

# Journal of Theology

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# Journal of Theology

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The *Journal of Theology* is the theological journal of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. The *Journal of Theology* is designed to deepen the understanding and sharpen the skills of those who teach the Word of God. The *Journal of Theology* also testifies to the confession of our church body and serves as a witness to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, and His unchanging Word.

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# Ministers of Christ<sup>1</sup>

P. Mark Weis

## Fear, Weakness, and Trembling

*“When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).<sup>2</sup>*

### Fellow Ministers of Christ:

Even in kindergarten, I knew that I wanted to be a minister. At that time I didn’t know how I knew. I just knew. A former pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Winter Haven, Florida, often reminded me of how, as a kindergartener, I tugged on his sleeve one day and said, “Pastor Kuehne, I’m going to take your place.”

On occasion I coaxed my younger sister into playing “church” with me. I was the pastor. She was the parishioner, and there she sat, alone, in the middle of the living room, listening to my sermons, standing and sitting at my directions, and singing hymns of my choosing. I can’t recall for certain, but I may have passed a collection plate.

Admittedly, there were times when I considered other callings or occupations—a doctor, lawyer, fireman, astronaut, President of the United States, but the desire to minister never left me. Even though I didn’t always return to Immanuel Lutheran College and Seminary for theological reasons—

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<sup>1</sup>The six *Ministers of Christ* devotions were delivered at the 2017 General Pastoral Conference of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Knowing this context will aid the reader with some of the “local color” in the devotions—references and illustrations that might otherwise not have a clear connection.

<sup>2</sup> All Scripture quotations in *Ministers of Christ* are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

sometimes the reasons were classmates, basketball, and yes, girlfriends—I did keep returning. As the hymnist wrote, “God moves in a mysterious way.”

Finally, in 1978, along with my two classmates, I graduated from the seminary and became what I had always wanted to be. More importantly, it was what I had always believed God wanted me to be—a minister of Christ. It was precisely then, when I stepped from the classroom into the realities of ministering, that I asked myself for the first time and not the last, “Why did I want to be a minister?”

Perhaps you’ve never asked that question. Conversely, perhaps you have asked it after a contentious voters’ meeting, or after a casual observation like, “Pastor, that wasn’t your best sermon,” or after struggling with a sermon text late into Saturday night, or after any number of congregational or pastoral challenges.

The apostle Paul told the Corinthians: *“I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling,”* (1 Corinthians 2:3). Frankly, I can’t imagine any minister of Christ not saying the same.

Fear, weakness, and trembling arise at the accountability of the pastoral office. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:2-4, *“Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.”* That’s the accountability.

Fear, weakness, and trembling arise at the responsibility of pastoring the people of God—people redeemed with the blood of Christ and precious in His sight. Paul admonished the elders of Ephesus, Acts 20:28, *“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”* That’s the responsibility.

We face fear, weakness, and trembling at the magnitude of life’s heartaches and losses. During my first year of ministry, I received a phone call shortly before dawn. Scrambling to the kitchen, I snatched the receiver from its cradle—this was long before cell phones—and said tentatively, “Hello, this is Pastor Weis.” At first I heard only sobs and gasps. Eventually, I realized that I was talking with one of the members of my congregation. Through the broken syllables and incomplete sentences, I finally understood six words: “The baby is dead. Please hurry.”

Thirty-eight years have passed. Yet, I will never forget the look on the parents' faces. I will never forget the grandfather saying, "Pastor, what did we do wrong? Why is God punishing us?" I will never forget how, amid the grief and weeping, the small mobile home still smelled like baby powder. I will never forget the weakness, fear, and trembling in which I prayed, "O God, please give me the right words to say."

On our own, who among us is up to such a task? No one. Certainly not me. Not even the apostle Paul, who reminded the Corinthians, "*I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.*" Yet, dear brothers in Christ, is it not in our personal and pastoral weaknesses and fears and trembling that almighty God has again and again demonstrated His strength?

This blessed reality led Paul to write in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, "*Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*"

The overall theme of these devotions is "Ministers of Christ." I'm under no illusion that I can tell you anything new. Rather, I'm merely privileged to share Biblical encouragements of which we, as pastors, need to be reminded—in our weakness, in our fear, in our trembling.

## **The Means Is Scripture**

*"When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God" (1 Corinthians 2:1).*

### **Fellow Ministers of Christ:**

Sometimes, the smallness can be humorous. Years ago, I conducted a midweek Lenten service in a member's home. Only three people were in attendance. The first, our accompanist, sat with her back to me because of the location of the piano. The second sat attentively listening, except when checking the pie in the oven. The third sat contentedly sleeping in a La-Z-Boy recliner. On the drive home, I had to smile.

At other times, however, the smallness can be discouraging. Our small congregation in Cape Coral, Florida, has only nine members. Recently, we canvassed 1,500 homes and distributed 1,500 door hangers. Of the people we contacted, some expressed mild interest. A few said they would definitely be in church the following Sunday. And one woman even asked about membership.

Because Easter was approaching, we ran a color ad in the local newspaper. In part, the ad read: “Grace Lutheran Church is a small congregation with a big commitment to proclaiming the Bible in all of its fullness and truth. We are new to the Cape Coral area and would be delighted if you and your family joined us as we celebrate the resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ.”

I was excited and hopeful, not only because of the results of canvassing, but because visitors often attend church on Easter. I had visions of packed pews and placing folding chairs in the aisles to accommodate the overflow. When Easter came, the pews were as empty as always. Not one visitor attended—not even the woman who inquired about membership. Admittedly, I was discouraged.

Amid such discouragement—the empty pews, declining memberships, small budgets, and lack of visible results—the temptation, though we know better, is always to question the efficacy of simply proclaiming the Scriptures. “*Preach the Word,*” Paul told Timothy (2 Timothy 4:2). “Yes, but I have preached the Word Sunday after Sunday with no increase in membership. Perhaps the Word alone is not enough. Perhaps I need something more appealing to the general public: bake sales, bingo games, live bands. Perhaps if I were a better speaker, if I had a better vocabulary, if I used better metaphors and better gestures.”

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “*When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom*”—more literally, “superiority of words or wisdom.” Paul’s reference was likely to the philosophers and orators of ancient Greece with whom the Corinthians were no doubt familiar.

As early as the fifth century B.C., traveling teachers known as Sophists taught a discipline they called rhetoric—from the Greek word, ῥῆμα, meaning “words” or “that which is spoken.” The goal of this early rhetoric was to persuade and even to manipulate listeners through powerful speeches, practiced gestures, eloquent vocabularies, flowery metaphors, appeals to emotion, dramatic pauses—and all of this was often at the expense of the truth. All presentation. No substance.

Similar rhetoric is still used in the speeches of silk-tongued politicians who dance around the truth, or in TV commercials where the true cost of a product is buried in the illegible print at the bottom of the screen. Sadly, the same can be said of some churches today who hide or twist the truth of Scripture because they are more interested in membership than in ministry. For good reason, in Romans 16:17-18 Paul warned against self-serving false teachers, who *“by smooth talk and flattery . . . deceive the minds of naïve people.”*

What then did Paul mean by saying, *“I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom”*? He meant, “I did not come to trick, but to teach. I did not come to conceal the truth, but to reveal the truth. I did not come to impress you with my words, but to proclaim to you God’s words—or as he put it, *“the testimony about God.”*

Does this mean that as ministers of Christ we should give no thought to our sermonizing, that we should not strive to improve our styles, vocabularies, gestures, and delivery? Of course not. Every sermon should be as good as it can be—not good for the sake of good, but good for the sake of glorifying God. Not as a testament to the skills of a preacher, but as a testimony to God’s grace and salvation in Jesus Christ.

Styles, vocabularies, compelling introductions, and powerful conclusions are only useful insofar as they serve the Word of God and do not supplant the Word of God. Our desire is not to have parishioners leave church saying, “My, what a beautiful sermon,” rather, to leave church saying, “My, what a beautiful Savior!” Such a belief and perspective can never come from purely human persuasion or purely human words, no matter how well-crafted or eloquent. Such a belief and perspective can only come from the Word of God.

Did the apostle feel overwhelmed at times? Did he experience disappointment and frustration? Undoubtedly. But this is what God told Paul: *“Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city”* (Acts 18:9-10). Does the same God not say the same words to us? “Keep on speaking. Do not be silent. I am with you.”

So, dear brothers in Christ, amid all the smallness, all the frustrations, all the disappointments, may the Spirit of God remind us that the means to ministry is always Scripture. For Scripture is the means through which the Spirit of God has chosen to work.

## The Message Is Christ

*“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).*

### **Fellow Ministers of Christ:**

Joel Osteen pastors the largest church in the United States: forty thousand attendees over five weekly services and millions of supporters watching on television. Yet, incredibly, there is not a single cross in Osteen’s church complex, there are few mentions of the cross, if any, in Osteen’s sermons. Instead, his focus is on feel-good themes, positive thinking, and material prosperity. “We don’t talk about the cross,” Osteen said in one interview, “That’s too negative.”

