

# Thursday Theology November 29, 2018

## Back on Track: A Refreshed Orientation for Crossings and Thursday Theology

Colleagues—or dare I say, Co-Missioners:

I'm sticking my neck out here. Readers of Thursday Theology have been greeted 932 times with the first of the above words. Ed Schroeder launched it into use when he dashed off the initial offering in this series some 19 years ago. I never asked him why he chose this term, or if he even gave much thought to it. I suspect he had in mind a primary audience of fellow theologians and former seminary students; though Ed being Ed, it wouldn't surprise me to learn that he was also addressing the countless people he had met in his second career as a tireless, peripatetic peddler of Crossings-style theology to the lay audiences it was designed for.

**AGAIN**

JESUS SAID,  
PEACE BE

**WITH YOU!**

{ **AS** }

**THE FATHER**

**HAS SENT ME,  
I AM SENDING YOU.**

**-JOHN 20:21**

After all, Lutherans at their best—Ed is often that, methinks—are at once narrowminded in the extreme and generous beyond reason. Like Paul, they will brook “no other gospel,” nor any Lord and God who isn’t Christ Crucified. And also like Paul, they know of no one for whom Christ was not crucified, nor any person trusting this who isn’t rightly called a colleague in the faith. Paul goes even further and calls them “brothers,” a term that pops up at least 110 times in the letters that all agree

are authentically his own. (Its comparative infrequency in Ephesians and Colossians would be a strong point in the argument that someone else wrote these.) So extreme is Paul's generosity, by the way, that he even wraps this masculine term around the women in those first-century congregations he's writing to, implying by context that all brotherly prerogatives—"Are you kidding?" say the guys—are theirs as well; or so it seems to this reader.

Now as with most creatures, Lutherans are rarely at their best. Over the past five centuries it's been all too easy to find us slipping into a narrowmindedness of a false, ungenerous sort, the kind that screams not Paul, but Old Adam. Distinctions erased by Christ start once again to matter, and all too deeply. Of sinners, some are better, some worse, and a few beyond redemption—or so we pretend. Of saints and brothers, some are agents of the Gospel and others mere consumers. The former have degrees or clerical collars or appear somewhere on a list of professional church workers. They get to be called colleagues. The rest, "merely" baptized, trudge through their days on someone's secular payroll. The collared crowd call them "the laity." Some take to regarding them as minions of sorts. I've witnessed that foolishness. I've sinned it too, I'm sure.

Crossings, as it happens, was established in the 1980s with the baptized laity precisely in mind. The assumption was that all too many are under-tutored for the task of letting one's light so shine (Matt. 5:16) in the places and venues people occupy from Monday to Saturday. The aim was to remedy this by passing along some serious theological tools that would help them hone their confessional skills and put Christ's benefits to work no matter when or where they found themselves. So much for good intentions. There came a point when the leadership of Crossings passed necessarily from the founders, Ed and the late Bob Bertram, to a corps of others, the majority of whom, like me,

were pastors and preachers with full time jobs and a fair amount of interest in what others would regard as theological arcana. (See, for example, “third use of the law,” aka *tertius usus legis* when we really wanted to flash our stuff.) What followed were fifteen years of thinking that our limited time would best be spent by trying to talk to other professionals—you know, the “real” colleagues. The concept here was a theological version of trickle-down economics: infect the preachers with a notion of what the Gospel is, and perhaps a drop or two will start to reach the folks they’re preaching to. It turned out, naturally, to be a bad idea, for reasons I’ll address some other time. The point for now is that the current leadership at Crossings has abandoned it.

This happened formally at our annual board meeting in late August. Crossings has been invigorated this year with a few fresh leaders, in particular our executive-directing team of Candice Wassell and Sherman Lee. Both are grievously part-time—and both are mocking those time constraints with their energy and imagination. Together they primed the board to deliver a once-and-for-all response to that still dangling question: who is our primary audience going forward? Answer: the thoughtful laity, people knowingly engaged in the mission of Christ—“as the Father has sent me, so I send you”—who are itching for tools that will burnish their faith, refresh their spirits, and crack open God’s word as a gift to use and employ while they go about their days as baptized infiltrators of a sinful, dying world.

Again, much more on this at some point soon. In the meantime, I pass along what is suddenly an official statement of what Crossings is about: *“Equipping the baptized for their indispensable role as agents of and witnesses to the Gospel.”* Sherman Lee calls this our new elevator speech. He has tried it out, he says, on people he knows who have little to do with

church, and they all get it. They like it too. It sounds attractive, they say.

The challenge now is for our collared content-creators to get it as well, and to proceed accordingly. That means a shift of sorts also for Thursday Theology, signaled by today's introducing term: "Co-missioners" as replacement for "Colleagues." It's there in the first place as a reminder to yours truly—old flesh hanging around my neck too, as Luther puts it—that he's committed henceforth to editing and writing for an audience much wider than people who attended seminaries. (Thus reminded, an immediate note: "old flesh" is Luther's term for the predisposition we were born with to be cramped and narrowminded in that false, ungenerous way.)

"Co-missioner" also cuts to the heart of what all of us were baptized for: to wake up every morning in this old, familiar world of sin and death under the Spirit's commission to spend the next many hours as living advertisements of a new, unusual world that, thanks to Christ, is already in the making. Hence "We Do Crazy," as in turning cheeks, loving enemies, forgiving sins, etc.

Thursday Theology going forward will focus squarely on explicating this everyday Christian "crazy" with constant attention to the death and resurrection of the One who authorizes it. For his sake we'll also be sure to fuss and fume when we spot his 21st century servants, ourselves included, settling for less-than-crazy. You can expect us, of course, to continue doing this through the confessional perspective of the diehard Lutheran who insists that God keeps speaking two words into our ears, hearts and lives, the Law on the one hand, the Gospel on the other. Our driving objective throughout will be to help our lay readers catch this; and if some preachers catch it too, then God be praised. But first the laity.

*“EQUIPPING THE BAPTIZED FOR THEIR  
INDISPENSABLE ROLE AS AGENTS OF  
AND WITNESSES TO THE GOSPEL.”*

This does not mean that Thursday Theology is about to be “dumbed down.” An assumption that writing primarily for the laity might require this is obnoxious on its face. We will still take it for granted that most everyone who bothers to work through a Thursday Theology post will have gone to college and likes to think. What we’ll avoid if we can help it is the shoptalk of the seminary nerd, the one who gets a tingle from those delicious Latin phrases. In my own contributions I’ll do my best to practice a lesson I learned long ago learned, that down-to-earth language is the vat that brews the clearest thought.

Finally, our aim—not for the first time—is to get Thursday Theology back on track as a regular weekly offering. To that end we’ve started pulling together a team of occasional yet regular contributors. As ongoing editor, I’ll introduce them to you as they start appearing. Each has a specialty and a particular interest, this one in current thinking about mission, another in reviewing books, yet another in spotting the theological themes that pop up so frequently in cultural artifacts like movies or TV shows. And so forth. Now and then we’ll post a good sermon. Every so often we’ll point to you to a gem that lies buried and all but forgotten in the Crossings online library. I’ll continue too as a regular writer, challenging myself for the time being to crank out two original contributions a month. One will be an essay on the intersection of Law-and-Gospel theology with the everyday realities of life in either church or world or both. The other will likely focus on twists, turns, and items of other interest in the texts that most all us will be encountering at



church on coming Sundays. We'll see how that goes.

In one other change, perhaps subtle yet significant, I plan from now on to step into the shadows of editorial anonymity. The one who wishes peace and joy to all who read won't be Burce, but the Crossings Community; and whether it was me or someone else who pushed out what you're reading is something you'll never quite be sure of. I will own only what I write. The rest will be a gift from the community as a whole. This said, if something you encounter provokes a comment or complaint, keep pushing these my way. The address is [jburce@att.net](mailto:jburce@att.net).

A closing thought: for the last few years, Thursday Theology posts received by email have featured a tag line: "That the benefits of Christ be put to use." The phrase is so ingrained in me by now that it leaks easily into my prose. See above, paragraph four. It uses old Lutheran language of 500 years ago to summarize what today's Crossings enterprise is about. I'll be very glad if we can keep this in front of you for a while as a supplement to our new elevator speech. The latter is less opaque in 21st century ears, though if you know the old lingo, the former is sharper, more pointed.

The point is this: we are all of us sent and sent together—commissioned; *missus summus* in that lovely old Latin—to spend the inexhaustible riches that God keeps adorning us with through the agency of his Son. May the material you encounter here going forward incite the holy spendthrift in you and drive you to encourage it in others. God grant.

Peace and Joy,  
Jerry Burce

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**Thursday Theology: that the benefits of Christ be put to use**

# No “Mission” in Luther? A Re-examination (Part 1 of 3)

Colleagues,

Advent is upon us, thrusting the world into a fresh year in the unfolding regime of the crucified and risen Son of God—another *Annus Domini*, as stubborn Christ-folk will continue to put it. In my own [idiosyncratic take on the season](#), Advent is first and foremost a time for baptized travelers to pull off at the scenic overlook, get out of the car, and spend a while drinking in the view. On the far horizon are the shadowy peaks of our ultimate destination. God will use Isaiah in particular to sketch these out for us during our next few weeks at church. Immediately below, and stretching into the distance, is the great jumble of country between here and there, some of it pleasant, some not so much. Death traps abound. Somewhere out there is the one that I’ll be falling into. “So what?” says Christ. “Take a fresh grip on that cross of yours. Fall in line. And on the way down the hill, hit the gas in the fearless confidence that with me in front you will reach those far off heights where babies play with snakes, lambs gambol with wolves, tables groan with the weight of the feast, and the Father waits with arms wide open to welcome his children home.”

Thus Advent, or so I think. And in so thinking I’m inclined as a preacher to spend at least some of the season talking “mission,” pointing eyes to that messy, broken terrain at the bottom of the



hill. That's where we live. It's where God dispatches his saints, week upon week, from the hillocks of their Sunday liturgies, Christ in front, the Holy Spirit behind to push them into the work and witness that awaits them there. The proper name for this terrain is "mission field." The question, as ever, is what to say about it. In the wider Christian world, rumor has it that serious Lutherans are ill-equipped to say much about mission at all. As Ed Schroeder will point out in today's chief offering, Luther is thought to have been "mission-deficient." Ed, of course, will dispute that. In doing so he'll dredge up a welter of ideas that the rest of us can put to use as we think, pray, listen, and proclaim between now and Christmas.

This will be the third opus in a row that I send your way with Ed as either author or translator. Like the prior two, it comes to you in segments, the theory being that 2000 or so words are enough for one sitting. Much more, and eyes start glazing. Or so one suspects in this era of information overload.

The genesis of this piece was a semester-long stint that Ed spent as scholar-in-residence at [OMSC](#)—the Overseas Ministries Study Center—in New Haven, Connecticut. The year was 2002. Some months later he presented his research to a little group of like-minded thinkers that Bob Bertram had pulled together around the theme of "Setting the Agenda for Lutheran Theology." That's what you're reading here.

Mission, Ed argues, is high on that Lutheran agenda. I hasten to add that you'll hear much more along those lines at the forthcoming [Crossings conference](#), in Belleville, Illinois, at the end of next month. Our focus is the mission field of 2018 that God will send us into as sturdy bearers of the Gospel, and nothing less than Gospel. You haven't signed up yet? I pray you do!

Peace and Joy,  
Jerry Burce

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## **Luther's Theology of Mission**

by Edward H. Schroeder

### **Introduction.**

#### **Are Missions Missing in Luther's Theology? The Accepted Wisdom in Missiology Says Yes.**

Lutheran churches did not move actively into "foreign" mission work in the wake of the Reformation era nor in the next two centuries that followed. This delay has nourished the widespread opinion that in Luther—and other 16th-century Lutheran reformers (and John Calvin too)—"we miss not only missionary action, but even the idea of missions, in the sense in which we understand them today. And this...because fundamental theological views hindered them from giving their activity, and even their thoughts, a missionary direction." So says Gustav Warneck in his *History of Protestant Missions*, 1882ff. [Citation from the 1901 English translation, p.9]

Warneck's work was itself a critical response to other Lutheran mission scholars of his day (Ostertag, Plitt, Kalkar) who claimed the opposite for Luther. But, as far as I know, Warneck's work was the only one that got translated into English. And English is the language of missiology. So his judgment has become the accepted wisdom of the trade.

