

**PROCEEDINGS
of the
CONFESSIONAL EVANGELICAL
LUTHERAN CONFERENCE**

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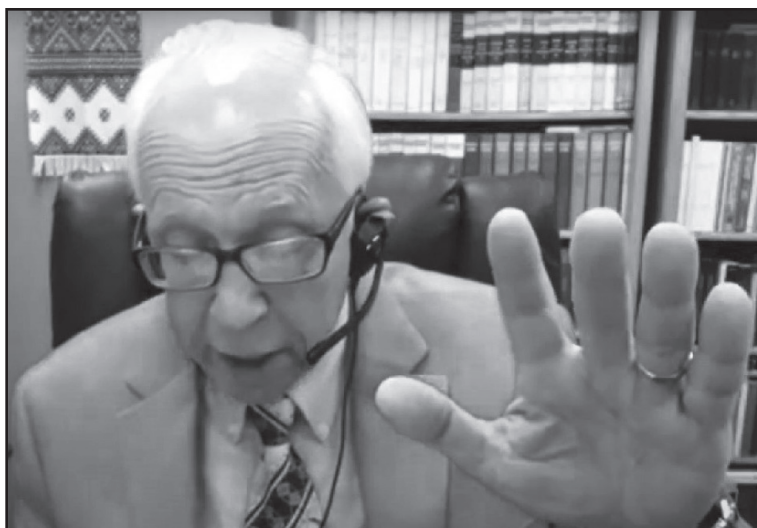


Tenth Triennial Convention
Online
May 25–June 10, 2021

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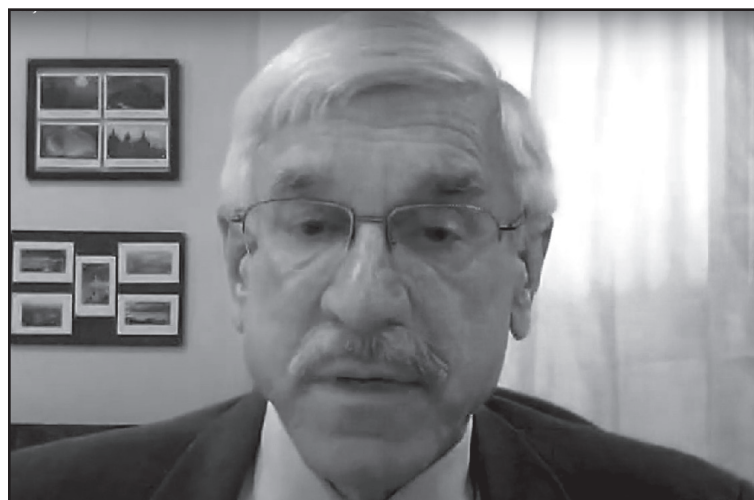
Outgoing President Schmeling
Installation of new officers



New President Thomas Nass



New Vice President Timothy Buelow



Mark Schulz, Treasurer



New Secretary Nathan Seiltz



President Schmeling delivers his president's report

**CONSTITUTION
of the
CONFSSIONAL EVANGELICAL
LUTHERAN CONFERENCE**

ARTICLE I

Name

The name of this federation of churches shall be The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference.

ARTICLE II

Confession of Faith

Section 1. The Conference accepts the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God and submits to this Word of God as the only infallible rule and authority in all matters of doctrine, faith, and life.

Section 2. The Conference also accepts the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord of 1580, not in so far as, but because they are a correct exposition of the pure doctrine of the Word of God.

ARTICLE III

Purpose

The purpose of this conference of confessional Evangelical Lutheran churches is:

1. To give outward expression to the unity of spirit and oneness in faith and confession that binds the members of the Conference together;
2. To provide a forum for the members' mutual encouragement, spiritual growth, and strengthening in faith and confession;
3. To promote and strengthen the existing unity in scriptural doctrine and practice among the member churches and to seek to remove whatever might threaten to disturb or disrupt that unity;
4. To encourage the members of the Conference to be zealous in sharing their Lutheran heritage of the pure and unadulterated gospel of

CONSTITUTION

Jesus Christ with those who do not yet know and believe in Jesus as their Savior;

5. To give a clear, firm, and united testimony to the world concerning all that the Bible, the verbally inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God, teaches;
6. To encourage and undertake the preparation and publication of clear Scripture-based confessional statements on issues that confront the church from time to time and which may or may not be addressed in the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord of 1580.

ARTICLE IV

Membership

Section 1. Membership in the Conference may be acquired and held only by such Lutheran churches which have accepted without reservation the doctrinal and confessional basis of the Conference described in Article II and which are not in fellowship with churches that in their doctrine or practice deviate from the confessional standard of the Conference.