Or consider this quote from George Stallings, a former, now excommunicated, archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church. Stallings said: “We have realized that, as expressions of faith, there are certain symbols that have stood in the way. The cross has served as a barrier in bringing about a true spirit of reconciliation between Jews and also between Muslims and Christians; and thus, we have sought to remove the cross from our Christian churches across America as a sign of our willingness to remove any barrier that stands in the way of us coming together as people of faith.”<sup>1</sup>

Compare the words of Osteen and Stallings with the clear, unflinching words of the apostle Paul: *“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”* Not that these were the only words Paul preached while in Corinth, rather, that “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” was always the focus of Paul’s message—as he explained in 1 Corinthians 1:23 -24, *“[B]ut we preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”*

Early in my ministry, someone advised me to look for Christ on every page of the Bible. I wish I could remember the source because that godly counsel helped shape my entire ministry. Look for Christ on every page. Let Christ be preeminent in all your thoughts, words, deeds, priorities, and ministries. Not

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<sup>1</sup>[www.cnsnews.com/news/article/christian-churches-should-stop-using-cross-group-says](http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/christian-churches-should-stop-using-cross-group-says)



surprisingly, Martin Luther offered much the same advice, saying, “The Bible is the cradle wherein Christ is laid.”<sup>2</sup> In another place, Luther remarked, “If you want to interpret well and confidently, set Christ before you, for He is the Man to whom it all applies, every bit of it.”

*“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”* But how can we preach “Jesus Christ and him crucified” without preaching the reason for His crucifixion?

And how can we preach the reason for His crucifixion without preaching about sin?

And how can we preach about sin without preaching that we ourselves are sinners?

And how can we preach that we are sinners without preaching that we cannot save ourselves?

And how can we preach that we cannot save ourselves without preaching about our desperate need for the Savior?

And how can we preach about the Savior who came to save us without preaching about God’s love?

And how can we preach about God’s love without preaching about its incalculable cost?

And how can we preach about the incalculable cost of God’s love without preaching about the cross?

All of these blessed teachings are connected, and their focus is Jesus Christ.

*“We preach Christ crucified,”* declared Paul, and by the grace of God, Paul’s declaration is ours. We don’t preach watered-down messages devoid of such words as *sin*, *punishment*, *Hell*, *sacrifice*, or *cross*. We don’t preach messages that present God as a doting, slightly senile grandfather, who cares nothing about the behavior of His children so long as they stop by His house on Sunday mornings.

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<sup>2</sup> Luther’s Works, Volume 35, p. 236. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 1960.

We don't preach messages about a generic God who can be stretched, distorted, and manipulated to fit any conception of Him. We don't preach about God's love without connecting it to God's immeasurable sacrifice. Our message is not simply, "God loves you," but "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son*" (John 3:16).

We don't preach a so-called prosperity gospel in which Jesus Christ is more of a banker than a Savior. Rather, we preach a gospel that promises the infinite riches of God's forgiveness and salvation to all who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

We don't preach self-righteousness—that salvation may be earned by good works or trying harder or resisting less. Instead, we declare, "*it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast*" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

We don't preach entertainment. Our proclamation is, "*the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 6:23).

We don't preach that all roads lead to Heaven. We do preach that Jesus Christ alone is "*the way and the truth and the life*" (John 14:6). And we don't preach that following Christ will eliminate persecution, but rather, that in many instances following Christ will bring persecution. "*If they persecuted me,*" said Jesus in John 15:20, "*they will persecute you also.*"

Finally, we don't preach from Einstein's Theory of Relativity or *Reader's Digest* or the *Works of the World's Great Philosophers* or the *Guinness Book of Records* or the *Koran* or *Time* magazine. No, we preach from the Bible because it alone is the inspired Word of God.

When we preach, we preach "Christ crucified," because He alone is God's promised salvation and He alone is the only way to be saved.

## The Power Is God's

*"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).*

### **Fellow Ministers of Christ:**

"How can I grow this congregation?" I've asked myself that question many times over the years. I've asked the question after preaching to half-empty pews. I've asked the question after counting names in the guest ledger and after reading the treasurer's report. I've asked the question after wondering why a visitor never returned to church and after driving past the crowded parking lots of other churches on Sunday mornings.

"How can I grow this congregation?" If this is an understandable question, it is also a misleading question—misleading, because it contains entirely too much "I" and too little "God." How can I grow a congregation? When did God ask me to grow anything except to *"grow up into Christ" (Ephesians 4:15)*, and *"grow up in our salvation" (1 Peter 2:2)*, and to *"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18)*—and even these are His doing, not ours.

When Jesus commissioned His Church, He said "Go," not "Grow." He said, "Go out," not "Bring them in." He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth is given to Me," not to you. *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).* The going is our responsibility. The growing is God's responsibility. If we could only remember this distinction, our ministries would be even more joyful and less stressful.

Paul wrote, *"I planted the seed."* Have you ever planted a seed? Most of us have. After planting the seed, exactly what did you do to make the seed grow? Yes, you chose the location. You scooped out the soil and dropped in the seed. You covered the seed with dirt. You faithfully watered, weeded, and fertilized. And when no one was looking, perhaps you spoke encouragingly to the seed: "Come on, little seed. Grow. Mature. Bear fruit." But what did you personally do to make the seed germinate and sprout? The answer, of course, is nothing.

You did nothing to grow the seed, because the power to grow always resided in the seed and never in you. So it is with the seeds of God's Word.

In Mark chapter 4, Jesus told a parable about a growing seed. He said, "*A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself (αὐτομάτη, automatically) the soil produces grain*" (Mark 4:26ff).

What part did the farmer in the parable play in growing the seed? Night or day, awake or asleep, he had nothing to do with growing the seed or producing the fruit. God did the work. He gathered the harvest. What a relief! What a blessing! So, a seed does not grow because of us, but in spite of us. This is true in nature. It is also true in ministry. The power to grow faith or effect change does not lie in the one sharing God's Word, but in the Word of God being shared. As Paul wrote in Romans 10:17, "*Faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.*"

At times, the Word of God may appear small when compared to the heartaches and challenges of life. Perhaps this is why Jesus likened the Word of God to a seed and its growth to the growth of a mustard seed. In the world of gardening, what is smaller, more ordinary-looking, and less promising than a mustard seed? And in the real world, what is seemingly smaller, more ordinary-looking, and less promising than the old, tattered family Bible? Yet, there is no greater power on earth to make things grow, from a struggling faith to a struggling congregation.

How did God create the universe in its vastness? Through His Word. How did Jesus heal the ten lepers and the centurion's servant? Through His Word. How did Jesus calm the storm on Lake Galilee? Through His Word. How did Jesus raise from the dead Lazarus, the daughter of Jairus, and the son of the widow of Nain? Through His Word. How did Jesus promise to grow the Christian Church? Through His Word. "*On this rock,*" He said, referring to Peter's confession of Him as Lord and Christ, "*I will build My Church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it*" (Matthew 16:18). *I will build*, He said, not *you*.

Rest assured, ministers of Christ, that God is working through the proclamation of His Word and through the ministry of your congregation. How do we know? First, because He Himself has told us so, saying in Isaiah, "*As the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without*

*watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is My Word that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10-11).*

But we can be certain that God is mightily working through His Word for another reason, and that reason is you. Sometime, someplace, someone—a parent, pastor, teacher, friend, or even a stranger—planted a gospel seed in you, and God made it grow.

*“I planted the seed,” said Paul. “Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”*

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## Compelled to Preach

*“Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16).*

### **Fellow Ministers of Christ:**

For nearly thirty years, the apostle Paul proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ to kings and commoners, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, young and old, rich and poor, free and slave, even to Greece’s finest philosophers—some of whom called him a σπερμαλόγος, a “seed picker.”

During that time, Paul made three extensive missionary journeys and by some estimates traveled more than 25,000 miles. Along the way, he faced fierce opposition and endured many hardships: hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness, sleeplessness, betrayal, beatings, stoning, persecution—and all of this while struggling with that mysterious “*thorn in the flesh*” (2 Corinthians 12:7).

Surely, at our busiest, we’ve all still marveled at Paul’s tireless commitment to preaching the gospel. “*For I am compelled to preach,*” he said. Compelled. The Greek word is ἀνάγκη and means “necessity.” Literally translated, Paul said, “a necessity is laid on me.” But what was that necessity? What compelled Paul to travel so far and to endure such hardships in order to

preach the gospel of Christ and to the point of exclaiming: “*Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*”? The answer, I believe, is fourfold.

First, Paul was compelled by his divine call, that is, by the fact that God had chosen and privileged him to serve as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Remember, ministry was not Paul’s chosen profession. Before his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul was a prosecutor and persecutor, not a preacher. That Paul became an apostle of Christ was by God’s design, not his—a fact that Paul stated in nine of his thirteen epistles, including 1 Corinthians, “*Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God*” (1 Corinthians 1:1).