Many reasons have been adduced to explain this:

- The massive task of organizing church life throughout large areas of Europe where the Reformation took hold demanded all the time and energy they had.
- Very few of the Lutheran territories had direct access to international waters and thus did not acquire overseas colonies to raise the mission issue.
- By contrast, Spain and Portugal ("Roman Catholic" nations) became worldwide colonial powers, opening the doors to Roman Catholic mission activity and mission theology.

Also internal factors get mentioned:

- Luther expected Judgment Day to arrive soon, perhaps still in his lifetime, and was convinced that the Gospel already had come to all nations, so no mission operations were needed.
- It was also said that early Lutheranism understood Christ's mission mandate (Matt. 28 and Mark 16) to apply only to the apostles, not to the entire church, and consequently no one should engage in evangelization without explicit call and authorization.

Warneck's critique goes deeper:

"The great reformer did not see the mission task of the church. Luther did require and encourage the 'spirit of witnessing,' but not really the 'spirit of mission.' Within Christendom he himself missionized with 'demonstrations of the Spirit and of power,' but mission to the non-Christian world was far from his mind and from that of his coworkers."

Why this defect? "The missing impulse for mission comes largely from an error in Lutheran theology, namely, (1) a biased notion of eschatology, [and] (2) a defect in the doctrine of the Kingdom of God. These flaws are understandable (and excusable) partly from Luther's personality, partly from the conflicts

going on at the time, partly from the justifiable polemics about justification which nevertheless led to *a much too exclusive focus on that doctrine.*" [13f., emphasis added.]

After noting that Luther thought the mission mandate already fulfilled, Warneck says: "This startling view becomes in some degree intelligible when we further learn that the Reformer does not understand the progress of the Gospel through the whole world in the sense that Christianity would become everywhere the *ruling religion*, or that all men would be won to believe the Gospel." [1906 English translation, p. 13, emphasis added.]

Those are hefty criticisms.

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## **Revisiting the Accepted Wisdom: Exploring Luther for Mission Themes**

Luther himself could well have missed the mission message in the scriptures. But if he was indeed the trustworthy witness to the Gospel, as the later Lutheran confessions call him, is it likely that he could be right about the evangel, and yet miss the element of evangelization intrinsic to it? Given Luther's intense wrestling with the theology of St. Paul, the "apostle to the Gentiles," how could he have missed the missiology in Paul's theology? If he did talk about the Great Commission, and he did, what did he say?

### **1. Luther's Preaching on the Great Commission Text of Mark's Gospel**

One place to look for "Luther on Mission" is the sermons Luther preached year after year on the Feast of the Ascension. Why those sermons? The text for that festival—year after year in the medieval church's lectionary—was Mark 16:14-20, the Great Commission pericope in Mark's Gospel. It reads:

Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.

Luther's sermons on this text—I found twelve (from 1522 to 1538) in the Weimar edition of Luther's Works—contain mission theology aplenty. Warneck knew these sermons too. He cites them often. But they didn't satisfy him for the reasons mentioned above. We shall look at three of them here. This Markan Ascension Day text provides a context for Christ's "GO" word that Matthew 28 does not have. Luther makes heavy use of that context, viz.,

- the disciples' initial lack of faith, "not believing those who saw him after he had risen,"
- Christ's faith-codicil to the commission "who believes and is baptized will be saved,"
- the ascended Lord as the mission commissioner, and finally
- the baptism addendum and the addendum about signs and wonders.

## **1. The Ascension Day Sermon of 1522**

In the 1522 sermon he says: "What should they proclaim? Nothing less, says Christ, than that I am raised from the dead, have conquered and wiped away sin and all misery. Whoever believes this is saved (*selig*). That faith alone suffices for salvation... Faith does not coerce or pressure anyone to the gospel, rather it invites and encourages everyone freely. Whoever believes, believes. Whoever comes to it, comes. Whoever stays away, stays away."

How shall we understand the words: Go into all the world? What concerns Luther is the fact that the "apostles did not get to the whole world. For no apostle ever got to us in Germany." In view of what he knows about the recently-discovered New World [Note: Luther was nine years old in 1492], he says: "many islands have been discovered in our own time, where unbelievers live and no one has ever preached to them." Doesn't that contradict the scriptural word that Luther knows from Romans 10:18, where Paul (citing Psalm 19:5) testifies "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the end of the world"? How to reconcile this with the plain fact that there are vast places where neither the holy apostles nor anyone up to Luther's time has ever proclaimed the gospel? Luther answers: "The message has gone out into all the world, although it has not yet arrived in all the world. The transmission has begun, but is not yet finished. It will be preached wider and further until the Last Day. When this message is proclaimed and heard throughout all the world, then the last day will arrive."

Luther sees three facts: 1) The Holy Apostles began the proclamation in response to Christ's mandate to bring this message to all peoples. 2) The movement of the Gospel throughout the world is not at all concluded, but persists and moves forward. 3) The Gospel's continuing movement is linked to the day of Christ's return. Luther illustrates this "mission theology" with the image of a stone tossed into a pond.



“The message of the Gospel is like a stone cast into water. It makes waves and the waves push outward relentlessly, one pushing the other, until they come to the shoreline. Even when the middle calms down, the waves do not stop, but go on and on. That illustrates Gospel proclamation. The apostles started it and it continues in ever widening circles through other proclaimers. Hounded and persecuted though it may be, it moves on to those who have not heard it before, even when in the process it is crushed and condemned as heresy.”

Luther then offers another illustration. Even worldly rulers send proclamations throughout their entire territory, but it takes time before the messengers get that proclamation to all parts of the realm. “This is how we should understand apostolic preaching,” he says. Such preaching is a public event, not done “in a corner.” “Universal and public throughout the whole world, not to be kept away from anyone, till the end of the world comes.” “Thus the gospel has now come to us as well, us here at the end of the world, at the edge of that pond.” Here Luther shows that he sees himself and his fellow Germans, now enlivened by the revived Gospel, as part of the expanding waves of that original stone cast into the pond and now rippling through the world and hastening toward the Last Day.

Some additional context items in the 1522 sermon:

### ***The factor of faith***

The Ascension text begins with Christ upbraiding the disciples for their un-faith in his resurrection. Not that they needed one more item to believe in and thus be full-believers. But faith in the resurrection is fundamental to being out from under the power / curse of sin. Un-faith is the greatest sin there is. *[Der Unglaube ist die größte Sünd, die da mag genannt werden.]*

(134) Not that the disciples had no faith in God, but without faith in the resurrection they were still in their sin. And if Christ be not raised, then sin is still in charge and any believer is still in sin.

But faith here is not believing THAT it happened—the wicked, Satan too, believe that. (137) “Rather they must believe the content of the resurrection, the fruit, the benefit of the resurrection. Namely, what we have received from it, forgiveness and redemption from all sins, and that Christ has gone into death and thereby sin and death, yes everything that could harm us, is gone. All this he has conquered, trampled under foot, conquering sin, devil, death, hell and whatever could harm us, and therefore he sits at the right hand of the Father. That all of this happened for our benefit, that is what unbelievers don’t believe.” (138)

To the passage: The one who believes is saved, he says: The “head” [*Haupt*] of righteousness is faith, as the head of wickedness is un-faith. There is no greater sin that might condemn [*verdammen*] a person than that. For un-faith alone is what condemns every one who is condemned. As corollary, it is only faith that saves all humankind, for faith deals only with God. (141)

Believe and be baptized, yes, but only un-faith condemns. Baptism is the seal on the letter. Faith in the resurrection and thus freedom from sin, etc. is the writing on the letter. Baptism without faith is a seal on a letter that has no writing in / on it. (142)

### ***Preaching the Gospel to the whole creation***□

“The rocks and trees too? Here’s what those words mean: the Gospel is a universal public announcement that is meant for everyone, is not done in a corner, but should be proclaimed

openly in every place.... It arose and had its start through the apostles, but is not yet complete, has not yet come to all the places it is meant to come. In fact, I wonder whether Germany ever heard God's word before. We have indeed heard the pope's word. That is true." (143f)

### ***Signs and Wonders***□

Mark's gospel concludes with Christ's word about the signs that will accompany the proclamation of the Gospel. Since the Gospel is now widespread, signs are not necessary as they once were in the early days. But the time may come when they are in order again. That will be a signal of the dire state of the Gospel then and ML hopes it won't come. Some people are driving out demons and Luther says, "I don't know what to say about that." [*weiß ich nit was ich dartzu sagen sol.*] This he knows, however, "that it is dangerous. For the devil may allow exorcisms, but he can be deceptive even then. He may be confirming people in their error that they have power over him. I wouldn't trust him. We have many examples of this these days. I know about a number of them that happened not long ago." (146) And then he concludes with an incident where a "church warden" seeking to practice exorcism wound up with the devil breaking his neck.

#### **1. The Ascension Day Sermon of 1523**

##### ***The message must be spoken out loud!***

Luther again preaches on the lectionary text. This time he accentuates the Gospel's quality as something not written in books, but an oral announcement from public messengers sent by God: "A palpable proclamation to be heard throughout the world to be shouted out before all creatures, so that all who have ears would have to hear it." He also emphasizes its public character, "preached in such a way that it could not be more public for everyone to hear." He contrasts it with the ancient

law and what the prophets preached, “restricted only to the Jews in their synagogues. The Gospel however is not to be restricted at all, but moves out unfettered throughout the world, so that no corner of the earth shall not have heard it before the Last Day. That is God’s decree, his decision, that those who cannot read, nor have heard Moses and the prophets, are still to hear the Gospel.”

### ***The earthly activity of the ascended Lord***

The Gospel’s ongoing ripple-effect, says Luther, is the work of Christ now exalted to the right hand of the Father. Christ’s ascension does not mean that he has moved away. Rather just the opposite: now he is present and accessible in all places. “For had he remained on earth...all people could not have been equally near him and able to hear him. Therefore he initiates a new way whereby he can work with everyone, reign in all, proclaim to all, and all of us can hear him and he be with all of us.”

*To be continued...*

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## **Easter Mission in 2017 (A Homily by Martin Lohrmann)**

Colleagues,

This Sunday, the Second of Easter, we hear the first conclusion of St. John’s Gospel in the unabashed confession of Thomas: “My Lord and my God!” This strikes as an excellent time to pass along a contribution I got in late January from Martin Lohrmann, who teaches Reformation history and theology at Wartburg

Seminary. Martin recently served a term on the Crossing Board of Directors. He sent the homily he delivered on January 18 at the seminary's Wednesday Eucharist. The church's calendar sets that day aside to remember the Confession of St. Peter. One of the texts appointed for the day, Acts 4:8-13, is also a classic Easter season text, reverberating with the joy and grit that Thomas erupts with. Here's how Martin underscored that for his students and colleagues, and now for you.

Peace and Joy,

Jerry Burce

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### **A Homily on the Confession of Peter**

Texts: Acts 4:8-13 & Matthew 16:13-19

by Martin Lohrmann, Ph.D.

Wartburg Seminary

Dubuque, Iowa

In the name of Christ our Lord. Amen

In the first chapter of Acts, the crucified and risen Christ spent forty days with the disciples before ascending into heaven and vanishing from their sight. Death could not hold him, but apparently heaven would. In that way, Jesus' ascension might have seemed like a mixed blessing: he was victorious over death, but it doesn't seem like he's here among us any longer, either.

Both the crucifixion and ascension can seem to have left abiding absences. But Jesus was not remotely finished with his followers or with the world. Through the Holy Spirit, the disciples themselves brought Jesus' holy grace, truth, healing and

resurrection to this broken creation. They started in Jerusalem, a capital city well acquainted with mock justice, mob violence and cynical power plays. The disciples then went to Samaria, heartland of the culturally and spiritually impure. Then they went out to all the lost, forgotten, conquered and conquering peoples of this earth to share Christ's truth and life. Jesus was not remotely absent. Death could not hold him. Heaven does not hide him away from us, either. Crucified, risen, ascended: he is God with us still.

In the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter and John kept on doing what Jesus taught them to do. They kept being the people Jesus freed them to be. They taught spiritually hungry crowds, they gave the good news of resurrection in Christ to jaded souls, and they cared for sick and forgotten people. And they had a great time doing it: the gospel really is good news! By Acts chapter 4, these kind deeds and good tidings of great joy got them arrested for the first time.