Section 2. Churches applying for membership in the Conference may be received at any convention of the Conference by an affirmative vote of two thirds of the delegates present and voting.

ARTICLE V

Authority

Section 1. The Conference has only advisory authority in all things with respect to which the member churches have not specifically given it power to act.

Section 2. Any member church of the Conference which enters into fellowship with another church shall submit its action to the next meeting of the Conference for ratification.

ARTICLE VI

Representation

Section 1. Each member church of the Conference shall be encouraged to send two male voting delegates to the regular meetings of the Conference.

Section 2. Other delegates are welcome at CELC meetings and may participate in the discussion, but they are not allowed to vote on matters of CELC business.

CONSTITUTION

ARTICLE VII

Meetings

Regular plenary meetings of the Conference shall be held triennially. Recommendations as to the place and time of the meetings are to be made by the Planning Committee (see Article X) to the voting assembly three years in advance. Changes that become necessary are to be made and announced by the Planning Committee.

ARTICLE VIII

Officers

Section 1. Officers of the Conference shall be a president, vice president, and secretary.

Section 2. The officers of the Conference shall be elected from a slate of candidates presented by the Planning Committee, with opportunity for additional nominations from voting delegates at the meeting. Voting shall be by ballot. A majority is necessary for election.

Section 3. The officers of the Conference shall serve for a term of three years. After two terms an individual will be ineligible for reelection to the same office for a period of three years. If a vacancy occurs in the office of president, the vice president shall become president. If a vacancy occurs in the office of vice president or secretary, the person who received the next highest number of votes for the office of vice president or secretary in the previous election shall succeed to the office for the remainder of the term.

ARTICLE IX

World Regions

Section 1. For various purposes the Conference shall be divided into five world regions: North America, Latin America, Asia-Oceania, Europe, and Africa. Church bodies in these regions are encouraged to meet together for mutual support and for joint work, especially in missions and theological training.

Section 2. These regions may elect officers to oversee their activities, and they may choose to organize further. If regional constitutions are produced, these constitutions shall be shared with the CELC Planning Committee for approval and for circulation throughout the CELC.

Section 3. CELC membership issues—both applications and (God forbid) terminations—shall not be considered at regional meetings. The entrance point into the CELC shall be through the plenary meeting, since membership in the CELC involves membership in the entire world-wide fellowship.

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Section 4. Funding for CELC regional activities shall be procured through the regions themselves. The CELC Operating Fund and the CELC Travel Assistance Fund shall not be used for regional purposes.

ARTICLE X

Planning Committee

Section 1. The Planning Committee shall consist of the president, vice president, secretary, and two representatives elected by the plenary assembly. The latter two representatives shall serve for a maximum of two three-year terms.

Section 2. The Planning Committee shall plan the program and make all necessary arrangements for the plenary meetings of the Conference. It shall disseminate information regarding the meetings and work of the Conference. It shall meet as often as necessary to carry out these and any other duties that may be assigned to it.

ARTICLE XI

Expenses

Section 1. Each member church shall pay the expenses of its own delegates to meetings of the Conference.

Section 2. The Planning Committee shall administer a CELC Operating Fund, from which the expenses of the CELC will be paid. All member churches shall be encouraged to contribute to this fund, in keeping with their abilities. The Planning Committee shall also administer a CELC Travel Assistance Fund, to be funded by special gifts. Member churches that need help in paying the expenses of their delegates may apply to the Planning Committee for assistance from this fund.

Section 3. The CELC funds shall be managed by a treasurer, who shall be appointed by the Planning Committee for a renewable term of three years, subject to ratification at the plenary meeting. The treasurer shall provide financial reports for ratification at each plenary meeting.

ARTICLE XII

Amendments

Amendments to this Constitution may be made at any meeting of the Conference by the affirmative vote of two-thirds of the voting delegates, provided that notice of such amendments shall have been sent through the Planning Committee to all member churches one year prior to the meeting of the Conference.

BYLAWS

- 1.1 There shall be a Commission on Theology consisting of five members. The members of the commission shall be appointed by the Planning Committee, subject to ratification by the convention. The term of the office shall be six years. Members will normally be eligible for appointment for a maximum of two terms. The president of the Conference shall be a non-voting member of the commission.
- 1.2 The commission shall prepare a position paper on the theological topic treated by the last convention. This statement shall be submitted for ratification by the CELC in convention.
- 1.3 The commission shall evaluate all requests for membership and shall bring membership recommendations to the triennial conventions.
- 2.1 There shall be a Global Theological Education Commission (GTEC) consisting of six members: one representative of WELS, one representative of the ELS, and one theological education leader from each of the four other CELC regions (Africa, Asia-Oceania, Europe, and Latin America). The members of the commission shall be appointed by the Planning Committee, subject to ratification by the convention. The term of the office shall be six years. Members will normally be eligible for appointment for a maximum of two terms. The president of the Conference shall be a non-voting member of the commission.
- 2.2 The GTEC shall facilitate the discussion of Lutheran theological education in and among CELC churches at pre-seminary, seminary, and continuing education levels. It shall facilitate and promote the sharing of curricula, Lutheran materials, and sound pedagogical practices between CELC seminaries worldwide. The GTEC, as funds are available, shall conduct theological education conferences, provide a website for sharing resources, and oversee other activities for the improvement of theological education in the CELC. The commission shall report its activities to each convention.