Second, the “necessity” of which Paul spoke in 1 Corinthians 9:16 was not an outer coercion, but an inner conviction worked by the Spirit of God—a burning, unquenchable desire to preach Christ even should there be no one to hear. Each of us, fellow ministers of Christ, have felt that same inner necessity. It’s what led us to the seminary. It’s what compels us to go on ministering and proclaiming Christ despite our personal or congregational circumstances—whether successes or failures, good times or bad, packed pews or meager attendance.

In the first devotion, I raised the question, “Why did I want to be a minister?” But despite frustrations and occasional doubts, as ministers of Jesus Christ we all know the answer. Rightly understood, the answer is that we had no other choice, meaning that for us there was only one choice because of the deep conviction worked in us by God’s Spirit. In this regard, the compelling need we feel to proclaim God’s truth is no different from Paul’s and no different from Martin Luther’s, who said at the Diet of Worms, “Here I stand. I can do none other. God help me! Amen.”

Charles Spurgeon wrote: “A man who truly has within him the inspiration of the Holy Spirit calling him to preach cannot help it. He must preach. Like fire within the bones, so will that influence be until it blazes forth. Friends may restrain him, foes criticize him, despisers sneer at him, yet the man is resolute. He must preach if he has the call from heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

Third, Paul was compelled by the urgency of his calling. Preaching the gospel of Christ was a necessity for Paul because there is no other way for lost

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<sup>1</sup> In a sermon delivered on Sunday, August 5, 1855, at New Park Street Chapel, Southwark, England.

sinner to be saved. This is what led the apostle to write in the same ninth chapter of 1 Corinthians, *“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible”* and again, *“I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings”* (1 Corinthians 9:19, 22-23).

Are there more lucrative callings than being a minister of Christ? Absolutely. But there is no more important calling or rewarding calling, for God has given each of us the privilege of preaching His gospel—the gospel, as Paul reminded the Romans, that *“is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes”* (Romans 1:16). How privileged we are indeed! How compelled we should be!

Finally, Paul was compelled to preach the gospel because of the blessings that very same gospel brought to him. It is a deep, personal appreciation of what Jesus Christ has done for each of us that above all else compels us to preach Christ to others. *“For Christ’s love compels us,”* Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:14.

And the apostle’s humble gratitude is unmistakable in his words to Timothy: *“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst”* (1 Timothy 1:12-15).

Compelled to preach. Yes, we are—by God’s call, conviction, urgency, and grace. It’s what we always wanted to do, because He always wanted us to do it.

## Therefore

*“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).*

### **Fellow Ministers of Christ:**

I attended Immanuel Lutheran High School, College, and Seminary from 1968 to 1978. Looking back, those were such happy, carefree years. Basketball games. Tour choir. Field Day. The banquet. Louis the Lancer. *Cantate Domino*. Lilacs blooming in Spring. At this school, I made lasting friendships. I received an education second to none. I only wish I had studied harder and had told my teachers “thank you” more often.

On graduation day, 1978, I walked across the stage in the Fieldhouse next door, received a theological diploma, and then walked out through the Fieldhouse doors which are just down the hall—into the bright sunshine, into my life and future, into things I expected and things I did not.

Thirty-nine years later, this campus is still a respite for me, as I’m certain it is for all of you. For the past three days, we’ve enjoyed its beauty and serenity, but more importantly, to paraphrase the words of Acts 2:42, we’ve “devoted ourselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship.”

Now, however, it is almost time to leave, to pack our belongings and learnings and return to our homes, congregations, and ministries. Whether we are pastors-elect or pastors-emeritus, whether entering the ministry or retiring from it, how we pass through these doors today—into the bright sunshine, into our lives and futures, into things we expect and things we do not—will depend on whether we view these doors merely as *exits* or as *therefores*.

*Therefore* is an important word. It is a word of transition, explanation, inference, summary, and conclusion. It often provides the reason and motivation for moving forward by looking back to an accomplished fact, and so defined, there are many great “therefores” in Scripture—each one grounded in divine fact.

*“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. **Therefore** we will not fear” (Psalm 46:1-2).*

*“**Therefore**, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).*



*“Therefore, there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).*

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17).*

*“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess” (Hebrews 4:14).*

There are multitudes of other examples, though surely none are more comforting than the great *therefore* of 1 Corinthians 15:58, especially for ministers of Christ. This *therefore* is also grounded in divine fact—the glorious fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Before writing the word *therefore* in verse 58, Paul wrote the following words in verses 56-57: *“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

On at least three occasions, Jesus forewarned His disciples of His impending suffering and death, and with each warning He gave the certain promise of His resurrection. *“The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life” (Matthew 17:22-23).*

Yet, on the first Easter, the disciples were not anticipating a living Lord but mourning a dead Savior. Women hurried to the tomb wondering who would roll away the stone. Mary Magdalene was so distraught she confused the risen Jesus with the cemetery caretaker. Peter and John equated the empty sepulcher with body theft not bodily resurrection. Thomas insisted on viewing forensic evidence. The two disciples shuffling sadly toward Emmaus lamented, *“We thought He was the one.”*

But then they all encountered the risen Jesus. The fact of His resurrection changed everything—their lives, their deaths, their ministries—and to such an extent that after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the same disciples who once huddled behind the locked doors of an upper room boldly proclaimed the resurrected Christ in the very city in which He was crucified. *“Therefore,”* said Peter, *“let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).*

Now, what of us? What of our work as ministers of Christ? I can't speak for others, but I've come to realize that whenever I view "*labor in the Lord*" as futile, unproductive, a losing effort, or, to use Paul's words, "*in vain*," whenever I despair at empty pews or small budgets, or presume that I must somehow supplement the power of the gospel with power of my own, then and there I'm acting more as if Jesus Christ were still dead and buried than living and reigning.

But Jesus Christ *is* living and reigning. That is a divine fact. It is the fact of His resurrection that transforms these fieldhouse doors today from mere exits into *therefores*.

Whatever our personal or pastoral challenges, as we adjourn our conference and walk through these doors—into the sunshine, into our lives and futures, into things we expect and things we do not—let us do so in boldness and hope, rejoicing with the apostle Paul and saying: "*Thanks be to God! He give us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

***Therefore***, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."



## In Memoriam<sup>1</sup>

**Gordon Paul Radtke**

(1919-2017)

*“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).*

Gordon Paul Radtke was born in Milwaukee, WI on June 10, 1919—God’s gift to Edwin and Mathilda Radtke. On July 13 of the same year, the Lord Jesus rescued Gordon from the great poverty of sin and with His grace in baptism made him exceedingly rich in heavenly treasures and a king and priest in the kingdom of everlasting life.

*“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Ephesians 4:7).*

The Spirit of God blessed Gordon with the special gift of being able to speak to others about Jesus in a spirit of meekness. This gift was developed over his years of schooling, which included six years at Concordia College in Milwaukee, WI, two years at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, MO, and two years at Wisconsin Seminary in Thiensville, WI. He graduated in May of 1944. Over the following years he also took courses at Milwaukee State Teachers College and the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

*“[Esau] lifted his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, ‘Who are these with you?’ So [Jacob] said, ‘The children whom God has graciously given your servant’” (Genesis 33:5).*

Gordon joined Jacob of long ago in acknowledging the great gift of a Christian family. On September 17, 1944, God united Gordon and Claudine Krueger in a Christ-centered marriage. God blessed Gordon and Claudine with a son, Jonathan, and a daughter, Johanna. Over the years, the Lord graciously added eight grandchildren and eleven great grandchildren.

*“[B]y the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10).*

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the memorial service obituary, *Messiah* Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI,

The Spirit of God gave Gordon special gifts for working with people and starting programs. His first call was to a mission congregation in Wabasha, MN. While serving there he opened two additional preaching posts and began services in nearby Kellogg, MN.

Late in 1946, Gordon accepted the call to Red Wing, MN. While serving in Red Wing, he was instrumental in beginning a Christian day school. In 1950, Gordon accepted the call to Belle Plaine, MN, where he led an expansion of the Christian day school and conducted soul-care in the Lutheran Home for the Aged. In 1953, the Lord moved Gordon to accept a call to Monroe, MI. While he served there, a Christian day school was opened, and outreach efforts were undertaken with assistance from seminary student, Karl Brandle.

In 1955, the Radtke family moved to Mankato, MN, where Gordon took up the work of assistant pastor to G.W. Fischer at Immanuel Lutheran Church. While serving at Immanuel, doctrinal issues within the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) came to a head. In obedience to the Word of God, the congregation and its pastors separated from the fellowship. During the next few years, the congregation sought like-minded Christians with whom they could establish a new fellowship. This eventually led to the formation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). In 1959, the Mankato congregation started a high school, college, and seminary. All three schools became synodical schools when the CLC was formed and were relocated to Eau Claire, WI in 1963.