In their trial, Peter and John talked with confidence about this good news for all people: Jesus Christ changes lives. When the ruler and elders heard this, what really astounded them was not the miraculous healing or heavenly message. It was the fact that ordinary people were doing the things of God. If ordinary people are doing holy things, then there's no stopping it. As the text says, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus" (Acts 4:13). That's what Jesus did then and what he does now: he brings the great things of God to ordinary lives. And this is unstoppable.

In the power of the Holy Spirit, we get to be part of this gospel. We receive this new life of grace and truth and apply it to ourselves. We share the power of Christ when we care for sick and forgotten people, because Jesus came not for those who are



well (or who think they are well) but for those who need help. We share this good news when we teach that God desires mercy, not sacrifice. These days—with Christ—we get to be people of truth and love in an openly post-truth culture where love mostly means self-satisfaction. In such a world, Jesus frees us to care, serve, listen, share, receive and enjoy life as ordinary broken people blessed to see and experience holiness everywhere. This is gospel truth; it is a Way of Life with a capital W and capital L. It is the wonderful Way of Jesus Christ.

Christ's power and goodness are ours simply by trusting him, by receiving him through faith alone. Faith means knowing in our hearts, bearing in our bodies, breathing with our breath that Jesus Christ is Lord. With Peter we confess: "You are the messiah, the Son of the living God." We reclaim this confession ourselves today and every day as the foundation for life that neither death, nor the gates of hell, nor even our own cynicism can shake.

What does this confession of faith look like in practice? I ask this because anyone can say that they are taking a stand for faith or truth. It's an easy thing to say and believe about one's own perspective. And then there's the question of whether we can even know what is true and good. "What is truth, anyways?" asked Pontius Pilate as he sanctioned the execution of the holy one of God. How do we know which confessional stands or prophetic stances are gospel truth?

Faced with such real questions, the Spirit has not left us empty. First, we notice that in Acts 4 Peter and John weren't speaking abstractly about God, truth or goodness when they got arrested. They were simply doing what Jesus' people always do: worshiping God, talking with people about God's grace in Christ, and caring for the sick. These holy things don't change. The gospel isn't abstract. It's something to be experienced, lived

and shared. So that's one way we know gospel truth is we ourselves have received this good news and can talk about the difference it makes.

Second, when it comes to faithful stands and prophetic speech, the cross remains our guide. We can ask: do our words point people to a self-emptying Lord, who desires mercy not sacrifice for this broken world, who came to find the lost, save sinners, and give godliness to the ungodly? If so, then we're on the right road. And we can ask: do our lives have their starting point in the foundational trust that God is at work to save, heal and redeem, even when such healing and salvation seems impossibly far away? We know our Lord through the cross. To this end, we pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us in the life-giving way of the cross one day at a time.

Jesus Christ is life and truth. Death could not hold him and heaven does not hide him away from us. Crucified, risen, and ascended: Jesus Christ is God with us still, bringing the great things of God to ordinary people. Amen

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# **Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Epistle, Year A**

SEEKING GOD'S WISDOM

1 Corinthians 2:1-12 [13-16]

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Analysis by Michael Hoy

1When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom.

2For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. 4My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. 6Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. 7But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8None of the rulers of this age understand this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him" – 10these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is only God's except the Spirit of God. 12Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. [13And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. 14Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. 16"For who has known the mind of the Lord, so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.]

DIAGNOSIS: False Wisdom and Bad Intelligence

Step One: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Seeking Wisdom in All the Wrong Places

There are plenty of sages out there. You could find them in

abundance in a city like Corinth. And people were tuning in and listening to what it is they were selling. Some of the messages of these sages permeated the church, and not everything these sages were selling was the gospel (who wants something so pure and simple as that?). Our cities and places today are not without that kind of human sophistry that can captivate our eyes and ears. And obviously, we haven't tired too much of buying what it is they are selling, even if it is not really good for us. Paul lifts up how this human wisdom it is also readily being sold by "the rulers of this age" (v. 6). Hmm. And that kind of consumerism is as popular now as it was in Corinth.

#### Step Two: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Foolishness

We have not only let this poison slip in through our eyes and ears (v. 9), but it finds a way to poison our brains and hearts and soul. We may not even realize it. It is that "foolishness", a failure to "understand" or "discern" anymore what is good for us (v. 14), that becomes our faith. And the heart continues to cling to that which it thinks of as godly, and can never get enough of, even as our whole being is weighed down by its burden.

#### Step Three: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Doomed to Perish

Where does it all end? There is an ending. It ends with perishing. And that may be our own personal perishing (in death, which shows its ugly face up all along the buying-and-selling journey); and it may also be our perishing as a whole (for which we are getting increasingly planetary evidence). But it will end. And we can count on God to make sure of it, whether we buy that or not.

#### PROGNOSIS: True Wisdom and Good News

#### Step Four: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): The Power/Wisdom of the Cross

The cross of Christ, however, gives us a no-less-real but alternate ending to this madness of doom. Here, Jesus the Christ makes our ending his own, not simply as one among countless millions, but in order to put an end to the ending-of us! Death will not have the last word for our being! This cross is the “power of God” and “wisdom of God” (v. 5; cf. 1:24) to overcome the final verdict of the end.

#### Step Five: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Faith Resting on This

Even in the nickel-words of St. Paul who knew he was never as eloquent as others (v. 1), faith comes to rest on this promise (v. 5). This faith grasps the power that God gives, through the Spirit of God, who continues to nurture us and feeds us back to health through the faithful proclamation of the gospel and sacraments. Through faith we find our souls restored. We get to have the “mind of Christ” (v. 16) given to us as a gift that helps us “discern” and “understand” where before that was never possible. What ends here is the cycle of being burned out pursuing human wisdom, as we lay our burdens down at Christ’s cross.

#### Step Six: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Living Wisdom for All in the Wrong Places

What we get to do is share the promise with others. The sages of Christ, who may seem “foolish” to the world (1:20-25), have something not to sell but to give away—as a free gift, even as it was given to them. To be sure, there are plenty of people in all the wrong places and cities and dwellings who have been looking for wisdom; but what they get in Christ and ourselves as living wisdom of his promise is a gift for which they, with us, may cherish the best “mystery” (musterion) of all in the witness (marturion) of all in God’s promising, free, freeing, good news (v. 1).

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# “Will No One Have the Guts to be a Sinner?” –Preface and Ur-text

*Colleagues,*

- 1. The congregation I serve is going to celebrate the Reformation this coming Sunday. So will lots of other Lutheran churches in the U.S., and elsewhere too. Whether and how joyfully they do it will depend heavily on their pastors' opinions about the merits of what happened in 1517 and thereafter, and, more to the point, about the value of a distinct and vivid Lutheran identity for the mission of Christ in the world of 2015. There's dispute about this in most every U.S. Lutheran camp today, whatever its cultural leaning, to the right as well as the left. For her part, the ELCA's Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton knows value when she sees it. Ever since her election two years ago she's been working hard to shove some steel up the Lutheran spines of her large, unruly flock. [Her latest effort along these lines](#) appeared a week or two ago in the October issue of *The Lutheran*. You'll want to read it if you haven't yet. May it whet your appetite for things that follow here.*
- 2. From the solemn to the silly: [Old Lutheran](#) is an enterprise that peddles sub-cultural kitsch, chiefly via the Internet, from its base in Moorhead, Minnesota. They used email this Monday to push their latest product, a zinfandel from the Borra Vineyard of Lodi, California, available in “limited supply,” which is simply to say,*



“Buy today!” The wine’s label? You guessed it: [Zin Boldly](#), the words broadly emblazoned over a representation of Luther’s seal. The attending ad copy includes the famous dictum, Luther to Melanchthon: “Sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly...” So sin with zin, shall we? It would be churlish, I suppose, not to chuckle over this, at least a little; though if we failed to grind our teeth when the chuckle died away—that, I’m sure, would be foolish.

3. Better still if we grind our teeth a lot. I submit on this eve of the Reformation’s 498th anniversary that Luther’s heirs have lost their grip, if ever they had one, on his key anthropological insight. Having done so, they’re trashing Christ, damaging the Church, and cheating neighbors of the Gospel God wants them to hear. One sees this going on at the close, personal level of interactions within a congregation. One sees it just as vividly in the operations of our church bodies. When we’re forced by time or circumstance to flash our deepest convictions, we prove over and over that we’re Lutheran in name only. Scrape away the label, and you’ll find a simmering Calvinist, a frothing “evangelical,” here and there a bit of closet [Tridentine](#)Catholic. OK, I’m exaggerating—though not as much as I wish I were. What does it say about us when the most we’re willing to make of Luther at his best and most distinctive is a little joke for insiders on a bottle of wine?
4. This is, of course, a weighty charge, too weighty by far to deal with in a single post. So what I send today is nothing more than a preface for some posts to come, two or three of them at least, maybe more. They’ll arrive in serial form under the title the present post bears: “Will no one have the guts to be a sinner?” This, I’ll argue, is the question of the hour that Lutherans ought to be

pressing for the sake of a church and a world that keeps tearing itself to pieces in the sinner's mad, incessant quest to be deemed righteous on one's own account. We Lutherans are by no means strangers to this madness, nor can we be; though were we serious about the astonishing gifts of faith and insight that the Holy Spirit surfaced through Luther and his colleagues, we'd be able at least to spot the madness, and name it, and struggle against it. I, for one, see little or none of that going on among us. Struggles there are, and in grievous abundance; but they're invariably of the kind the madness itself induces, where the fight boils down to who is right and who is wrong, woe to the latter, bennies to the former, Christ-for-us-all being more or less beside the point. Christ always lands in the trash when sinners refuse to own their sin. He's gotten far too familiar of late with Lutheran dumpsters—or again, so I plan to argue.

5. I've been stewing on this for some years now, ever since the fellow walked into my office to say that he couldn't come to communion because that would mean communing with a sinful church. I'll tell that story when I launch the first episode. For now I merely point to it as the slap in the face that got the wheels churning. Around that time I stumbled by sheer accident across an incidental bit in the massive corpus of Luther's output—however did the man manage to get all this on paper?—where he says something about sin that took me by surprise. It seemed blithe and cavalier. I could think of no one else who had dared in my hearing or reading to talk that way. The wheels turned faster. Not long after my title emerged. I mean that question about having “the guts to be a sinner.” I wrestled for a time with “the guts.” It's crude. It sounds careless. “The nerve” would be less offensive. But then it occurred to me how guts are

featured in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus has them, and in a double sense, not only the English one of "courage," but also in the New Testament Greek conception, where churning bowels are a signal of pity and compassion. So gutsy Jesus sits with sinners, and feeds them, and is crucified for them; and in and through all this, God "[is making] him to be sin who knew no sin," as Paul describes it (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus being sinner-for-us was, first to last, about God-in-Christ having the guts to get the job done. It still is. "Receive the Holy Spirit...", Jesus said. I got this far in my thinking and returned to my original title. If it scrapes and offends, so be it.

6. Back to Luther. The line about sin that startled me some time ago was not the famous one that Old Lutheran abused for its wine label. I heard about "sin boldly" in my seminary days. The same was true, I'm sure, for all my classmates, though we caught it in passing, and few if any took the time to track down the source and read it in context. Had we done so we might have noticed, already then, how flagrant Luther gets in his recognition of sin as a condition we're obliged to face, admit, accept, and, with Christ in view, to live with more or less cheerfully. It may be that some or many of you have yet to see the passage, so I pass it along as this year's Reformation gift, though also as a key piece of grounding for the reflections to come. The date is August 1, 1521, barely two months since Charles V issued the [Edict of Worms](#), making Luther an outlaw. Luther, then, is holed up in the Wartburg Castle. Even so he's both receiving and responding to a stream of reports and letters from Wittenberg. The latest news is about two disputations that his colleague Karlstadt has undertaken, one about whether priests, monks, and nuns can abandon vows and get married, and the other about making the sacrament

available to the laity in both kinds, wine as well as bread. It's with these in mind that Luther now writes to Philip Melanchthon. After propounding his current views in both matters, he swings abruptly to the following, behind which must surely lie a pastoral concern for a friend who is staring at the challenge of advocating moves that others will denounce loudly as wicked and sinful. "Break a vow? Are you kidding?" Says Luther:

If you are a preacher of grace, then preach a true and not a fictitious grace; if grace is true, you must bear a true and not a fictitious sin. God does not save people who are only fictitious sinners. **Be a sinner** and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly, for he is victorious over sin, death, and the world. As long as we are here [in this world] **we have to sin. This life is not the dwelling place of righteousness** but, as Peter says, we look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. It is enough that by the riches of God's glory we have come to know the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world. **No sin will separate us from the Lamb, even though we commit fornication and murder a thousand times a day.** Do you think that the purchase price that was paid for the redemption of our sins by so great a Lamb is too small? Pray boldly—you too are a mighty sinner. (Letters I, Volume 48 of Luther's Works, American Edition, p. 281- 282; emphases added.)

