewish return from exile with the modern establishment of the State of Israel after the holocaust.

6. The establishment of the State of Israel is a major sign that the end of the world and the beginning of the reign of God is near.

7. Books like Daniel, 1 Thessalonians, and Revelation fit together like a jigsaw puzzle to show how the destruction of the world will unfold through warfare.

8. True believers in Jesus will be spared the experience of the world’s violent end because they will be “raptured” into heaven.

9. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is unresolvable because not only is it rooted in centuries of ethnic and religious hatred, but it is also prophesied in God's Word for the end of time.

10. Peace will come only when Jesus comes to reign, cursing those who have criticized the State of Israel.

11. As the world's superpower, the United States should be funding the expansion of the State of Israel.

When local Palestinian Christians encounter this theology they are surprised. It is not like any Christian theology they know and they do not see any place for themselves in it except, perhaps, in hell, if not for eternity then certainly along the way. So, how do they read the situation and the Bible differently?

First of all, local Christians understand God's Law in a way much more familiar to Lutherans around the world: God's Law is not the promise made to Abraham but is the Word of God intended to preserve the creation. This is what is known in Lutheran circles as the civil use of the Law. It leads into God's judgment against humanity for failure to love God's creation, the theological use of the Law. This leads God to come in the person of Jesus to share in the life of flawed humanity in order to lead us through the judgment in himself, and to keep us alive by his breath, the Holy Spirit, who has gone out to all the world from Jerusalem. For Palestinian Christians, as for most Christians in the world, if the first piece of this is missing, God's intent for justice in the world, then the salvation brought by the Gospel will never come. One thing leads to another, as I will spell out.

If one begins, as Jews, Christians and Muslims all do, from "an assertion of the sovereignty of God as the ultimate ruler of the

universe, and with the teaching that God [is] Lord over the kingdoms of humankind," then all governmental power is subject to the law of God and cannot be exercised arbitrarily without condemnation from God.2 When the ancient people of Judah had returned from exile, the new Persian government required of them an account of how they would exercise the limited autonomy granted to them. What divine principles were going to rule them? The Torah was written to answer this question that touched on the people's character and identity.3 It begins with Genesis, a story of creation. Mitri Raheb, a Palestinian Lutheran pastor, says about this,

> A theology of creation can be very important to us in the Middle East, where several religions, as well as nations, co-exist. Such a theology holds that all human beings, no matter what their religion or nationality, are created in the image of God. To protect a human being's rights is therefore a divine law.4

The idea that human rights are given by God when God creates human beings is a strong theme running through Palestinian theology. As Elias Chacour says, "I was not born a Christian. I was born a baby. We all are born babies with the same identity, in the image and with the likeness of God."5

The Law is God's recognition that the world God creates and loves is in the care of sinners, which drives God to put in place protective boundaries to limit human behavior. This Godly Law channels action toward the preservation of life and goodness and away from what is harmful. This Law is often summarized by the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21) or by Jesus' words: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments

depend all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40; see also Mark 12:28-34). There are variations on this in every religion and culture. The Law is God’s call to us to care for what God has made; it is our human vocation. Here a triangular relationship is at work between God, you, and your neighbor. However, since the social structures of our world, including our laws, are shaped by sinful humans, they can be corrupt and unjust. They must always be evaluated to ensure that they are oriented toward God’s overarching principles. Criticism and disobedience are sometimes necessary. When the Hebrew prophets tested the actions of their kings, they found them wanting. At a conference in Bethlehem in November 2005, George Tinker of the Osage nation gave a warning from his own people’s experience: The “rule of law” is not always rooted in justice. Laws must be deconstructed when they are unjust.6

Doing our best to live according to the Law and doing our best to ensure that the laws are just does not, however, make us right in God’s eyes. The Law exists because we are sinners; if we were not sinners, we would not need the Law. Therefore, its very presence convicts us in front of God even as it protects us from ourselves and each other. Since we are always sinners, even as Christians, we always need the Law.

This means, first of all, that “[n]o one is entitled to violate God’s law, putting themselves in God’s place.”7 Injustice must not be perpetrated in the name of God. Secondly, it means that everything we are and have, including our neighbor, is a gift from God. Thus we are obliged to God. It matters to God what we do with these gifts.8

When we oppress others in the name of God, theological distortions are created. Mitri Raheb lifts up the example of God’s promise of land.