In the fall of 1966, Pastor Radtke became Professor Radtke when he accepted the call to Immanuel Lutheran College (ILC) in Eau Claire, WI. He taught a variety of classes in the high school, college, and seminary during the next twenty-nine years until his retirement in 1995. He served as ILC President from 1982 to 1989 and as Dean of Immanuel Lutheran Seminary from 1989 to 1994. Gordon's love of and high esteem for the Word of God, his dedication to Christian education, and his wide-sweeping pastoral experience served his students well as He served the Lord.

In addition to his work on the ILC campus, Gordon served the CLC in a number of additional positions.

During his years at Immanuel, Professor Radtke started conducting worship services at the Eau Claire County Hospital (now Dove West) and continued doing so for seventeen years. Even after retirement, the Lord had more

opportunities in which His dedicated servant could use his gifts. Professor Radtke came out of retirement to serve as pastor of Morning Star Lutheran Church in Fairchild, WI from 1995 to 2009.

While living in Eau Claire, Gordon was a charter member in the Chippewa Valley Symphony and was active in the community. He enjoyed his Tuesday outings with his friends from the coffee klatsch.

*“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9).*

The victory over death obtained by Jesus was given to Claudine, Gordon’s beloved wife of 67 years, on October 18, 2011.

Gordon stayed busy sorting through his accumulated materials and visiting with friends and family about the amazing time of grace and its blessings which the Lord had given him. In the past few years, Gordon began experiencing some health issues—none very serious—and began slowing down. On April 6, 2017, the Lord Jesus ended Gordon’s earthly pilgrimage at 97 years, 9 months, and 27 days.

*“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work” (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17).*

A memorial service was held on April 9, 2017 at Messiah Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI. Pastors Bruce Naumann and Paul Tiefel officiated. Interment was at Rest Haven Cemetery. Pastor Tiefel used Romans 3:23-24 as his sermon text under the theme, “Always Leave the Word of God”— Everyone needs it, the Holy Spirit always uses it.

*“Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them’” (Revelation 14:13).*



# Competitive and Non-Competitive Comments on Competition<sup>1</sup>

Gordon P. Radtke

## The Scriptural Attitude toward Competition

### Scriptural Evidence of Competition before the Fall into Sin

Let me remind you of a few basic definitions of competition in case you're in doubt.

Competition has been defined as the act of striving for some object that is sought for by others at the same time, a contention of two or more persons or groups for the same object or goal, a conscious or unconscious activity involving rivalry in which one person or group tries to gain advantage over other persons, and sometimes rivalry with the previous record of the individual or group.

Now, to comment briefly upon the assigned theme. Is there evidence of any competition before the fall into sin? What evidence do we have we in Scripture about Eternity B.C. (Before Creation). Was there any competition? It doesn't hurt to ask.

We find, of course, that both Scripture and our ecumenical creeds have statements concerning the complete unity and harmony—the essential oneness—of the Triune God. Unity, a perfect state of non-competition, is the truth that God gives us concerning His eternal being.

Isaiah is especially rich in references to this unity and harmony. God says, *"I am the LORD, and there is no other"* (Isaiah 45:6). That extends the authority and the rule of the eternal God right over this little inch of time that you and I are experiencing. Note also, *"I, even I, am the LORD, And besides Me there is no savior. . . . Indeed before the day was, I am He; And there is no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work, and who will reverse it?"* (Isaiah 43:11,13).

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<sup>1</sup>Professor Radtke made this presentation at the Church of the Lutheran Confession's 1972 Teachers' Conference in Mankato, MN. The oral presentation (an outline was provided to the assembly) was later transcribed. Some of the time-specific references have been edited from the original for the benefit of the present-day reader. We have left intact the somewhat colloquial feel of the oral presentation because it captures Professor Radtke's style so well and is fitting for this memorial article.

The exclusive being of God is likewise expressed in Isaiah 44:6, 8: *“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, And His Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God. . . . Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.’”*

Many other Scripture references essentially say this same thing: The Trinity in Unity admits no competition!

We are also informed by Scripture that God in eternity elected some of the mass of humanity—the world which He justified completely in the redemptive work of His Son—to be brought to saving faith. For despite the redemptive work of God for all mankind, the effect upon natural man was rejection and unbelief. So God in eternity elected some to be brought to the saving faith. To accomplish God’s election goal, His Scriptures reveal to us the divine activity of the Holy Trinity: The Father sent His Son. The Son carried out the work of redemption to its completion and declared, *“It is finished”* from the cross (John 19:30). Finally, the Holy Spirit effectively teaches and convinces the elect, bringing them into faith so that the believer may confess the gospel with heart and lips and life.

Coming to the point of created time, we ask, “Do we learn anything about competition during the creation week?” In that week we have the creation of time, space, and material—the earth, the sea, the heavens. Then He furnished the earth, the heavens, and the sea with life.

On the very first day we observe the creation of light and on the fourth day the creation of the light-bearers—the sun, moon, and stars. In all of this we find no evidence of competition. We carefully observe the creative activity of the Trinity and find it to be one of perfect harmony, and perfect agreement. There is no competition at all. God reviewed it all and *“God saw that it was good”* (Genesis 1:25).

Next, we come to the creation of that creature which God chose to make in His image, the creation of mankind. God made man in His image (Genesis 1:26f). God made him free from the element of competition. It’s interesting to think of the term “the image of God.” God did not make man competitive, but in His likeness. Then He made Eve. He made Eve from a bone of Adam, and she was not a competitor as she believes she is today. She was not created a competitor, but was created a helper suited for her man. From the time that God viewed His creation and saw that it was good up to the time of the fall into sin, we find no evidence of competition on earth, only harmony and unity.

At some point within the six days of Creation, God created ministering spirits—the angels. We know from Scripture that sometime between the creation of man and the fall into sin, there was rebellion among the angels—competition. They were competing, they were contending against God and the good angels (Jude 6). We are given the name of the good angel, Michael, who competed against Satan (Jude 9).

Against God there can be no successful competition, for he is God! Without any competing on God's part, the wicked angels were simply cast out of God's presence. In 2 Peter 2:4 we learn, *"God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment."* In Revelation 12:9 we read, *"[T]he great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."*

So it was that competition entered the creation scene—not yet upon the earth, but within God's creation after He had made His ministering servants. They were not to compete between God and man, they were created to minister, to serve, to carry out that good and gracious will of God toward his creature—the one made in His image. But among the ministering spirits there were angels who rebelled—competed unsuccessfully and were cast out of Heaven.

### **Scriptural Evidence of Competition in Connection with the Fall into Sin**

Next, we find the element of competition on earth. We have Scriptural evidence of competition in connection with the fall into sin. It begins and centers in the activity of Satan—the rebellious angel. Satan and his legions—the competitive angels who unsuccessfully competed against God—turned their attention to the earth.

Once cast from Heaven, Satan and his angels came to the earth with temptation and the thought of competition to those who had been made in the non-competitive image of God. The competitive fallen angel continues to compete against the Creator and the rest of His creation. Satan set the scene for this competition. Recall how he competed, first of all, for attractiveness. So he sought out the serpent with its subtleness. The serpent before the fall into sin was not a creature associated with deception.

It has long been a proverb: "If Satan ever wants to really convince someone that something is good and right, he'll find himself a preacher." Well, Satan did



better than that at the beginning. He found one of the most subtle creatures of God. Knowing Satan's ways, it would suggest that he chose one you would trust, one in whom you would confide, one that would appear completely guileless and harmless, just as all of God's creatures were created.

Then Satan made his appearance on the stage of innocence. The actor's opening lines were a simple question—nothing wrong in asking simple questions! He acted out a loving concern for these newly created images of God. He suggested that perhaps something a little more could be added to their blissful state. There they were, creatures of God and in His image—they were good and knew only good. "But," the actor opined, "they could still become *as God*—as God knowing good and evil."

The phrase, "to be as God" highlights the underlying competition that brought Satan to his present position. Now, Satan was attempting to transfer the same "little bit of competition" to Adam and Eve for their demise. It simply involved a bit of competition. Adam and Eve were in the image of God's holiness and righteousness, what more was needed? What was lacking? They were not competitive to anything or anyone. They were God's creatures and in no way competing to be God! But the old arch-competitor tempts with this very thing. He suggests it to Eve first, and of course, Adam swallowed it. They both swallowed the whole bit on competition: "You can be *as God*."

Along with that deception, Satan became bolder. Things were moving his way! The subtle serpent, the "sincere" question, and the "concerned" attitude: "*Has God indeed said*" (Genesis 3:1). The deceptive suggestion follows: "You're beautiful, you are almost complete in the image of your God, how wonderful!" Next Satan uses one of his handiest linguistic tools: "But. . ." He tells Eve, "*But you could become as God!*"

With this deceptive device Satan competes with the Word which in reality—in the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4)—became fatal to him. For that Word crushed Satan's head as witnessed when the Word said from the cross, "*It is finished!*" (John 19:30).