7. This was radical stuff. It still is. I can't help but think that had Luther said these things at the Diet of Worms under the grilling of John Eck, he'd have been clapped in irons on the spot and burned at the stake the next day. I'm pretty sure that were someone to talk like this in today's Lutheran assemblies without mentioning

*Luther as source, he or she would be shown the door, and that right smartly.*

*But more on this in coming weeks or months, though not immediately. We have some fresh work from Ed Schroeder that awaits your perusal. Look for a first installment of that two weeks from now.*

*Peace and Joy,  
Jerry Burce*

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## **On Christian Obedience: A Homiletical “Aha!”**

Colleagues,

Many of us will be bumping into the word ‘obedience’ this Sunday. It’s featured heavily in the section of Romans 6 that the Revised Common Lectionary designates as the day’s Second Reading (Year A, Proper 8). Whether it also shows up in the sermons we preach or listen to will depend on the preacher’s willingness to tackle the topic. And yes, ‘tackle’ is the appropriate verb here. Obedience is not high on the list of favorite concepts in the wider culture that shapes us these days; and if the preacher is a Lutheran, then there’s that pesky business that our thinkers have been squabbling over since the sixteenth century, a set of questions packaged under the rubric, “Third Use of the Law.” Question One: is there such a use, or is there not? Or, in terms that plain people might employ, do the Ten Commandments have a positive role to play in the

conversation that ensues when Jesus-trusters start sorting out what to do with their trust? More sharply, do they define the “new obedience” that our trust in Christ gives rise to? Werner Elert said no. His student, Ed Schroeder, has echoed that ‘no’ consistently over the decades. Even so, heads have bumped over “third use” in the brief history of our own Crossings Community. Take that as a sign of how stubborn a question this is.

Fiercer by far was the head-bumping that happened in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod of the sixties and seventies, “third use” being but one of the issues in contention, and a derivative one at that. Still, it came up, and fairly frequently, with epithets of “legalist” and “antinomian” being hurled back and forth between contenders. Among those caught in the tumult of the day was one Richard Jungkuntz. (I write it that way for those of you who haven’t heard of him.) Jungkuntz taught New Testament at Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, now located in Fort Wayne. He was also the first executive secretary of the Missouri Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations. The 1969 election of Jacob A. O. Preus as president of the LCMS led speedily to his dismissal from both posts. He continued his career as provost at the American Lutheran Church’s Pacific Lutheran University, where he also served a brief stint as interim president. We’re pleased at Crossings to count his son, Rich, as a member of the community. If you’ve followed Thursday Theology these past few years, you’ll recall his occasional contributions, dispatched from the northeastern corner of Thailand that he presently calls home.

Rich recently transcribed a handwritten manuscript of one of his father’s chapel homilies at PLU. We caught wind of this and asked for permission to pass it along. The piece is striking in its serendipity. For one thing, it speaks directly to the question of the Christian’s “obedience,” and what that entails. For another, we had just been looking at another sharp piece on

the same topic, for which permission to publish could not be gotten. Jungkuntz approaches the matter from a somewhat different angle; even so, the essential point gets driven home, and very effectively. You'll want to consider this now as a touchstone for the usefulness of what you'll hear or hope to say when Sunday gets here.

And there's an added benefit. Next week we'll send you an analysis of the homily by Robert C. Schultz. Bob is a friend of Rich, and recalls Rich's father as a respected colleague. We think you'll appreciate his insights.

Peace and Joy,  
Jerry Burce, for the editorial team

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+ In Nomine Iesu +

LBW 423

"Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God." John 8:47 (RSV)

About fifteen years or so ago I attended a faculty meeting I'll never forget. Actually, it was a joint faculty conference involving some eighty theological professors from two Lutheran seminaries. One of the major presentations at that conference was given by a New Testament scholar on the topic, "The Pauline Paraenesis." Paraenesis is not some kind of disease, but just an old Greek word meaning exhortation. For instance, a typical Pauline paraenesis or exhortation would be a passage like this from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (4:4-6).

Now you notice that all the verbs in this exhortation are in the imperative mode, the mode of command. Well, the question being considered at that conference was whether such New Testament injunctions are in fact commandments in the sense of divine Law, or whether they are really just another form of the gracious Gospel, by which we learn that our sins are forgiven and that in Christ Jesus we are freed from the dictates and condemnations of God's holy Law. And it was this latter interpretation that the New Testament scholar was eloquently arguing for in his presentation.

When he finished, there was of course a vigorous discussion, with many penetrating questions being asked—all of which the presenter patiently and persuasively answered. Until at last one beady-eyed professor from the other seminary arose and said in severe and abrasive tones, "But listen here, Dr. B, it's obvious that you are completely wrong and in grievous error; after all, there have to be some moral absolutes in the Christian religion!" To which the essayist responded, "Like what, for instance?" "Like the Decalogue of Moses, sir, the Ten Commandments!" snapped back the critic. After a split-second of silence the essayist dismissed his critic's retort with a casual shrug, as he said, "Aw, shucks—not those dinky commandments?"

Well, that ended the discussion, I can tell you. For the conference immediately broke up in an uproar, with half of the professors shouting: "Heresy, heresy!" and the other half weakly claiming that maybe the essayist hadn't really meant what everyone had heard him say. This morning, however, I want to tell you, before God, that the essayist was really right; and, if I can, I'd like to try at least to explain why it's important for us to understand both what he meant and how it matters to us.

Let me begin with a little foreign language lesson (non-credit,



pass/fail). But first I want to suggest that you think of some commandment of God, or your parents, or your teacher, or your boss on a summer job, or your drill sergeant—and ask yourself what English word, verb or noun, declares the kind of response the giver of the commandment expects from you. It's the verb 'obey' isn't it? And the noun is 'obedience'.

Now here comes the foreign language lesson. In Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written, the words we translate with 'obey' and 'obedience' are υπακούω [hip-ah-koo-oh] and υπακοή [hip-ah-ko-ay]. "So what?" you say. Well, this is what: both those words come directly from the Greek verb meaning "to hear" (ακούω [ah-koo-oh]). So when you read in your New Testament the English translation 'obey' or 'obedience', you really should think, not about capitulating to the will of someone who has enforcement power over you, but rather about "hearing" and what that implies.

Now, that isn't just a fluke of the Greek language. For when the New Testament was translated into Latin by St. Jerome, the words he used for υπακούω and υπακοή were 'oebodio' and 'oebodientia', the very words from which we've derived our English 'obey' and 'obedience'. And you know what? Those two Latin words are directly from the Latin verb 'audio', which means "to hear" (compare 'audience'). But this little language lesson gets stranger still. For when Luther translated the New Testament into German, the word he used for obedience (Greek υπακοή) was 'Gehorsamkeit'. And can you guess what 'Gehorsamkeit' is derived from? You're right! It's derived from the German word meaning "to hear," viz. 'hören'. And just by the way, my good friend, Professor Toven, tells me that in Norwegian the word for obedience is 'adlydelse', which really means "hearing," or "paying attention to the sound of something."

But what about the Old Testament? Well, it's a funny thing in a

way, but you won't find the words 'obey' or 'obedience' anywhere in the whole Old Testament. Instead, when your English Bible uses these words (which, of course it does), the original Hebrew has the word שמע [she-mah], or a derivative of שמע, which means—you guessed it!—"to hear."

Now what are we to make of all this? What we make of it is whether we're Christian, or not; whether we are the lambs and sheep of the flock of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, or not. For "the sheep hear [their shepherd's] voice," as Jesus says in St. John's Gospel, "and He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (10:3).

By our Baptism in Jesus' name, the heavenly Father has made you and me his very own. And that's why in our text Jesus can say, "He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason you do not hear them is that you are not of God."

Okay, but what does that have to do with commandments and exhortations and injunctions? Just this. Do you remember when your little sister or brother had not yet learned to walk, and was just beginning to stand upright by holding on to the edge of a chair? And what did your dad do? He knelt on the floor just a foot or two away with his arms outstretched and said, "Come, Suzy, come here; c'mon, you can do it!"

Did you notice that verb form? It was imperative, the form of a commandment: "Come!" But how did dad's voice *sound* to Suzy when she *heard* it? Like a commandment, an order, an injunction to obey, or else? No way. What it sounded like, and what she heard, was a gracious tender invitation—and more than that. What she heard in that loving voice was the strong assurance that she really had the strength and power to do what she never realized she could do. And so she "obeyed." Empowered by the love she could hear in her father's voice, she tottered forward into his

arms. She learned how to walk.

And what about us? What do we hear when we read in the Holy Scriptures those exhortations and imperatives to *do* thus and so, to *be* this or that? On what wavelength do we tune in? Do we hear Law or Gospel? As the sheep and lambs whom the Good Shepherd has called by name in our Baptism, surely we hear only Gospel, only the tender and loving voice of God, letting us know again and again what wonderful things His forgiveness for Jesus' sake now enables and empowers us to do.

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# A Crossings Celebration: Ed Schroeder and His Ministry

PDF [A Crossings Celebration: Ed Schroeder and His Ministry](#)

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## Assesses Movement's Future Role

Robert W. Bertram

[Printed in "Viewpoint," Missouri in Perspective (October 23, 1978).]

### **ABSTRACT**

*The LCMS moderate movement, not dispirited but dispersed, faces*

*the ongoing challenges of continuing to rely on the Gospel's efficiency alone in contrast to relying on the power of church bureaucracy. It also faces the ever-new challenges of being yoked with Christ for local, ecumenical opportunities for cooperative mission. The ambiguous question of staying in or withdrawing from the LCMS continues to be covered by Christ's mutual forgiveness.*

The "moderate" confessional movement in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is not so much "dispirited" as "dispersed."

This is one central theme from an address to the 1978 Assembly of Evangelical Lutherans in Mission by the Rev. Dr. Robert Bertram, Oct 13.

The Christ Seminary professor suggested that the movement is reappearing in "hometown," no longer among Lutherans of a single synodical interest but rather in pan-Lutheran and even pan-Christian co-operative efforts.

This happens as Christians reduce their dependence of denominational bureaucracies and instead assume new responsibility themselves, locally yet ecumenically, he suggested.

## **New Challenge**

While synods are losing their importance as managerial authorities, said Dr. Bertram, their new challenge lies in providing confessional support and "networking" among local Lutherans.

The greatest need, he added, if the current anti-bureaucratic grass-roots ecumenism is going to be channeled constructively as a "confessional movement" is for those who share a common confession of faith to give it shape through the proclamation of

the Gospel.

This, he noted, however, “can be a lonely task,” and there is a need to provide “encouragement” not from “transcendent bureaucracies” but from a “worldwide Lutheran confessional presence.”

Confessional movements arise, he said, whenever there is “churchly oppression” by the “secular authority of the church itself.”

## **Safeguarded Gospel?**

But, he added, “What is being oppressed is not only other Christians but the very Gospel of Christ,” as authorities attempt to “safeguard” the Gospel “with additional conditions and expectations which Christ never imposed, thus reducing His Gospel to a tool for enslavement.”

When this happens, Christians need to resist a minimizing of the importance of the Cross and to take a stand together to defy the authorities.

What is dangerous is not secular authority in the church on its own, he said, but a reliance on that authority rather than on the Gospel.

God’s “efficiency” is a matter of proclaiming grace to sinners and “churching the world,” he argued.