> It is interesting to note that most of the promises of land in the Bible stem from the time of the patriarchs or from the time of the exile…and thus from a time when Israel actually had no land of its own. As a matter of fact, these promises were meant to be promises and words of hope to a people who were weak and stateless. …But in situations when Israel had control over a state, a territory, and an army, God's word came instead to admonish Israel to do justice. As far as God was concerned, land without justice was out of the question.9

For Palestinians, expulsion from the land in the name of God has thrown them into a struggle with the Bible itself and, furthermore, with God. Naim Ateek, a Palestinian Anglican theologian writes:

> With the exception of relatively few people within the Christian communities in the Middle East, the existence of God is not in doubt. What has been seriously questioned is the nature and character of God. What is God really like? What is God's relation to the new State of Israel? Is God partial only to the Jews? Is this a God of justice and peace? …The focus of these questions is the very person of God. God's character is at stake. God's integrity has been questioned.10

Palestinian Christian Munir Fasheh expresses the anguish that such questions create in his own life's story:

> I was born in Jerusalem in 1941 and was expelled along with my family from our home in 1948. Since then, our home has been inhabited by European Jews, whom I was told were 'chosen' by God to live in it, play with my toys, even eat the food we left. …What makes things more irrational is the way Western media and scholars still place the blame on 'me', the Palestinian.
>
> Many of the absurdities and hypocrisies I have had to live

> with are connected with God. It was very difficult for me as a child to reconcile two Gods in my mind; one in whose name I was expelled from my home, and the other who was revealed in the beatitudes, who is the God of the scapegoats, the persecuted, the dehumanized and the poor. Not only have I never been able to reconcile the two but, over the years, I have watched the God of the deprived and scapegoats slowly retreating and being defeated, especially within official circles, religious institutions, official media, the clergy, scholars and leaders.11

For many Christian Zionists it is clear that Munir Fasheh had to be displaced in order for the events described by the prophets to be fulfilled. In their eyes the time for human justice is over. It is now time for God to come with destructive power. So televangelist Jim Robinson can say, "'There will be no peace until Jesus comes. Any preaching of peace prior to his return is heresy. It is against the word of God. It is anti-Christ.' "12

As outrageous as such a statement seems, perhaps there is a sense in which it is true, not in historical terms but in theological terms. When the world is teeming with injustice and the offspring of injustice, despair among the powerless and impunity among the powerful, there can indeed be no peace. Here there can only be the hopeless death of the victims and the judgment of God upon the oppressors. From these depths comes the voice of the psalmist crying to God in Psalm 88:7 and 16, "Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves. …Your wrath has swept over me; your dread assaults destroy me." Reflecting on Martin Luther's understanding of these verses, Bob Bertram wrote,

> For that is the way it is with the law. "All it does is to increase sin, accuse, frighten, threaten with death, and disclose God as a wrathful Judge who damns sinners." And

> “where terror and a sense of sin, death, and the wrath of God are present, there is certainly no righteousness, nothing heavenly, and no God. …Witness that cry of misery on the cross, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ …A man who feels these things in earnest really becomes sin, death, and the curse itself’.”13

Notice the way that the experiences of both victim and perpetrator are woven into the words of the Psalmist, and then notice that at the end of Luther’s explanation “Jesus comes” to absorb and express all that human experience of vain misery and guilty condemnation in a cry from the cross. This is very biblical, as New Testament scholar Peter Walker points out:

> [A]lthough they were faced with the very same Old Testament passages as we are today, the New Testament writers did not reach a ‘Zionist’ conclusion. Instead they reached a distinctively Christian conclusion which affirmed the faithfulness of God to his ancient promises and saw these as now fulfilled, even if in an unexpected way, in the coming of Jesus.14

As Mitri Raheb explains, “The Bible, the book of the persecuted, has the crucified Lord as its centerpiece. Only from this center…can the Bible be understood and interpreted correctly.”15

If we look at this “crucified Lord,” we see that in Jesus’ time, his own beloved Jewish people were living under both external oppression and internal corruption. It was not an accident that Jesus was killed in Jerusalem and not somewhere else. “Jesus was claiming to be, in effect, the new or true temple, and…his death is to be seen as the drawing together into one of the history of Israel in her desolation, dying her death outside the walls of the city, and rising again as the beginning of the real ‘restoration’, the real return from exile… .”16