Note Satan's bold lie when next he competes against the Word of God and blasphemously asserts, "You will *not surely die*" (Genesis 3:4). This was direct competition to the Truth! Satan was competing against God for the creature's fear, love, and trust. If only Eve would take up the suggestion and join the competition! Thus the great Competitor successfully induced the mortality of

mankind in the Fall. By the woman's toleration of Satan's words, she let the father of lies (John 8:44) compete as truth. His lie was allowed to stand alongside of God's Truth, but in reality it could not stand, did not stand, and neither could man!

Satan was posing as God while opposing God's truth with his lie. It brings to mind the Scriptural image of the Antichrist. God tells us that he will sit in God's temple as God—compete against God's Truth of the gospel with his lies proclaimed from within the church (2 Thessalonians 2:3ff).

How easy it is to overlay Satan's toleration-device upon the pattern of false teachers in every age. They are all competing with their thoughts against what God said, and they are quick to add, "Thus saith God!" And how easy it is to fall in this line by calling for a tolerance of the errorist for the purpose of further admonition, or to beg time to extricate those less active in their involvement with error. Any such practice sets aside God's clear directive and in His name sets up competitive action based on human judgment. It is the "Fall-problem" all over again.

Finally, Eve's cooperation with competition against God's Word called for open rebellion. Following the father of lies, who had now become her father, she took the fruit and ate, gave to Adam, and he ate also.

Now competition had arrived on earth with full impact! The eyes competed with reality, reason competed with truth, flesh competed with spirit, man competed with God, death competed with life. From this point forward, only Satan, his angels, and all the fallen images of God were in harmony and unity. In fact, all of nature itself became infected by man's fall. Nature too became involved with the struggles of competition as Paul writes, "*For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now*" (Romans 8:19-22).

The total loss of the image and the total corruption of man's whole being spelled out ugly, sinful competition as a "way of life"—ultimately, a euphemism for death.

But thanks be to God! Mankind's total, all-out competition against God—a competition which gave the victory of death over life—was wiped out! And

how all-important that “wipe-out” is for all mankind! The “wipe-out” tells how man’s total competition against God was reversed by the love of God. This is already announced to the fallen creatures in Genesis 3:15—the first gospel promise. There God promised that a Seed of the woman would come to crush the head of Satan, would destroy the source of unbelieving competition. As a result of that successful combat, God promised to all of fallen mankind the complete victory over the arch-competitor, over the world in competition about them, and over their own competitive egos.

That universal “Good News” from God’s love that was proclaimed so soon after the Fall is followed by Eve’s wonderful statement of faith in Genesis 4:1, “*I have a man, the Lord!*”<sup>2</sup> Eve had taken God at His word concerning total annihilation of death-dealing competition.

God restores His fallen creatures to the image of His likeness, an image which is non-competitive against God and His words. Spirit-created faith causes man to take God at His word, to love Him for it, and to give all glory to Him alone. Sinners, by faith, enjoy the life of a child of God. This miracle of faith in the heart of fallen man is worked by the very word of God’s love itself. God’s great Spirit-teacher works in and through God’s words and brings to man full deliverance from all the evils of sinful competition.

### **Scriptural Evidence of Competition since the Fall into Sin**

Evidence of competition since the fall into sin must be classified under “natural man” and “new man.” It’s that simple and yet that complicated.

Under “natural man” we see the development of inherited sin and competitiveness in mankind. Adam and Eve bore their children in their likeness, Scripture says (Genesis 5:3). After the marvelous story of man’s creation in the image of God, followed by the story of fallen mankind’s recreation by God’s promise of a successfully fought victory on behalf of mankind, next we hear that Adam and Eve bore their children in *their corrupted* likeness. What a let-down! Yet, that’s how it remained child after child, generation after generation. There is no difference, “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23).

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<sup>2</sup> Translation by the author. Professor Radtke follows Martin Luther’s lead in translating אֵת יְהוָה as an appositive to אִישׁ (אִנְיָוִי). The resultant translation and exegesis suggests that Eve believed Cain to be the promised Seed and expected Savior.

Scripture clearly teaches all human beings are born with “inherited sin” and live and grow in “actual sin.” Think of the marvelous assistance that natural sinful man gets through an education that is without the regenerating Word. Luther reminds us that thereby you create “clever devils”! We give birth to totally corrupt children and then educate them with equally corrupted wisdom and they simply get smarter in their sinning, more clever in their sinning, more clever in competition.

There is only one thing that changes the whole scene and that thing natural man is not capable of acquiring. With the very best efforts of natural man set forth in history you get a story of his unsuccessful competition with himself, his fellow men, his enemies, his philosophies, his problems, his life, his death. He contends to be a god in his demonstration of the great self-made man, “Look what I did! I was born poor and look where I am now! I’m sitting on my treasures!” So it will be with man until he comes to the Word of regeneration by redemption in Christ. So it will be until the Spirit makes him a new creature, the new man. He has to be entirely new, for there is nothing to salvage. He is conceived and born in sin and he grows in sin. Without the word of truth from God he becomes educated in that darkness, in the spirit of sinful competition.

Natural man lives in unbelief and does nothing by faith. What is not of faith is sin before God (Romans 14:23, Hebrews 11:6). So all of man’s works are corrupt, everything is in sinful competition. He competes with his fellow man in a spirit which is not good before God because it is not of faith, it is not to the glory of the Lord. He competes also with all that is called god. If he wants a god he’ll make it a do-it-yourself project. He’ll make a god by himself, he’ll select the materials, he’ll decide on its shape, and then he’ll put the delightful words which he wants to hear in its mouth. That is natural man’s concept of a god and all that is related to it.

To be sure, before his fellow man, one can develop a very honorable control over his competitiveness. We call this civic righteousness. This has its benefit and reward in this life, but it has nothing to do with eternity. We may observe a man who is very honorable in competition, who may in many ways want to show concern for his neighbor, who will not take advantage of his neighbor in business, who is a very fine individual socially and makes a good neighbor—a very good neighbor with whom you’d like to associate and do business. Yet, before God all such controlled behavior is sinful and it is finally competitive—sinfully competitive—because it is not in accord with God.

Nothing in man ever changes until he is a new man. How does this regeneration come about? Well, this already took place and came about when God in His grace and love decided to compete on behalf of man—that made the difference! The story of redemption, the very gospel itself, began to unfold with the idea of smashing the head of the serpent and of overcoming death and the grave. This entire penalty for sin was to be absorbed and to be paid in full. Then, having cleansed the man, God did not leave him in this world and in his flesh in a vacuum state, but the emptying from sin and death was filled with the perfect harmony and unity of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, God's own Son. Thus, God restored to man the image of God, which is harmony and unity with the Father as a beloved child—one in whom God is well-pleased, a child no longer sinfully competitive.

This whole redemptive story and also the precious comfort involved in the doctrine of election becomes the new man's complete and lasting life. On mankind's behalf, God competed against all of mankind's enemies with absolute success. He drew His sword, He left that sword unsheathed, He went to battle and simply cut to ribbons Satan, death, and Hell. He, in His own body on the cross, suffered all of the torments of Hell for all the sins of mankind. He removed the whole load from man and paid it in full! Then He sent the good news of His work to all people. God's gospel truth goes out to every sinner. It comes from God, not the arch deceiver, and says: "You shall not surely die! I have redeemed you. You shall not die because I have bought you, I have purchased you with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20, 1 Peter 1 :18, et al.).

God's gift to every sinner is eternal life through His Son Jesus Christ, and the whole redeemed world without exception rises up in competition against this blessed salvation, to this news of life. Competitively all say in unison, "Ah, no thanks. If we're going to be saved, we'll do it ourselves. We have a better way than this degrading thing about 'we're all miserable sinners and only by grace are we saved!' If we're even interested in heaven, we'll find our way or be ready to suffer the consequences."

Oh, ugly, deadly fact, and it includes each of us. Man's nature simply will in no way have any involvement with this victory against all competition performed by God on man's behalf.

But the love of God is eternal and it responded against such sinful competition to His grace. While this whole world turned on God in vicious competition: "No, we will rather be as god and take care of ourselves! We'll

take care of our own problems! We'll get to heaven by ourselves! We don't want to hear, 'You shall surely not die' coming as mercy from God," nevertheless, God in His love elected some of these culprits, these unbelieving culprits—us—to be brought to faith, to be converted.

God carried out that election unto faith in this way, that when the Good News is preached to sinners, God's Holy Spirit is the teacher *par excellence*. In and through that Word the Spirit convinces the individual of the truth, converts him, simply turns him upside-down, inside-out. Then, lo and behold! Suddenly that believing new man glories in the victory of His loving Father over all his sinful competition! He is filled with thanksgiving for the gift of Life!

## **The Attitude of God's Children in Connection with Competition**

### **Faithful Zeal for All God-Directed Competition**

The subject will unfold rather easily, for when we talk about the attitude of God's children in connection with competition, we are talking about the believer dealing with competition in this life. You will find first that there is a competition which God *requires* of His children.