## **Yoke-Bearing**

But if anti-bureaucratic protest is a Christian “No,” he said, a confessional movement must also be able to say a Gospel “Yes,” which is that Christ is willing to bear “the yoke” for Christians of the responsibility for new co-cooperative efforts

on the local level, so that they can bear His.

He cautioned against missing the opportunity presented by the current anti-bureaucracy trend to see the common experience that members of ELIM share with Christians in other confessions.

At the same time, he cautioned that such “populism” can turn vindictive, noting that what had happened to “moderates” in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was itself part of an anti-bureaucratic outrage.

But, the assumption that synodical bureaus were “where the church’s real power was “at” was wrong-headed, he added.

## **Doctrinally Neutral**

While bureaucratic management may seem to be “doctrinally neutral,” the Seminex professor suggested, it seems to have changed “from being the Gospel’s servant to being the Gospel’s partner to being the Gospel’s rival to being the Gospel’s undoing.”

This happens when cooperation in management systems becomes a “necessity” in the life of the Church for “being truly acceptable in this church, or else.”

And “when objectors or critics are dismissed or penalized or excluded, then regardless of the authorities’ reassuring rhetoric, the door has been opened to idolatry.”

Dr. Bertram also took issue with a statement in a recent issue in PERSPECTIVE to describe how difficult it is to make a clear confession—even to his friends.

That statement had suggested that his appearance would serve as a challenge to the idea that “moderates” should withdraw from the fellowship of the LCMS.s

On the one hand, he said, he favors a complete withdrawal from the fellowship of the LCMS, if by that one means to refuse to submit to an authority “that has invalidated itself through a systematic legalism.”

On the other hand, he said, he would not advocate removing oneself from the fellowship of many people, including his students, who are still on the LCMS rolls.

But even in such cases of misunderstanding, he concluded, “mutual forgiveness” covers a multitude of ambiguities.

Robert W. Bertram

[Assesses Movement's Future Role \(PDF\)](#)

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# **“Review of Edward Schillebeeckx, Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter With God”**

Robert W. Bertram

[This review was printed in Journal of Religion 45 (1965): 260-261. Used with permission.]

Father Schillebeeckx, whose reputation is already as notable as his name, has previously attracted English readers with his chapter in the Callahan-Obermann-O'Hanlon symposium, *Christianity Divided*. That chapter, like this book, was on the

sacraments, with the consequent risk that this versatile theologian might just become typecast as the Roman specialist on the sacraments and little more – like Kung used to be thought the specialist on justification and Rahner, on death.

But such a fate, even if it should befall Schillebeeckx, would not be all loss, for his theology of the sacraments, far from consigning them to a topic in dogmatics or a monopoly for liturgics, so universalizes them that they emerge as “the properly human mode of encounter with God” – not in the exclusive sense that merely the sacramental is encounter with God but in the inclusive sense that all encounter with God is at least implicitly sacramental. (Which, incidentally, allows Schillebeeckx to value the sacraments also in the “separated Christian Churches.”)

The way the implicit sacramentality in all religion comes to light, however, is not by its being made explicit logically through the theologian’s analysis but by its being fulfilled in God’s gracious and purposive conduct of redemptive history, culminating in the incarnation of his Son, “the primordial sacrament.” Indeed, the incarnation is itself the Son’s consummating his sonship with the Father in the form of man, bodily. When, in turn, he is glorified and “leaves the world,” his incarnation is prolonged in the world in the church’s sacraments. The result, so different from the old scholastic picture of us as substances with sacramental grace as something “put into us,” is “that the Church’s sacraments are not things but encounters of men on earth with the glorified man Jesus by way of a visible form.” Here, then, is fulfilled the universally human nostalgia for a personal relationship with God in the only way in which a person is accessible to us at all, through bodily encounter.

But let it not be thought that Schillebeeckx, for all his



newness and freshness, is a Dominican upstart turning against his scholastic masters. On the contrary, seldom has Thomas Aquinas looked so good, or at least so adaptable to modern biblical studies (the treatment here of Johannine Christology is a marvel), so continuous with the Greek fathers (for example, on the “sacraments of nature”), so misconstrued by some of his (especially post-Tridentine) interpreters so congenial to the anthropology of today’s phenomenologists. (I was reminded throughout of Zaner’s recent *The Problem of Embodiment*.) It is all there – *ex opere operato*, *gratia praeveniens*, all seven sacraments, even (once or twice) “trans-substantiation” – but with a difference.

Of course, so are many of the old differences still there, some of them perhaps even aggravated. For example, for all the new reminders that there is no personal encounter without embodiment, the result is that sacramental embodiment for Schillebeeckx serves almost exclusively an optical function: it renders the invisible visible. That strikes us as less realistic and less Johannine – though admittedly more, shall we say, palatable – than the “flesh” in John 6. There is one mechanical defect that could quickly be remedied in the next edition: the book is too good and too re-readable not to have an index.

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[ReviewEdwardSchillebeeckx \(PDF\)](#)

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# HOW OUR SINS WERE CHRIST'S: A STUDY IN LUTHER'S GALATIANS (1531)

By Robert W. Bertram

## 1. Peccator Peccatorum [Sinner of Sinners]

The sinlessness of Christ, indispensable as this was for Luther's christology, was seldom the major point at issue. In fact, Christ's innocence, readily enough accepted by Luther's opponents, threatened to overshadow what was equally essential to Christ's redemptive achievement: that "for our sake God made Christ to be sin,"<sup>1</sup> "a curse for us,"<sup>2</sup> or in the words of Isaiah, "numbered among the thieves."<sup>3</sup> In Luther's own words, Christ "has sinned or has sins,"<sup>4</sup> he was "a sinner of sinners,"<sup>5</sup> indeed "the highest, the greatest, and the only sinner."<sup>6</sup>

We confront a problem in predication. How can the theological predicate, *est peccator* [is a sinner], really and significantly be about the subject, this *purissima persona* [purest of persons], *deus et homo* [God and man]? By reason of what can he be both the sinless God-man and at the same time a sinner? And we encounter Luther's characteristic solution. What finally makes the predication meaningful and real is that it is soteriologically necessary. Unless Christ was our sinner, we ourselves must be; but since through him we are not sinners, it follows that he was a sinner and had to be. "Our sin must be Christ's own sin, or we shall perish eternally."<sup>7</sup> If he is innocent and does not carry our sins, then we carry them and shall die and be damned in them. 'But thanks be to God, who

gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!’ Amen.”<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Cernere Antitheses [To Discern the Antitheses]

As usual, Luther’s positive assertions are unintelligible apart from the antitheses they ne-gate. “...When two opposites are placed side by side, they become more evident.”<sup>9</sup> It is important “to discern the antitheses,”<sup>10</sup> and not only for polemical reasons – to “drag them

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<sup>1</sup> LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1, 434, 36-435, 11.

<sup>2</sup> LW, XXVI, 276. WA, XL/1, 432, 17-18.

<sup>3</sup> LW, XXVI, 277. WA, XL/1, 433, 25.

<sup>4</sup> LW, XXVI, 279. WA, XL/1, 436, 13.

<sup>5</sup> LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL, 434, 35.

<sup>6</sup> LW, XXVI, 281. WA, XL/1, 439, 13.

<sup>7</sup> LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1, 435, 18.

<sup>8</sup> LW, XXVI, 280. WA, XL/1, 438, 30-31.

<sup>9</sup> LW, XXVI, 124. WA, XL/1, 220, 18-19.

<sup>10</sup> LW, XXVI, 248. WA, XL/1, 391, 18-19.

into the light, in order that the doctrine of justification, like the sun, may reveal their infamy and shame”<sup>11</sup>– but also for affirmative reasons. The unevangelical antitheses

should not be lightly dismissed or consigned to oblivion but should be diligently considered. And this, by contrast, serves to magnify the grace of God and the blessings of Christ.<sup>12</sup>

Presumably, then, if the opponents deny that Christ is a sinner, Luther’s polemic must serve both a negative and a constructive function. First, he must reveal the “infamy and the shame” of their antitheses. But that still leaves the second, the

constructive question. What is there about their false antithesis by contrast with which, and only by contrast with which, Christ's sinnerhood takes on its fully positive meaning? Offhand, the opponents' reverent insistence upon Christ's sinlessness would seem to be by far the more positive of the two christologies. It is not immediately apparent how Luther can exploit that antithesis in the interest of his own contrary and apparently pessimistic insistence upon Christ's sin, and how in the bargain Christ's sinnerhood can be "magnified" into, as Luther calls it, our "most delightful comfort."<sup>13</sup> Still, as we shall see, unless Christ's sinnerhood does appear as "delightful" as that, it has no warrant as a predicate of its subject – that is, as the real sin of a really sinless God-man.

What actually is the antithesis to saying that Christ is a sinner? One would think it is the simple counter-assertion, Christ is not a sinner. Still, that is not the extent of the opposition. Just as Luther's affirming Christ's sinnerhood is necessitated by soteriological, not only christological, considerations, so the opponents' denying Christ's sinnerhood is likewise inspired by their contrary soteriology. And there, for Luther, lies their "infamy and shame." The papists' real motive for clearing Christ of sin, Luther claims, is not to honor Christ, as they would pretend, but rather to promote "justification by works."<sup>14</sup> "They want ... to unwrap Christ and to unclothe him from our sins."<sup>15</sup> However, "to make him innocent" is "to burden and overwhelm ourselves with our own sins, and to behold them not in Christ but in ourselves."<sup>16</sup> And the reason the papists do this is that they prefer to have their sins removed and replaced, not in Christ, but within their own selves – "by some opposing motivations, namely, by love,"<sup>17</sup> or by the sort of faith which is actualized in love. It is this wish of theirs to be valuable inherently and biographically which prompts them to

protest, with such deceptive reverence for Christ, that he “is not a criminal and a thief but righteous and holy,”<sup>18</sup> or that “it is highly absurd and insulting to call the Son of God a sinner and a curse.”<sup>19</sup> “Perhaps,” Luther shrugs, “this may impress the inexperienced, for they suppose that the sophists are ... defending the honor of Christ and are religiously admonishing all Christians not to suppose wickedly that Christ was a curse.”<sup>20</sup> Yet if the sophists had their way, if it were true that Christ “is innocent and does not carry our sins, then we carry them

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<sup>11</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 136. *WA*, XL/1, 238, 24-26.

<sup>12</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 135. *WA*, XL/1, 237, 34—238, 13.

<sup>13</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 278. *WA*, XL/1, 434, 21.

<sup>14</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 279. *WA*, XL/1, 436, 27.

<sup>15</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 279. *WA*, XL/1, 436, 29-31.

<sup>16</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 286. *WA*, XL/1, 445, 28-29.

<sup>17</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 279. *WA*, XL/1, 436, 24-31.

<sup>18</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 277. *WA*, XL/1, 432, 33.

<sup>19</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 278. *WA*, XL/1, 434, 29-30.

<sup>20</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 277. *WA*, XL/1, 432, 33—433, 12.

and shall die and be damned in them.”<sup>21</sup> But, says Luther, “this is to abolish Christ and make him useless.”<sup>22</sup> That is the “shame and infamy” of denying Christ’s sinnerhood.

Then how does the sophists’ denial, their divesting Christ of our sins, now provide the foil for Luther’s positive thrust – serving, “by contrast, to magnify the grace of God and the blessings of Christ?”<sup>23</sup> Ironically, it was the scholastics’ (and the Scriptures’) whole profound understanding of moral predication, that same grammar of legality which insures that our sins are ours and no one else’s and least of all the Son of God’s, which now furnishes Luther with the very key for

discovering the ways in which sin, our sin, belonged instead to the Son of God. True, our sins did not belong to him in the sense that he committed them. Still, it is that kind of culpability, a guilt by active commission, to which Luther appeals for a comparison to underscore how real a sinner Christ was. Our sins “are as much Christ’s own as if he himself had committed them.”<sup>24</sup> We can state the matter another way: Our sins are Christ’s, not by means merely of some transcendent, super-historical transaction, in which God simply “regards” our sins as his or simply “imputes” our sins to him, but by means also of his own immanent, historical “bearing” of those sins – “as much Christ’s own as if he himself had committed them.” He did not commit them, of course. But that does not mean for Luther that there is only one other way by which our sins can then be his, namely by divine imputation. No, Luther comes as close as he can to saying our sins are Christ’s by reason of his committing them, but without actually saying that. And, as we shall see, Luther adopts this procedure not for rhetorical effect but for an intensely important theological purpose.