Therefore, those who are confused and in despair because so many powerful forces are arrayed against them with the message that they are not loved or wanted must take Luther's advice and wrap Christ up

> in our sins, our curse, our death, and everything evil. …The Prince of life, who died, is alive and reigns. …Therefore Christ, who is the divine Power, Righteousness, Blessing, Grace, and Life, conquers and destroys these monsters – sin, death, and the curse – without weapons or battle, in His own body and in Himself… .This circumstance, 'in Himself,' makes the duel more amazing and outstanding; for it shows that such great things were to be achieved in the one and only Person of Christ – namely, that the curse, sin, and death were to be destroyed, and that the blessing, righteousness, and life were to replace them – and that through Him the whole creation was to be renewed. …To the extent that Christ rules by His grace in the hearts of the faithful, there is no sin or death or curse. …This is the chief doctrine of the Christian faith.17

This is the advice Martin Luther gave for all who are being condemned with the Bible: "[I]f the adversaries press the Scriptures against Christ, we urge Christ against the Scriptures."18 This is why, in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the site both of the cross and of the tomb, a small stone pillar was placed and named the omphalos, Greek for "navel." Bishop Munib Younan writes,

> For Palestinian Christians, Jerusalem represents the navel of the world, symbolically located near the Holy Tomb in the Holy Sepulchre Church. Whenever we visit there, we make a point of touching this spot as a constant reminder of our place in the world. Our whole existence revolves around the belief in the crucifixion and the resurrection. It nurtures our faith that the hope of resurrection will overcome all suffering from

> injustice and oppression. The resurrection creates in us new life, revives love, promotes peace, and calls for reconciliation to live together in the land. It provides us the only lasting security, which frees us up to be witnesses, engaged fully in a pluralistic society.19

As Chris Wright explains, Jesus was understood by the gospel writers to be the fulfillment of prophecy. Jesus never points beyond himself to some future fulfillment.20 God's reign is not waiting for global warfare to end the world but has already begun among those who live in Jesus. Christian Zionism's "shift away from the Christocentric faith" worries the Middle East Council of Churches. "Jesus is de-emphasized, as is His death and Resurrection, while salvation and judgement are redefined."21 Bishop Younan writes of Christian Zionists: "They seek Christ the military general, not the Christ of the Cross. …My Christ is always the Christ of the Cross that comes to save the world freely with his precious blood… ."22

> The Christian Zionist program…[presents] a world view where the gospel is identified with the ideology of success and militarism. …[It] is, therefore a dangerous reduction of the Christian faith and one that would advance the political cause of a state or particular people at the expense of other people within God's creation, even the living church.23

The center of Christian faith is Christ, not the State of Israel. It is not one's support for the State of Israel's policies that gains salvation, but it is faith in Christ and what he has done for the world.

So as not to leave Jesus behind Munir Fasheh exercises his faith "to make sure that the God of the persecuted and the dehumanized is not defeated in our minds, hearts, actions and relationships with one another. Although this sounds like a simple act, it

requires courage, intellectual honesty, and a sense of social responsibility… .”24 By their baptisms into the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Christians share the very breath of Jesus, and begin to be conformed to his life. Their question then becomes not “How can I use my God/religion/Bible to get the result I want?” but as Lutheran pastor Ibrahim Azar asks, “How will I live here? How can I live without losing my belief? How can I make the best of this situation?”25 In Christ the politically powerless receive the power of the Holy Spirit, which is the “power of love over death, and hope over despair.”26 It is the same Spirit, “the Lord and giver of life,” who hovered over the chaos at the beginning to create the whole earth. Now the Holy Spirit creates new people as “God has reconciled Himself with the human being in Jesus Christ Incarnate.”27

As Palestinian Christians try to be salt in their own societies, they call upon Christians in other parts of the world, particularly in the United States, to help. Rifat Kassis, director of the World Council of Churches’ Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, has made a list of actions for American and European Christians to consider. It includes the following:

…

b. Help strengthen the churches’ structures and help them fulfill their mission.

c. Offer moral and financial support and encouragement to Christians with the aim of helping them remain in their home country and become authentic witnesses within society.

…

f. Visit Palestinian Christians to learn about their problems and to help them find solutions.

g. Work alongside Palestinian Christians in their attempt to rectify the misinterpretations of the Bible, especially on the part of so-called Zionist Christians.

h. Initiate and strengthen various levels of partnership with Palestinian Christians.28

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