This is all in the grand context that God competed successfully for us in all ways so the victory is accomplished—it is finished. God simply lets the believing children glory in this victory and glory in it in every situation of life that calls for the use of that victory. In every believer it is the Spirit who causes him both to will and to do those things which God requires (Philippians 2:13).

There is God-directed competition: "*Fight the good fight of faith*" (1 Timothy 6:12), "*Resist the devil*" (James 4:7), et al. We are to compete against sin, against the devil, against the world, and against our flesh. God wants us to do that. It is not by the strength of our arm, of our mental capacity, of our emotional well-being, or anything else one may wish to classify. This competition and all of our sanctification is something God has already achieved and acquired and obtained. It is complete. He has given this to us and we simply with joy use it while we are here and involved with time and material.

Satan still works, seeking whom he may devour. Him you will resist steadfast in the faith. In this world, we will not love the world, neither the things that are in the world. We will not allow the world to compete for our

love, for our trust, for our fear, or to become our security. We must compete as directed and led by God; yet, sinful competition is still dangled before us daily. How careful we must be!

The world, Satan, and our flesh compete to find their security in *things*. The believing child of God has God's directive to compete against such security, for God has already obtained our full security. In faith we compete wisely by responding to temptation: "No thank you, my security is in God, it is an accomplished thing, it's alone in the love of God, for His almighty, tender care covers me not only for eternity, but even now"—that is real security!

All of the Scripture references that we have whereby God requires of us that we live by faith require that we contend, compete! In this life we are in the Church Militant—there is your "competition." It's the Church Militant, but she doesn't have to fight her own battles, find her own weapons, devise her own places. Recall those marvelous passages speaking to us about our fighting equipment and our weapons. For example, *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints"* (Ephesians 6:10-18).

So there is a God-directed competition for His children. He gives us the equipment, He gives us the means, He gives us His Spirit both to will and to do and, of course, we have the victory. With this we go forth and contend. Even in our deadliest competition against the unholy three—the devil, the world, and our flesh—we have this security, that it's not really up to us at all! We go into battle and contend with that grand victory and absolute promise of success, because God is the one who obtained it and we have it from Him. It's ours right now!

I'm not belittling the fact that we are still in our flesh. So when we contend it isn't a matter of saying "Oh well, the victory's there, so who cares?" We need to watch and pray as we set about to compete. We are surrounded by the world, our flesh, and Satan who would like to convince us that he's not real because we can't see him. So the believer lives and practices a spirit-directed competition against these enemies.

Our life is one whereby "*whether [we] eat or drink, or whatever [we] do, [we] do all to the glory of God*" (1 Corinthians 10:31). That's the lesson-plan for our life.

Think of what the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 7. You see, he's in his weak flesh, but God has given him the victory—success in all his competition. Let's not kid ourselves, we have a worse situation than Paul, we don't have his strength of faith! Faithful zeal in our flesh has many problems. We learn well from Paul when he says, "*the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. . . . O wretched man that I am!*" (Romans 7:19,24). But then we see who is going to deliver him, "*Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!*" (Romans 7:24f). Paul comes back to that secure footing, the solid foundation that he has in Christ Jesus. It's not up to him—how wonderful! Yet, he has to contend and fight the good fight of faith even unto the end.

### **Faithful Avoidance of All God-Forbidden Competition**

Our weaknesses loom great when we are to faithfully avoid all God-forbidden competition against God and our neighbor. You can make it that simple. Take a look at the Ten Commandments and you get a real good idea of what kind of things we have to avoid, what kind of competition must be avoided. That's why the great activity of the new man is daily contrition and repentance. He is in his weak flesh, but he survives by the glorious fruit of the gospel and the work of the Spirit. The big thing in our sanctified life is that the Spirit leads us to contrition and repentance day by day.

Yet, we find ourselves in great trouble with this point: God-forbidden competition. We can easily recite certain dramatic things which God wants His children to avoid, but then the flesh begins to puff up and say, "And I have avoided them." Go to those fine applications Luther spelled out in his catechetical explanations and say to yourself: "So you think you haven't sinned against the Sixth Commandment? Well, let's review our thoughts and conversations. Then let's go to the next commandment . . . and the next."



God-forbidden competition sneaks in through our flesh time and again. Isn't that our common experience? For instance, God doesn't want competition among His children, you know that. Am I the only creature that at times feels that I'm sinfully competing for something? Sometimes I get really worried about the succession in chapel talks at ILC. "Whom do I follow and who follows me? Boy, I'm in a rough spot!" That's not entirely wholesome competition, is it? You come to conference, you present a paper, and the same thing happens. You listen to three or four very good papers and you say to yourself, "I think I'll get sick and go home before my time comes."

There are also the synodical problems we have had on "fellowship and separation" with our former brethren, the old Synodical Conference. It all deals with a thing which God has forbidden. Yet, there are those who argue, i.e., engage in competition against the word from God, that one needs to contend for those poor souls who are enmeshed in an organization that is in error—that if we stick with them a little longer and keep on admonishing we can extricate those poor souls! Such superstition competes with what God says in Romans 16:17-18. Dare anyone say to God's "*mark . . . avoid*": "No, no, no God! I have a better idea. I have a better approach to do this. I will hang in there with those who are teaching falsely and my admonition may convert them." Surely, that is not faithful avoidance of God-forbidden competition! We're competing with what He told us to do on the basis of our own wisdom!

We have other examples of Christian competition which are not good, but we don't have to parade too many of them to make the point. I'll give you a few "ouchies" by way of painful references in congregational life. Any time we turn to money-making devices, we set up sinful competition, really we do. This shouldn't be! God has made it very clear how He supports His church. He permits His believers the wonderful joy of giving from what He first gave them in such great measure. We need to be careful. How easy it is to set up a competitive attitude and atmosphere whereby the church hopes to fare better financially. It's very easy to get into this kind of competition. Watch out for it!

To compete for excellence is something that need not be wrong. I may and must compete for excellence against my own sinful laziness, and the list here could get long.

To compete in a game situation is not wrong in itself. However, it's another thing when it gets out of hand as the player or players lose consideration, fairness, honesty, observation of rules, when the whole spirit of the game

heads for personal gratification, or the elevation of self and the devaluation of the next one. You see, then you've gone fleshly. It's no longer a game.

There's the businessman who has no neighbor at all when it comes to successful business competition. He can pull out the grand economic phrase: "It's a dog-eat-dog world, you know" and justify the whole thing!

Economists and ecologists offer us a competition with future generations for earth's few and dwindling goodies. To provide for the next generation we'd have to deprive ourselves! The solution: Don't bother looking for increased resources, production, don't fertilize the land, don't expand and don't consider curtailing acres and acres of concrete poured over fertile soil, just chop off the kids and we'll have the goodies all to ourselves now!

You know that in the classroom, there's a point where competition for grades, competition for that "A" becomes an elevation of the individual, the ego, and involves the defamation of others. It becomes a matter of sinful pride quite easily, because everyone in the classroom has the flesh, even the teacher (and some of us weigh too much of it!). All of this can easily move into sinful competition.

### **Prayerful Enjoyment of All Such Competition Which God Leaves to His Children's Discretion (Freedom)**

God's children have a faithful zeal for all God-directed competition, a faithful avoidance of all God-forbidden competition, and also, a prayerful enjoyment of all such competition which God leaves open to His children's good judgment. Indeed, it must be prayerful because we know how deceptive Satan is, how the pressure and the influence of the world is round about us, and how our own flesh—that's the sneakiest one of all—is ever on the course of sinful competition.

So with the prayer that God will guard and keep us in His right spirit, we set out to enjoy all such competition which God leaves to our discretion, to our own judgment, our freedom. We are free to agree to play a game. Within the bounds of our faith which is ever concerned to give glory to the Lord, we enjoy recreation, we enjoy free time, and we set up some competition by mutual agreement and the enjoyment of all.

From time to time it's good to review our competitive activities. Many things are good, but it only takes so long and because of our flesh they can

head in the wrong direction. Let me use the classic example: Money. Is any material thing misused more than that and more quickly than that? Doesn't it spoil even the believers faster than anything else?

Money, riches, wealth—so what do we do? Do we say, “OK, I'm going to go through life without money!” Some of us have no choice in that, but if you do, that's not the solution. What we do is to drown that Old Adam—we discipline the flesh, we get new strength from the Word against what God forbids and for what He wants us to do, and thereby we get ourselves back in line. We train, and it is a training procedure.

In the classroom there can be many opportunities for mutual agreement on the enjoyment of some form of competition. But be watchful and let that work be prayerfully enjoyed. Watch the flesh. Be watchful in everything lest competition gets out of line. Don't say, “Competition is not for my school because it seems to head in the wrong direction.” Sure it does! But watch it, guide it, correct it. Train and teach these children how to use those good things.

Just as we pray, “Lord, teach me good stewardship for the gifts you give me,” we also pray that we be not used by those gifts, but that we use those good gifts properly—to His glory.