How much our sins truly are “Christ’s own” Luther elaborates in half a dozen ways, re-calling strangely the very ways in which our sin ought ordinarily be *our* own. These half dozen variations on how our sin is rightfully and culpably predicated of Christ (culminating in the reminder that his guilt was after all intentional) will occupy us in the next six sections of this essay. Then, in the essay’s concluding section, we shall note how it was precisely this recourse to ordinary moral predication in his portrayal of Christ’s sinnerhood which enables Luther finally to explode that type of predication in his discussion of Christ’s surprise victory. In other words, it was just because Christ “was made under the law” that he could be the death of the law – the law and its whole tyrannizing mode of predication. For, in the end, his intentional self-incrimination, which

rightfully rendered him guilty before the law, was the selfsame intention which in turn incriminated and annihilated the law – his intention, namely, of invincible divine mercy. Here, in the selfsameness of Christ’s loving will, willing to be a sinner in order to be a Redeemer, Luther finds the secret bond which unites the personal subject with its paradoxical predicate, the sinless God-man with the sins of all men. Nevertheless, as we have said, their sins are Christ’s own, not simply by a transcendent fiat of divine will, but in such a way that, when that will becomes immanent in this Man in this law-bound world, it becomes a guilty will. In other words, our sins are Christ’s as really and immanently as they are ours – that is, “as if he himself had com-mitted them.” But all this, for a very “delightful” purpose.

### **3. Sub lege, ergo peccator [Under the Law; therefore, a Sinner]**

For example, first of all, our sins are so much Christ’s own that we dare not say he bore merely our punishment. What he bore was our sin. If he did not, the law had no reason to

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<sup>21</sup> LW, XXVI, 280. WA, XL/1, 438, 29-31 (*italics mine*).

<sup>22</sup> LW, XXVI, 279. WA, XL/1, 436, 31.

<sup>23</sup> LW, XXVI, 135. WA, XL/1, 238, 12-13.

<sup>24</sup> LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1, 435, 17.

punish him. Luther refuses to explain away Paul’s statement that Christ was made a curse for us, or that he was made sin for us, by so diluting “sin” and “curse” that they mean merely the consequences of sin.<sup>25</sup> Such an exegetical *tour de force*, Luther argues, would be an evasion of the clear meaning of the text – and, let us note, not only of the text’s words but also of the text’s purpose, its native reasons. The critics who “want to

deny that [Christ] is a sinner and a curse" prefer to say rather that he "underwent the *torments* of sin and death."<sup>26</sup> But that is not all that Paul says, and "surely these words of Paul are not without purpose."<sup>27</sup> Neither are the words of John the Baptist, about "the Lamb of God." Nor the cries of the psalmist: "My iniquities have overtaken me;" "Heal me, for I have sinned against thee;" "O God, thou knowest my folly." ("In these psalms the Holy Spirit is speaking in the person of Christ and testifying in clear words that he has sinned or has sins.")<sup>28</sup> These "clear words" are all to some purpose, testifying as they do to the real sin, and not merely to the suffering, of Christ. And remember the way Isaiah speaks of Christ, "God has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Of course, for Christ to bear iniquities, Luther agrees, does include his bearing our punishment. "But why is Christ punished? Is it not because he has sin and bears sins?"<sup>29</sup> That must be Paul's reason, too, for applying to Christ the passage from Deuteronomy, "Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree," the disclaimers of Jerome to the contrary notwithstanding.<sup>30</sup>

For what is it that causes the law, the whole retributive order of things, to retaliate with punishment at all? What else but the culprit's sin and accursedness? If our sin had not really been Christ's, he could not have been liable to punishment, he could not have been killed. "For unless he had taken upon himself [our] sins, ... the law would have had no right over him, since it condemns only sinners and holds only them under a curse, ... since the cause of the curse and of death is sin." It is for that reason that the law says to Christ,

Let every *sinner* die! And therefore, Christ, if you want to reply that you are guilty and that you bear the punishment, you must bear the sin and the curse as well.<sup>31</sup>



For that reason, accordingly, Paul was correct in applying to Christ “this general law from Moses.”<sup>32</sup> To predicate sin and accursedness of Christ is lawful and rational: “Christ hung on a tree, therefore Christ is a curse of God”<sup>33</sup> – a lawfully accursed sinner, not merely the innocent bearer of sin’s punishments.

#### 4. **Socius Peccatorum [Associate of Sinners]**

Second, our sins are so much Christ’s own that, when he fraternized with sinners, he him-self stood condemned for the company he kept. And rightly so. For, says Luther, “a magistrate regards someone as a criminal and punishes him if he catches him among thieves,

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<sup>25</sup> LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1, 434, 29—435, 13.

<sup>26</sup> LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1, 434, 32-34 (*italics mine*).

<sup>27</sup> LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1, 434, 36.

<sup>28</sup> LW, XXVI, 279. WA, XL/1, 435, 31—436, 13.

<sup>29</sup> LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1, 435, 27 (*italics mine*).

<sup>30</sup> LW, XXVI, 276, 278. WA, XL/1, 432, 18-24; 448, 17-19.

<sup>31</sup> LW, XXVI, 279. WA, XL/1, 436, 16-20.

<sup>32</sup> LW, XXVI, 279. WA, XL/1, 436, 21.

<sup>33</sup> LW, XXVI, 279. WA, XL/1, 436, 22-23.

even though the man has never committed anything evil.”<sup>34</sup> “Among thieves,” indeed. Jesus was consorting with the enemies of God. He was a *socius peccatorum*.<sup>35</sup>

Of this Christ, Luther complains, “the sophists deprive us when they segregate Christ from sins and from sinners and set him forth to us only as an example to be imitated.”<sup>36</sup> They err in their too aloof definition of Christ, but also in their too sanguine definition of “the world,” in which Christ dwelt. For, says Luther, what is required here is that “you have two

definitions, of 'world' and of 'Christ'."<sup>37</sup> That is to say, we must remember that Christ delivered us, "not only from this world but from this 'evil world',<sup>38</sup> "from this evil age, which is an obedient servant and a willing follower of its god, the devil."<sup>39</sup> What links sinner to sinner in this worldwide syndicate of evil is not merely that they all misbehave in the same way, or even that they all aid and abet one another. Rather they are all under the tyrannical jurisdiction of a common demonic lord, so that, whatever their efforts at good behavior, "the definition still stands: You are still in the present evil age ..."<sup>40</sup> What makes it evil is that "whatever is in this age is subject to the evil of the devil, who rules the entire world."<sup>41</sup> The company of sinners is a kingdom, a realm, of evil.

This realm, being under divine curse, is off-limits. Yet it is into this realm that Christ came. "He joined himself to the company of the accursed."<sup>42</sup> "And being joined with us who were accursed, he became a curse for us."<sup>43</sup> "Therefore when the law found him among thieves, it condemned and executed him as a thief."<sup>44</sup>

## **5. Ego commisi peccata mundi [I Have Committed the Sins of the World]**

Third, our sins are so much Christ's own that, no matter who committed them originally, all of them have now been committed, in effect, by Jesus Christ personally. The sins he bore, as John says, are nothing less than "the sins of the world."<sup>45</sup> And "the sin of the world," as Luther understands the phrase, is not sin in general. It is no abstract universal. It is exhaustive of every actual sinner and sin in history: "not only my sins and yours, but the sins of the entire world, past, present, and

future ...”<sup>46</sup> Luther represents Christ as saying, “I have committed the sins that all men have committed”<sup>47</sup> – “the sin of Paul, the former blasphemer, ... of Peter, who denied Christ, of David, ... an adulterer and a murderer and who caused the Gentiles to blaspheme the name of the Lord.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> LW, XXVI, 277-278. WA, XL/1, 434, 14-16.

<sup>35</sup> LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1, 434, 17.

<sup>36</sup> LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1, 434, 22-24.

<sup>37</sup> LW, XXVI, 42. WA, XL/1, 97, 26.

<sup>38</sup> LW, XXVI, 42. WA, XL/1, 97, 24-25.

<sup>39</sup> LW, XXVI, 41. WA, XL/1, 96, 17-18.

<sup>40</sup> LW, XXVI, 40. WA, XL/1, 95, 12-13.

<sup>41</sup> LW, XXVI, 39. WA, XL/1, 94, 16-17.

<sup>42</sup> Gal. p. 281. WA, XL/1, 451, 14.

<sup>43</sup> LW, XXVI, 290. WA, XL/1, 451, 18-19.

<sup>44</sup> LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1, 434, 19-20.

<sup>45</sup> LW, XXVI, 151. WA, XL/1, 261, 20.

<sup>46</sup> LW, XXVI, 281. WA, XL/1, 438, 33-34.

<sup>47</sup> LW, XXVI, 283-284. WA, XL/1, 442, 34—443, 14.

<sup>48</sup> LW, XXVI, 277. WA, XL/1, 433, 29-31.

Still, even in the face of such specific enumerations, we in our false humility are wont to exempt Christ from our sins, at least from those sins of ours which seem to us more than Christ should be expected to bear and which, alas, we alone must bear.

It is easy for you to say and believe that Christ, the Son of God, was given for the sins of Peter, Paul, and other saints, who seem to us to have been worthy of this grace. But it is very hard for you, who regard yourself as unworthy of this grace, to say and believe from your heart that Christ was given for *your* many great sins.<sup>49</sup>

But false humility is what this is, and disdain for Christ.

Luther shows small sympathy for the neo-pharisaic pseudo-publican who prays, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and yet who means no more by "sinner" than the doer of trivial sins, "an imitation and counterfeit sinner."<sup>50</sup> "Christ was given, not for sham or counterfeit sins, nor yet for small sins but for great and huge sins, not for one or two sins but for all sins."<sup>51</sup> "And unless you are part of the company of those who say 'our sins,'... there is no salvation for you."<sup>52</sup>

Conversely, it is only because "the sin of the world" is no mere abstraction but an enumerative totality of every real sin and sinner that Luther can perform the inference he repeatedly does: Christ is "the one who took away the sins of the world; if the sin of the world is taken away, then it is taken away also from me ..."<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, Luther describes the Father sending his Son: "Be Peter the denier; Paul the persecutor ...; David the adulterer; the sinner who ate the apple in Paradise; the thief on the cross. In short, be the person ... who had committed the sins of all men."<sup>54</sup>

## **6. Ipsum Peccatum [Sin Itself]**

Fourth, our sins are so much Christ's own that, by his acknowledging them as his, he him-self – not only the sins he bore, but he who bore them – becomes a sin and a curse. This drastic conclusion is suggested by Paul's strong use of "curse" in its substantive rather than its adjectival sense.

Christ is said to have been made a curse and not merely accursed, not just a sinner but sin itself. And isn't this the way it is, Luther recalls, whenever "a sinner really comes to a knowledge of himself ..."? He can no longer distinguish nicely between his sin, on the one hand, and himself, on the other, as though the two were still separable. "That is, he seems to

himself to be not only miserable but misery itself; not only a sinner and an accursed one, but sin and the curse itself.”<sup>55</sup> And not only is that what he *seems* to be. A man who feels these things in earnest *really becomes (fit plane)* sin, death, and the curse itself.”<sup>56</sup>

This recalls that classic discussion of man the sinner, six years before, as Luther pursued that matter against Erasmus. When a man knows himself a sinner, he becomes in that act a sinner all the more. For to know that I am a sinner is to know, by *verus sensus* [proper sense] and at least by definition, that I anger God. Yet if I believe that I anger God, then of course I am disbelieving that I delight God. Still, as Luther reminds Erasmus, that is exactly

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<sup>49</sup> LW, XXVI, 34. WA, XL/1, 86, 9-13.

<sup>50</sup> LW, XXVI, 34. WA, XL/1, 86, 26-30.

<sup>51</sup> LW, XXVI, 35. WA, XL/1, 87, 25-27.

<sup>52</sup> LW, XXVI, 35. WA, XL/1, 87, 29-31.

<sup>53</sup> LW, XXVI, 151. WA, XL/1, 261, 20-21.

<sup>54</sup> LW, XXVI, 280. WA, XL/1, 437, 23-26.

<sup>55</sup> LW, XXVI, 288. WA, XL/1, 449, 14-15.