So Scripture clearly indicates competition which is wrong, competition which is good, and competition which may or may not be good depending upon the heart of the individuals involved. Now, we can't see the heart of individuals, so we must be prayerful. We need to pray to avoid temptation and so enjoy the liberty of friendly competition by mutual agreement as long as it remains such in the fear of the Lord!



## **Panorama**

### **2017 Church of the Lutheran Confession General Pastoral Conference Recommendation to the 2018 Church of the Lutheran Confession Convention**

The 2017 CLC General Pastoral Conference does not recommend adoption of the 2015 *Joint Statement Regarding the Termination of Fellowship*.

Various elements of the 2015 *Joint Statement* are unclear or are subject to varying interpretations and are, therefore, inadequate for resolving this particular doctrinal difference that has separated the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). In addition, the WELS and ELS have official statements, both past and present, which are in conflict with Section III of the *Joint Statement*.

It is true that the introduction to the Joint Statement includes the following sentence: “All conflicting or possibly conflicting statements from any of the three synods are herewith rejected.” However, as a church body the CLC cannot know what is actually being rejected when false official statements from the WELS and ELS remain as part of the public record, are not corrected, and in some cases are even defended as being compatible with Bible truth. Unless and until such official statements are specifically rejected, there can be no confidence that the *Joint Statement* is a genuine agreement on the doctrine in question. In other words, there can be no agreement if the position of the WELS and ELS is both to reject false teaching (in the *Joint Statement*) and also to defend it (by failing to correct previous and current false statements) at the same time.

We appreciate the work of our representatives on this matter. We also thank the Lord for the opportunity to study His Word and bear witness to it, and for the progress that has been made in our inter-synodical discussions over several years.

For information, we are including relevant issues that the CLC Board of Doctrine has raised about the Revised Joint Statement:

#### **Positive Elements**

1. The 2015 *Joint Statement Regarding the Termination of Fellowship* includes a number of agreed-upon scriptural affirmations of the teaching, purpose, and importance of the doctrine of church fellowship.

2. The 2015 *Joint Statement Regarding the Termination of Fellowship* includes a rejection of terms and concepts sometimes used by the WELS and ELS to defend continued fellowship with a false teaching church body, e.g., “debt of love,” “persistent errorist,” and subjective judgment or conjecture about the possible outcome of the admonition etc. (2015 *Joint Statement Regarding the Termination of Fellowship* III D, F, H).

### Difficulties that Remain

1. The 2015 *Joint Statement Regarding the Termination of Fellowship* fails to identify the differences between the CLC and the WELS and ELS as doctrinal—so identified from the very beginning of the CLC and reaffirmed often (cf. 1992 CLC convention resolutions) and also acknowledged by the 1973 WELS Convention.
2. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) justifies its 1955-1961 Convention resolutions in the light of its historical interpretation of what the intent may have been, rather than ascertaining what the words actually say.
3. Synodical practice is synodical doctrine in action (past and present) and vital to God-pleasing doctrinal unity (“*By their fruits you shall know them*”—Matthew 7:20). There was a clear failure on the part of the WELS to apply Romans 16:17 in 1955<sup>1</sup> and 1957.<sup>2</sup> In 1959, a false principle regarding the termination of church fellowship was adopted.<sup>3</sup> These official actions are what led to the formation of the CLC.

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<sup>1</sup> Report of Floor Committee No. 2 (Report of the Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union) - 1955 *WELS Proceedings*, pp. 77-88. [www.box.net/shared/zngwfefa8w](http://www.box.net/shared/zngwfefa8w)

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Floor Committee No. 2 (Church Union), 1957 *WELS Proceedings*, 130-148. [www.box.net/shared/huw4cly0co](http://www.box.net/shared/huw4cly0co)

<sup>3</sup> A Report to the Protest Committee by Carl J. Lawrenz. [www.box.net/shared/sve4muvvc40](http://www.box.net/shared/sve4muvvc40) / A Report of the Protest Committee, 1959 *WELS Proceedings*, p. 177-179. [www.box.net/shared/kapahr6cc4](http://www.box.net/shared/kapahr6cc4) / A Call for Decision Memorial to the 1959 Convention - 1959 *WELS Proceedings*, p. 209-211. [www.box.net/shared/tmqkxets8g](http://www.box.net/shared/tmqkxets8g) / Report of Floor Committee No. 23 (Memorial - A Call for Decision) - 1959 *WELS Proceedings*, p. 209-211. [www.box.net/shared/qfvi7c0004](http://www.box.net/shared/qfvi7c0004)

4. The 2015 *Joint Statement Regarding the Termination of Fellowship* fails to address other reasons for delaying the termination of church fellowship, e.g. “*In Statu Confessionis*” or “state of confession.” (This is a declaration of vigorously protesting fellowship toward an erring church body--an action which has sometimes been used as an excuse to avoid severing fellowship ties in obedience to Romans 16:17-18.)

There are other unresolved areas of doctrinal concern with WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), such as unionism with regard to membership in Thrivent, the role of women in society, instances of practicing selective fellowship, and questions regarding a lack of doctrinal discipline. A God-pleasing testing and resolution of these and other current fellowship practices would be necessary for any reestablishment of true unity in the Word.



## Book Reviews

*David T. Lau*

**Martin Luther: *Church Postil V (Luther's Works, Volume 79)*, Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, MO, 2016, hard cover, 427 pages, 17 preliminary pages.**

This new volume of Luther's Works contains sermons on the standard gospel and epistle lessons for the last part of the church year (from Trinity 11 to the Last Sunday). Not all texts are included, because sermons on some texts have been published separately. Sermons are included on such gospel accounts as Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and tax collector, Jesus' healing of a deaf man, the story of the good Samaritan, the healing of the ten lepers, the raising of the young man of Nain, the crippled man lowered from the roof, and Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant.

There are also sermons on a number of pericopes from the apostle Paul's letters to the Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and the second letter to the Corinthians. Included as an appendix is a longer sermon on Ephesians 6: 10-17.

Perhaps the best way to give the flavor of these sermons is with a few excerpts from one of them. As we might expect, Luther presents the extreme contrast between the Pharisee and the tax collector. Of the Pharisee Luther says, "Before God he is worse than any robber, murderer, adulterer, etc." (p. 7). "In the First Commandment arrogance especially and most highly is forbidden, that a person should not rely on himself or his gifts or be pleased with himself" (p. 8). The Pharisee "has no pity or sympathy in his heart about a poor sinner's distress and misery, but thinks that it serves him right to remain in damnation and destruction" (p. 9). "Christ sets forth this Pharisee as the highest example of what a person can do out of his own powers according to the Law" (p. 11). Each of us needs to be on guard against Pharisaism. As Luther says, "The righteous villain and hypocrite, the Pharisee, is still stuck in us, and he hinders and prevents us from bringing [sin and grace] together" (p. 13).

In contrast the tax collector pleads for God's mercy in a short prayer. Luther says, "No one can obtain such a prayer out of his own heart and thoughts, even as short as it is" (p. 12). "For him to step before God and make such a prayer, this tax collector must have heard this message, and the Holy Spirit must have touched and moved his heart with it" (p. 13). These words are typical of Luther, for he was an enemy of the idea of man's free will being able to choose God, and he was also an enemy of the notion that the Holy Spirit does His work apart from God's Word.

But this is not to say that sinners like the tax collector are preferred to Pharisees. It is true that God “is merciful only to poor sinners” (p. 14), but it is also true that “there are some coarse and insolent sinners—robbers, murderers, thieves, villains, fornicators—who are so bad they are drowned in sin, who always continue and never think or care about having a merciful God; they go on without a care, as if they were in no danger” (p. 14).

Luther was upset that so many of his fellow-citizens “want to accept and take comfort from the fact that God is merciful to sinners; yet they do not want to be rebuked and reprimanded as sinners by anyone” (p. 15). The fact is that both Pharisees and tax collectors resist God and have no use for His mercy. It is by grace alone that the Pharisee Nicodemus and the tax collector Matthew come to know Jesus and receive mercy from Him. Luther says: “It certainly is a skill above all human skill . . . that a man can have the grace truly to know that he is a sinner, and yet can so turn around that he looks away from God’s wrath and grasps nothing but grace” (p. 16).

What then is the lesson for us? “First, see that you are not a false but a real sinner; that is, not only with words but in reality and from your whole heart acknowledge yourself guilty before God of His wrath and eternal damnation, and thus truthfully utter these words: ‘to me, a poor sinner.’ However, at once lay hold of the other words, ‘Be merciful,’ with which you can blunt the Law’s point and edge” (p. 17). “God wants to be merciful to poor sinners who sense their sins and mourn and confess that they are condemned before God’s judgment” (p. 18).

Since volumes such as this are now available to us in our own American English, what better way is there to celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation than to pick up one of these volumes and let Luther lay into you by means of God’s law and then lift you up through the gospel of our Savior!

**John D. Schuetze: *Doctor of Souls – The Art of Pastoral Theology*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2017, hard cover, 348 pages, 8 preliminary pages.**

The Scriptures do not change, and this includes the letters the apostle Paul wrote to his pastoral assistants Timothy and Titus. In the years that I taught pastoral theology, we spent a great share of the time studying these letters. It was certainly beneficial to be solidly grounded on what God had to say before tackling the many issues involved in being a confessional Lutheran pastor in our country today.



When I attended seminary, we did not have a standard textbook. We used notes in English based on the German textbook *Pastorale Praxis*, written by Professor John Schaller (1913). Other textbooks written for the American scene were C. F. W. Walther's *Americanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie* (1872) and John Fritz's *Pastoral Theology* (1932).

By the time I started teaching pastoral theology, I was happy that a new textbook had been written, *The Shepherd under Christ* (1974), written by teachers at the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Armin Schuetze and Irwin Habeck. Even though Scriptures do not change, the situations faced by Lutheran pastors do change, and the teachings of Scripture need to be applied to circumstances never dreamed of by pastors of a previous age.

Now we have a still newer textbook written by Armin Schuetze's son, John Schuetze. In his foreword the author writes: "*The Shepherd under Christ* . . . is still a helpful pastoral theology text for the seminary student and veteran pastor alike. The purpose of this book is not to update or replace *The Shepherd under Christ*. . . . The author's purpose was . . . to provide a fresh look at pastoral ministry and offer some guidance in areas that were not specifically addressed in that book. For example, some of the ethical medical dilemmas that a pastor can face in 21st-century ministry were unheard of 40 [sic] or 50 [sic] years ago. Or we think of the many challenging situations the counseling pastor confronts as he ministers to Christian singles and families" (p. vii).

Since John Schuetze is both a counseling pastor as well as a licensed professional counselor, his book goes into greater detail on how to give counsel on such matters as divorce, abortion, sexual abuse, cohabitation, blended families, and same-sex couples. In these areas and others he builds on the counseling material found in *The Counseling Shepherd*, also co-authored by his father together with Frederick Matzke.

Some of the topics discussed in this book include the pastor's wife (pp. 45-47), termination of a call (pp. 53-60), the mode of baptism (pp. 70-76), the material elements of the Lord's Supper (pp. 87-93), and ministry to the military (pp. 117-120). In trying to be up to date, Schuetze discusses at length the principles involved in making medical decisions with regard to one's self as well as others (pp. 121-154). In his chapter on comforting the bereaved, Schuetze discusses suicide, miscarriage, and abortion. As we would expect, two of the longer chapters in the book are the chapter on marriage and other sexual matters (pp. 211-265) and the chapter on counseling members (pp. 267-310). It is especially in these chapters that Schuetze makes use of his training and experience as a licensed professional counselor.

There are several areas where Schuetze differs from Fritz. For example, he writes, "In his *Pastoral Theology* (1932), John Fritz states, 'Never should a Christian pastor officiate at the funeral of a suicide who *intentionally* took his own life' (emphasis his)." In contrast Schuetze says: "Rather than trying to judge the intent of the person who committed suicide, it is more consistent with Scripture to consider what the person believed. . . . Unless we have compelling evidence that the person rejected the Christian faith prior to taking his or her life and did so with a sound mind, we assume that the person committed the sin of suicide in weakness of faith. This treats the sin of suicide as other sins rather than as the unforgivable sin" (pp. 176-178).

Schuetze also differs from some previous authors, including Fritz, who do not distinguish clearly between Jewish betrothal and modern engagement. Schuetze does not agree with the saying that engagement is tantamount to marriage. He says, "It is present and not future consent that establishes marriage. . . . This promise to marry in the future is not a promise that makes them husband and wife, so to enjoy the blessings of marriage through cohabitation or sexual intimacy would be sinful" (pp. 217-218). As far as the expression "married in the eyes of God" is concerned, Schuetze makes the point that there is no marriage in the eyes of God that is not also marriage in the eyes of God's representatives in church and state. In other words, a marriage that is not a legal marriage is not a marriage.

On the question of malicious desertion Schuetze states, "Malicious desertion may include refusing sexual relations, withholding adequate financial support, various forms of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, spiritual), or having an emotional affair" (p. 242). This may well be an area where many of us would consider this an unwarranted expansion of the Scriptural concept. In this connection he also states: "Viewing Internet pornography does not in and of itself destroy the marriage bond, but a prolonged pattern of porn usage may" (p.242).

Sexual immorality has become so common in our society that present-day pastors can expect to spend a great amount of their ministry in dealing with the fallout. Schuetze predicts worse times ahead. "In the future, this (polygamy) may be more and more of an issue in North American culture. Now that society has redefined marriage to include same-gender couples, one has to wonder whether polygamy, polyandry, and group marriages will soon receive social and legal recognition as well" (p. 263).

Those who teach pastoral theology and those who practice pastoral theology will no doubt pick up valuable insights by reading this book. Schuetze

has no intention of teaching anything different from “the timeless truths of Scripture” (p. vii). You will have to read the book to judge for yourselves whether he succeeds in every detail.

**John P. Meyer: *Studies in the Smalcald Articles*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2017, hard cover, 241 pages, 20 preliminary pages.**

As a seminary student I read Professor Meyer’s discussions of Martin Luther’s *Smalcald Articles* in the *Northwestern Lutheran* in the years from 1957 to 1960. Professor Meyer was also my isagogics and dogmatics teacher during those years, and I knew he was a careful student of Scripture and church history. I was fascinated by many of the details he presented in his articles concerning the Roman Catholic practices of that time.

These *Northwestern Lutheran* studies are now available in book form. Since they were written in the nineteen fifties, one should not expect any reference to any historical developments since that time. But if we want a clearly written account of the meaning of the *Smalcald Articles* in their historical setting, this is a very useful book, written for ordinary Christians, not for scholars or theologians.

Meyer’s method is to present the text of the *Smalcald Articles* in English translation and then discuss their meaning in their setting, paragraph by paragraph. Along the way he gives us the meaning of difficult words, phrases, and points of theology. For example, in Part I Luther confesses that Jesus “*was born of the pure, holy Virgin Mary*” (p. 1). Meyer explains, “Mary was a virgin till the birth of our Savior. Then she was the wife of Joseph; and the brothers and sisters of Jesus, who are mentioned on several occasions in the New Testament, may well have been her children.” This, of course, is opposed to the unnatural view of many that supposes that Mary remained a virgin during her entire married life. If that had been the case, Mary would have been a failure as a wife, according to the apostle Paul’s teaching in First Corinthians seven.

Anyone acquainted with Meyer’s writings knows that he was a strong advocate of the Bible teaching of universal justification, and he delighted in showing that Martin Luther himself taught universal justification in his writings. Therefore in his discussion of what Luther called “the first and chief article” (*Smalcald Articles*, Part II, Article I) Meyer states, “By paying the penalty in full, Jesus stood justified of our sins; and in his justification we have

ours, our justification. It is a fact. Just as our offenses led to the death of Jesus, so also our justification led to his resurrection. In raising Jesus from the dead, God proclaimed justification to all the world for each and every sinner” (p. 5).

Since the *Smalcald Articles* were written by Luther at the direction of his elector as preparation for a general church council proposed by the Roman Catholic pope, two of the articles that received the most of Luther’s (and Meyer’s) attention were the articles on the Mass and the Papacy. In this connection Meyer makes this comment, “Luther, in speaking of the Mass, always stressed that with its work-righteousness it denies the chief article of the gospel and thus proves that it is anti-Christian to the core” (p. 33).

Since there was no Scriptural basis for the notion that in the Mass the priest offers a sacrifice to God to atone for the sins of the living and the dead, Luther wrote this rule: “The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel” (p. 35). Meyer comments, “If the rule . . . is disregarded . . . then thereby the gates have been thrown wide open for abuses of all sorts to come in and plague the church. The doctrines of the Mass and of purgatory are sad cases in point” (p. 35). In our time, of course, there are very few churches of any kind, Protestant or Roman Catholic, that follow Luther’s rule, and the gates have been thrown so wide open that both Luther and his Roman Catholic opponents would be astounded.

One of the saddest facts of present-day Lutheranism is its virtual abandonment of Part II, Article IV, dealing with the papacy. As confessional Lutherans today we still confess with Luther “that the Pope is the very Antichrist” (p. 72), and we appreciate Meyer’s extensive discussion of the history behind the rise of the papacy and also a clear summary of the Biblical prophecies of the Antichrist in Second Thessalonians chapter two. Meyer has no trouble accepting the claim of the *Smalcald Articles*. His comment is, “The fingerprints that Paul gives us of him in 2 Thessalonians 2 exactly match the papacy of Rome” (p. 74).

Much of the contents of this book is unknown territory for many ordinary Christians today. But since this unknown material is presented in clear and simple language, it will become known if this book is read, and it will be appreciated.

What a wonderful heritage we have as confessional Lutherans! May it never be ignored or lost among us!