<sup>56</sup> LW, XXVI, 288. WA, XL/1, 449, 18 (*italics mine*).

the impossible thing which God demands: That we who do indeed anger him must nevertheless believe we please him. So the more certainly a man recognizes he is a sinner, under the divine curse and forsaken of God, the more certainly his sin is “magnified” – his sin of unbelief. Although the sinner admits his sin, (and it is right and true that he should) yet he does not by that act become right and true himself. By repudiating the sins which God repudiates, the penitent does not thereby extricate himself from his sins, as though the sins which he repudiates were one thing and the self which does the repudiating were something else, something creditable; as though

the predicates were separable from their subject. And the reason they are not separable is that the subject, the very self, who confesses his ac-cursedness (and rightly so) thereby incriminates himself anew by denying (contrary to God's command) that he pleases God. That is why "a man who feels these things in earnest really becomes sin, death, and the curse itself" – "not only ... adjectivally but substantively."<sup>57</sup>

Luther is all but saying the same thing of Christ. Although Christ himself did not commit sin, yet he so acknowledged our sins as his own and himself accursed because of them that this very acknowledgement alienates God and makes Christ a sinner, not only adjectivally but substantively.

All our evils ... overwhelmed him once, for a brief time, and flooded in over his head, as in Psalm 88:7 and 16 the prophet laments in Christ's name when he says: 'Thy wrath lies heavy upon me and thou dost overwhelm me with all thy waves,' and: 'Thy wrath has swept over me, thy dread assaults destroy me.'<sup>58</sup>

Luther can even say of Christ: "He is not acting in his own person now; now he is not the Son of God, born of the virgin, but he is a sinner ...."<sup>59</sup> 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."<sup>60</sup> 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 ...."<sup>61</sup> In the case of Christ, the law raged even more fiercely than it does against us. "It accused him of blasphemy and sedition."<sup>62</sup> "It frightened him so horribly that he experienced greater anguish than any man has ever experienced."<sup>63</sup> Witness his "bloody sweat, the comfort of the angel, his solemn

prayer in the garden, and finally ... that cry of misery on the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'"<sup>64</sup> "A man who feels these things in earnest really becomes sin, death, and the curse itself."<sup>65</sup>

## 7. In Copore Suo [In His Body]

Fifth, our sins are so much Christ's own that he bore them not only psychologically but also, as we do, bodily – "in his body." That prepositional phrase, sometimes quoted directly from I Peter 2:24, occurs so often and so habitually in Luther's christological discussions

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<sup>57</sup> LW, XXVI, 288. WA, XL/1, 448, 35–449, 19.

<sup>58</sup> LW, XXVI, 290. WA, XL/1, 452, 12-20.

<sup>59</sup> LW, XXVI, 277. WA, XL/1, 433, 28-29.

<sup>60</sup> LW, XXVI, 365. WA, XL/1, 558, 18-20.

<sup>61</sup> LW, XXVI, 363. WA, XL/1, 554, 24–555, 13.

<sup>62</sup> LW, XXVI, 370. WA, XL/1, 565, 14.

<sup>63</sup> LW, XXVI, 372. WA, XL/1, 567, 27-28.

<sup>64</sup> LW, XXVI, 372. WA, XL/1, 567, 3-31.

<sup>65</sup> LW, XXVI, 288. WA, XL/1, 449, 18-19.

that its very frequency demonstrates how somatically Luther conceived of sin, whether ours or Christ's.

What precisely Luther understood the connection to be between sin and bodily existence (if indeed he did understand the connection precisely) is well-nigh impossible to determine. For that matter, whatever understanding Luther did have of this connection might well prove unintelligible to an age like ours which, for all its appreciation of psychosomatic man, still inclines to spiritualize sin, and death as "the wage of sin." What we can say about Luther, at the very least, is that he would have found it hard to speak of our sin as really ours, and hence of our sin as really Christ's, apart from the bodies in

which our sin rages and, in Christ's body, is destroyed. Of course, such expressions as "the body of sin" and "in his body on the tree" were not original with Luther but came to him on rather high recommendation.

It is true, Luther has been commended for not succumbing to the gnostic temptation, as some theologians have, of equating the New Testament "flesh" with sins merely of the body. That Luther does warn against this error can be seen from his arguments against Erasmus.<sup>66</sup> In his Galatians lectures, likewise, he reminds his students: "Now in Paul 'flesh' does not, as the sophists suppose, mean crass sins.... 'Flesh' means the entire nature of man, with reason and all his powers."<sup>67</sup> Neither are crass, bodily sins, just because they are more obvious, for that reason more culpable than the sins of the spirit. On the contrary, the sins against the first table are more to be feared than the sins against the second table,<sup>68</sup> the "white devil" more than the "black devil."<sup>69</sup> Nor could Luther, any more than he could say all sin is of the body, say that all bodily existence is sinful. We need only to recall that the Son of God, by being "made a true man by birth from the female sex," was not by that token a sinner.<sup>70</sup>

Nevertheless, Luther seems equally sure that there is for Christ no bearing of our sins with-out his doing so "in his body." Why? In one passage, and perhaps no oftener than that, Luther seems to explain Christ's bodily bearing of our sins in terms of a theory of "satis-faction." Christ, he says, "took these sins, committed by us, upon his own body, in order to make satisfaction for them with his own blood."<sup>71</sup> Yet the theme of satisfaction—a term which Luther seldom uses and, when. he does, tends to use disparagingly<sup>72</sup> — is not characteristic of his



christological language, even when he speaks of Christ's "blood" (which is usually coupled with the language of redemption and sacrifice and not of satisfaction.<sup>73</sup>)

No, the function which Luther most usually ascribes to Christ's bearing our sins "in his body" is that, by his bodily dying, he put those sins in his body to death. "He bore and sustained them in his own body."<sup>74</sup> where, by his death and apparent defeat, they were exterminated. Or, in Luther's own strong and variegated language, they were "destroyed," "conquered," "removed," "annihilated," "purged," "expiated," "abolished," "killed,"

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<sup>66</sup> WA, XVIII, 742, 12-21; 740, 1-6; 744, 6-18; 780, 35—781, 1.

<sup>67</sup> LW, XXVI, 139. WA, XL/1, 244, 14-17. See also WA, XL/1, 348, 14-17.

<sup>68</sup> LW, XXVI, 36. WA, XL/1, 88, 18-19.

<sup>69</sup> LW, XXVI, 41, 49. WA, XL/1, 96, 10; 108, 18-22.

<sup>70</sup> LW, XXVI, 367. WA, XL/1, 561, 22-23.

<sup>71</sup> LW, XXVI, 277. WA, XL/1, 433, 33—434, 12.

<sup>72</sup> LW, XXVI, 23, 132, 180, 411. WA, XL/1, 83, 30; 84, 13-14; 85, 22; 232, 30-33; 301, 34; 623, 18-21.

<sup>73</sup> LW, XXVI, 33, 99, 132, 175, 176, 183, 295, 360. WA, XL/1, 84, 12-15; 181, 18-19; 232, 33—233, 14; 295, 25-28; 295, 33; 305, 25-33; 550, 23-26.

<sup>74</sup> LW, XXVI, 288-289. WA, XL/1, 449, 31-32.

"buried," "damned," "devoured."<sup>75</sup> Christ "conquers and destroys these monsters — sin, death, and the curse — without weapons or battle, in his own body and in himself, as Paul enjoys saying (Col. 2:15): 'He disarmed the principalities and powers, triumphing over them in him' ."<sup>76</sup> "All these things happen ... through Christ the crucified, on whose shoulders lie all the evils of the human race — ... all of which die in him, because by his death he kills them."<sup>77</sup>

Something else remains to be said. Christ bears our sins in his body, not only because they are thereby destroyed, but also because they are ours. There is no question in Luther's mind

that Christ could have vanquished the tyrants without submitting to the cross, by an outright exercise of his divine sovereignty. But such an alternative completely overlooks how inti-mately his victory was to be ours, and how it was therefore to be achieved “in our sinful person.”<sup>78</sup> Luther has Christ saying,

I could have overcome the law by my supreme authority, without any injury to me; ... but for the sake of you, who were under the law, I assumed your flesh; ... I went down into the same imprisonment ... under which you were serving as captives.<sup>79</sup>

That is why “all men, even the apostles or prophets or patriarchs, would have remained under the curse [1] if Christ had not put himself in opposition to sin, death, the curse ..., and [2] *if he had not overcome them in his own body.*”<sup>80</sup> For, as Luther seems to see it, Christ does not bear our sin as ours unless he assumes “our sinful person,” and our sinful person is inseparable from our bodies.<sup>81</sup> “The old man ... is born of flesh and blood.”<sup>82</sup> John Osborne has captured a characteristic insight of Luther’s in the line, spoken by Hans to his son: “... You can’t ever get away from your body because that’s what you live in, and it’s all you’ve got to die in ....”<sup>83</sup>

Therefore, even though Christ in his incarnation through the Virgin was the purest of per-sons, and even though since his resurrection “there is no longer the mask of the sinner or any vestige of death” in him,<sup>84</sup> still, as he describes his historic mission, “I shall empty myself, I shall assume *your* clothing and mask, and in this I shall walk about and suffer death, in order to set *you* free from death.”<sup>85</sup> So “even though you know that he is God and man,” “you do not yet have Christ” until you know

that, “putting off his innocence and holiness and putting on your sinful person, he bore your sin.”<sup>86</sup> “He attached himself to those who are accursed, [not only by occupying the same world with them, nor only by fraternizing with them, but by] assuming their flesh and blood.”<sup>87</sup> Nor dare his assumption

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<sup>75</sup> LW, XXVI, 159, 280, 281, 282. WA, XL/1, 273, 21; 438, 14; 439, 26-27; 441, 22-25.

<sup>76</sup> LW, XXVI, 282. WA, XL/1, 440, 24-25.

<sup>77</sup> LW, XXVI, 160. WA, XL/1, 273, 26-29.

<sup>78</sup> LW, XXVI, 284. WA, XL/1, 443, 23-24.

<sup>79</sup> LW, XXVI, 370. WA, XL/1, 565, 27—566, 13.

<sup>80</sup> LW, XXVI, 287. WA, XL/1, 447, 29-33 (the bracketed numbers and italics are mine).

<sup>81</sup> See how, in connection with Galatians 2:20, Luther understands *persona* (WA, XL/1, 281-282) as inseparable from being “present in the flesh, living your familiar life, having five senses, and doing everything in this physical life that any other man does.” LW, XXVI, 170ff.; WA, XL/1, 288, 20ff.

<sup>82</sup> LW, XXVI, 7. WA, XL/1, 45, 28.

<sup>83</sup> Osborne, *Luther* (New York: The New American Library of American Literature, 1963), 50.

<sup>84</sup> LW, XXVI, 284. WA, XL/1, 444, 17-18.

<sup>85</sup> LW, XXVI, 284. WA, XL/1, 443, 27-29 (italics mine).

<sup>86</sup> LW, XXVI, 288. WA, XL/1, 448, 23-26.

<sup>87</sup> LW, XXVI, 289. WA, XL/1, 451, 14-15.

of our flesh be understood merely as a sinless incarnation, “in a purely physical way.”<sup>88</sup> Rather “he took along with him whatever clung to the flesh that he had assumed for our sake.”<sup>89</sup> Granted that this mystery “is impossible to understand and to believe fully, because all this is so contradictory to human reason.”<sup>90</sup> Nonetheless, the whole thrust of the mystery is clear: “Just as Christ is wrapped up in our flesh. and blood, so we must ... know him to be wrapped up in our sins.”<sup>91</sup>

## 8. Sponte [Willingly]

Sixth, our sin is so much Christ’s own that, since it is his by choice, it incriminates his very motives, his innermost self. Because he attached himself to our sins “willingly” (*sponte*), he has only himself to thank for the fact that he is liable for

them. "Because he took upon himself our sins, not by compulsion but by his own free will, it was right for him to bear the punishment and the wrath of God ...."<sup>92</sup>

The deliberate, intentional character of Christ's sinnerhood seems to illustrate most graphically for Luther how truly Christ bore our sin "in himself." And it may be that at this point Luther's meaning comes closest to being intelligible to an age like our own, with its definitions of selfhood in terms of "responsibility" and "decision." "Modern man," Bultmann reminds us, "... bears the responsibility for his own thinking, willing, and doing."<sup>93</sup> We are reminded once more of Luther's exchange with "the modern man," Erasmus. Even though sinners are like compliant beasts ridden by their rider, the devil, or like evil seeds who are never free from the pressures of the Creator to produce their evil fruit, still what identifies their sin as characteristically their own is that it always expresses what they themselves will and are. It is exactly as the ones who will and think as they do that God "necessarily foreknows" them as sinners. So understood, Luther is even willing to grant Erasmus that the determinative function of the human ego is "the throne of will and reason," "his rational and truly human part."<sup>94</sup> Similarly, in his lectures on Galatians, Luther can agree with the moral philosophers that what characterizes a man's actions as really and personally his is the ethical quality of his motives, his rational will.<sup>95</sup>

It is against this background that we might appreciate the intensive emphasis which Luther gives to the fact that Christ bore our sin "willingly."<sup>96</sup> In an earlier quote we heard Luther speak of Christ as a *socius peccatorum*, and heard him explain, "Thus a magistrate regards someone as a criminal and punishes him if he catches him among thieves, even though the man has

never committed anything evil ....”<sup>97</sup> But in the case of Christ this was no arbitrary guilt by association. Christ could not plead that, though he was indeed among sinners, he was there in innocent ignorance or again his will. For, as Luther adds immediately, “Christ was not only *found* among sinners; but of his *own free will* ... he *wanted* to be an associate

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<sup>88</sup> LW, XXVI, 290. WA, XL/1, 452, 8.

<sup>89</sup> LW, XXVI, 290. WA, XL/1, 451, 21-23.

<sup>90</sup> LW, XXVI, 290. WA, XL/1, 452, 10-11.

<sup>91</sup> LW, XXVI, 278. WA, XL/1, 434, 26-27.

<sup>92</sup> LW, XXVI, 284. WA, XL/1, 443, 19-21.

<sup>93</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, as quoted in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. H. W. Bartsch, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (London: S.P.C.K., 1957), 6.

<sup>94</sup> BoW, pp. 308-309. WA, XVIII, 780, 18-19; 780, 37-38.

<sup>95</sup> LW, XXVI, 256ff. WA, XL/1, 402-403.

<sup>96</sup> LW, XXVI, 284, 292, 370. WA, XL/1, 443, 25 (*volens*); 455, 12 (*libens*); 564, 31 (*sponte*).

<sup>97</sup> LW, XXVI, 277-278. WA, XL/1, 434, 14-16.

of sinners ....”<sup>98</sup> Accordingly, “the law came and said: ‘Christ if you want to reply that you are guilty and that you bear the punishment, you must bear the sin and the curse as well.’”<sup>99</sup>

## 9. Ex Magna Charitate [Because of (His) Great Love]

It was not for nothing that Luther invoked every biblical description of Christ’s sinnerhood which would show that, according to the moral grammar of predication, Christ was rightfully and legally subject to the law’s condemnation, that our sins “are as much Christ’s own as if he himself had committed them.”<sup>100</sup> For, by granting the legal order its maximum due, it is now drawn into the fray, not at its worst – not as the emasculated legalism of the scholastics, not as some miscarriage of justice by the Sanhedrin – but at its best. As a consequence, it is the divine law in its own holy integrity – that

is, as it justly condemns every sinner, no matter how pious, as the enemy of God – which now does what it has to do to this *peccator peccatorum*. And it is this same law at its holiest and best which, in the *mirabile duellum* [amazing duel] which ensues, is eternally discredited. The other antagonists as well – sin, devil, curse, wrath, death – are present not as caricatures but at the height of their power.

It is only because the enemies involved are the real enemies—the ones, in other words, with whom men have to reckon for life and death before God—that the *mirabile duellum* becomes indeed a “very joyous duel,” *iucundissimum duellum*.<sup>101</sup> Here we find Luther applying his own hermeneutical rule, exploiting the antithesis of the opponents (and doing so even more trenchantly than he did in his dialectical display against Erasmus) in order not only to “reveal their infamy and shame”<sup>102</sup> but to celebrate in turn our “knowledge of Christ and most delightful comfort.”<sup>103</sup> The whole legal mode of predication, so elaborately employed for what seemed a merely negative detailing of Christ’s sinnerhood, now “by contrast serves to magnify the grace of God and the blessings of Christ.”<sup>104</sup>

“The grace of God and the blessings of Christ”—that is the secret of the *iucundissimum duellum*. Or rather what is the secret is that this divine grace, “the blessing,” is locked in mortal combat with the curse “in this one person.” “Now let us see,” asks Luther, “how two such extremely contrary things come together in one person.”<sup>105</sup> The answer, as might be expected, is that when they do come together it is the divine powers – divine righteousness, life, and blessing – which of course prevail over their lesser contraries, sin and death and the curse.<sup>106</sup> But the secret, indeed the prerequisite, of the victory is that it

all occurs “in his own body and in himself”<sup>107</sup> Both sets of contraries are really his. If the sin had not been his, as truly as the righteousness was, the law could easily have avoided its blasphemy against him by cursing only the one and not the other. However, “he joined God and man in one person. And being joined with us who were accursed, he became a curse for us; and

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<sup>98</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 278. *WA*, XL/1, 434, 16-17 (italics mine).

<sup>99</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 279. *WA*, XL/1, 436, 19-20.

<sup>100</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 278. *WA*, XL/1, 435, 17.

<sup>101</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 164. *WA*, XL/1, 279, 25.

<sup>102</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 136. *WA*, XL/1, 238, 25-26.

<sup>103</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 278. *WA*, XL/1, 434, 21.

<sup>104</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 135. *WA*, XL/1, 238, 12-13.

<sup>105</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 280-281. *WA*, XL/1, 438, 32-33.

<sup>106</sup> “For if the blessing in Christ could be conquered, then God him self would be conquered. But this is impossible.” *LW*, XXVI, 282. *WA*, XL, 440, 19-21.

<sup>107</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 282. *WA*, XL/1, 440, 23.

he concealed his blessing in our sin, death, and curse, which condemned and killed him.”<sup>108</sup> His intentional self-incrimination, his personal decision to attach himself to the enemies of God – the very reason he was cursed, and rightfully – was the selfsame decision of the selfsame person (the merciful decision of the divine person) which to curse was sheer blasphemy. The wonder, therefore, is not just that the curse was conquered by the blessing. The prior wonder is, Why should the curse want to attack the blessing in the first place? Luther’s answer is that, because God’s blessing and our sin were so intimately joined in this one person (as intimately as the “person” and his “work”<sup>109</sup>), therefore the curse, which had no choice but to condemn our sin, necessarily condemned the divine blessing as well. “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.”<sup>110</sup>

We began the essay by asking, as a problem in theological predication, by reason of what can such a contradictory predicate as sin, our sin at that, really and meaningfully belong to Christ, this “purest of persons, ... God and man?”<sup>111</sup> Luther’s answer must finally be, by reason of Christ’s love. He “did this because of his great love; for Paul says [of Christ, in Galatians 2:20]: ‘who loved me’.”<sup>112</sup> In the last analysis, the explanation of Christ’s paradoxical sinnerhood is simply that “he is nothing but sheer, infinite mercy, which gives and is given;<sup>113</sup> “the kind of lover who gives himself for us and. .who interposes himself as the Mediator between God and us miserable sinners.”<sup>114</sup>

Yet to speak of Christ as the “Mediator between *God* and us miserable sinners” seems to suggest that, while Christ may lovingly have predicated our sins of himself, “God” (perhaps the first person of the Trinity) may not so spontaneously concur in this predication but prefers to reserve judgment. For Luther this would be tantamount to saying that the ultimate and terrifying truth about the Divine Majesty is that he is our judge and that the whole project of overcoming his judgment and abolishing our sin must be achieved “in the person” of someone other than himself, finally in our own persons. And that is exactly the fatal heresy, Luther would say, of those who prefer to speculate about the Divine Majesty apart from Christ, and who prefer to do so just because they suppose they can face his judgment on the strength of whatever behavioral transformations occur within their own persons.

But this is to deny what Luther, as we saw previously, so vigorously affirmed: namely, that “to conquer the sin of the



world, ... and the wrath of God in himself—this is the work, not of any creature but of the divine power.”<sup>115</sup> “Therefore when we teach that men are justified through Christ and that Christ is the victor over sin ... we are testifying at the same time that he is God by nature.”<sup>116</sup>

Accordingly, the final explanation which really and meaningfully predicates our sin of Christ is that same loving will which he who “is God by nature” shares with his Father. “The indescribable and inestimable mercy and love of God,” who saw “that we were being

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<sup>108</sup> LW, XXVI, 290. WA, XL/1, 451, 20.

<sup>109</sup> LW, XXVI, 367. WA, XL/1, 560, 24-28.

<sup>110</sup> LW, XXVI, 282. WA, XL/1, 440, 26-27.

<sup>111</sup> LW, XXVI, 287-288. WA, XL/1, 448, 19-20.

<sup>112</sup> LW, XXVI, 177. WA, XL/1, 297, 14.

<sup>113</sup> LW, XXVI, 178. WA, XL/1, 298, 20-21.

<sup>114</sup> LW, XXVI, 178-179. WA, XL/1, 299, 24-26.

<sup>115</sup> LW, XXVI, 282. WA, XL/1, 440, 17-18.

<sup>116</sup> LW, XXVI, 283. WA, XL/1, 441, 31-33.

held under a curse and that we could not be liberated from it, ... heaped all the sins of all men upon him.”<sup>117</sup> The culpable decision by which Christ attached himself to the enemies of God is simultaneously the decision of this very God. “Of his own free will and by the *will of the Father* he wanted to be an associate of sinners.”<sup>118</sup> Indeed, it is “only by taking hold of Christ, who, by the will of the Father, has given himself into death for our sins,” that we are “drawn and carried directly to the Father.”<sup>119</sup> The only alternative is to withdraw our sins from Christ, hoping wanly that God might enable us to remove and replace them in our own persons, and thus to be left alone with the mortifying “majesty of God.”<sup>120</sup>

Yet even the Divine Majesty, the very name by which Luther had described the hidden and intolerable God of the *De Servo Arbitrio*, becomes for believers, the same God who lovingly destroys our sin in the person of his Son. "For this is a work that is appropriate only to the Divine Majesty and is not within the power of either man or angel – namely, that Christ has abolished sin."<sup>121</sup> "... The Divine Majesty did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all."<sup>122</sup> The *maiestas Dei* [majesty of God], before whose inscrutable depths and dreadful judgments the sinner was forbidden to ask Why, now, in Christ, provides the sinner with new depths of mystery and perhaps even an answer to his question, but of an altogether different order.

The human heart is too limited to comprehend, much less to describe, the great depths and burning passion of divine love toward us. Indeed, the very greatness of divine mercy produces not only difficulty in believing but incredulity. Not only do I hear that God Almighty, the Creator of all, is good and merciful; but I hear that the Supreme Majesty cared so much for me ... that, he did not spare his own Son, ... in order that he might hang in the midst of thieves and become sin and a curse for me, the sinner and accursed one, and in order that I might be made righteous, blessed, and a son and heir of God. Who can adequately proclaim this goodness of God? Not even all the angels.<sup>123</sup>

By reason of what, then, is our sin Christ's own? "By divine love sin was laid upon him."<sup>124</sup> In fact, it was the divine love, his very willingness to be the *peccator peccatorum*, which before the law was the most sinful thing about him. And it was his "sinful" divine love, by compelling the law to attack him, which invalidated that law and its whole legalistic mode of predication, so that henceforth "there is no condemnation for

those who are in Christ Jesus.”

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<sup>117</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 280. *WA*, XL/1, 437, 19-22.

<sup>118</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 278. *WA*, XL/1, 434, 17-18.

<sup>119</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 42. *WA*, XL/1, 99, 10-13.

<sup>120</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 42. *WA*, XL/1, 99, 17.

<sup>121</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 41. *WA*, XL/1, 96, 15-16.

<sup>122</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 182. *WA*, XL/1, 303, 30-31.

<sup>123</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 292. *WA*, XL/1, 455, 17-27.

<sup>124</sup> *LW*, XXVI, 279. *WA*, XL/1, 436, 18.