Adopted 1993; Revised 1996, 2002, 2008, 2021

APPENDIX #1:
Guidelines for Churches Seeking Membership
in the CELC

A. Prerequisites for Membership

1. A church seeking membership in the CELC is expected to be in formal church fellowship with at least one of the churches of the CELC before making application for membership.
2. A church seeking membership in the CELC should have:
 - national clergy,
 - organized congregations with regular worship, with lay leadership, and with members providing support for the work of the church,
 - a constitution or other written document that provides for church organization and governance, and
 - an officially adopted doctrinal position.

B. Procedure for Attaining Membership

1. A church seeking membership in the CELC should:
 - request membership through a letter to the CELC President,
 - obtain a recommendation for membership from at least one CELC church that is in formal church fellowship with it, and
 - submit its constitution and doctrinal statement(s) to the CELC President at least one year before the triennial convention at which the membership request will be considered.
2. The CELC Commission on Theology will officially evaluate the membership application together with any comments submitted by member churches and will bring a recommendation to the triennial convention.

Adopted 2002; Revised 2011, 2021

APPENDIX #2:
Dispute Resolution Procedure for CELC Members

Should a theological dispute between member churches of the CELC surface, remain unresolved, and threaten the bonds of fellowship between those churches,

1. The churches unable to resolve the difficulty by themselves may approach the CELC president and ask for help in resolving the issue. In doing so, the churches retain their autonomous, self-governing status, but are voluntarily seeking and submitting themselves to the judgment of the CELC leadership in their effort to resolve the problem.
2. If the CELC president is unable on his own to bring about a resolution of the dispute, he shall enlist the help of four other individuals drawn from the CELC Theological Commission or Planning Committee. This five-member ad hoc committee shall further investigate the matter, give counsel, and seek to resolve the dispute.
3. If the matter remains unresolved, the ad hoc committee shall recommend a course of action to the next triennial convention of the CELC. The ad hoc committee's recommendation to the CELC convention shall be reported to the member churches of the CELC at least three months prior to that convention. The decision of the convention in session will be the final resolution of the matter for CELC member churches.

Adopted 2008

ONLINE CELC CONVENTION PARTICIPANTS

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Minutes of the 10th Triennial Convention of the CELC Conducted online via Zoom, May 25–June 10, 2021

TUESDAY, MAY 25

During the moments leading up to our start time, Larry Schlomer welcomed delegates as they arrived. At 6:02 CDT, President Gaylin Schmeling called the CELC convention into session and welcomed all. He turned the floor over to Erin Abel, the event coordinator from Third Coast Events, who went through some housekeeping items to help the meeting move smoothly, such as having everyone make sure their picture was labeled with their actual name, how to raise one's hand, mute, unmute, etc.

Next, at 6:10 CDT, Pres. Schmeling introduced Pastor Artur Villares, whose recorded devotion was played by Erin Abel. Pastor Villares' devotion was based on the words of Psalm 19:1-4 and emphasized the creation and preservation generously provided for the whole world by God the Father. Pastor Villares made generous use of words familiar to us all, namely the Nicene Creed and Luther's explanation to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed.

At 6:20 CDT, Pres. Schmeling began his prerecorded president's address, which reminded us all of the theme of the convention.

Following the address, Secretary Timothy Buelow read the roll call, beginning with the voting delegates, asking each to acknowledge his presence and briefly greet the group. This worked rather efficiently, but considering the size of the group gathered, this took us past the top of the second hour.

At 7:10, Pres. Schmeling began speaking live again, sharing with us greetings from "emeriti"—men who had in the past devoted a great amount of energy to the success of CELC: Gerhard Wilde, Forrest Bivens, and Steven Petersen.

At 7:18, Pres. Schmeling announced the Planning Committee's appointment of a Minutes Review Committee, consisting of John Hartwig, Holger Weiß, and Paul Fries. He called for a vote to approve the appointment. It was moved, seconded, and passed.

MINUTES

At 7:22, Pres. Schmeling introduced Prof. John Brenner of the CELC Theological Commission who presented Article VIII of *The Eternal Word* (Sanctification) for adoption. Article VIII had been sent out for review to the churches of the CELC more than a year earlier, so there was no further discussion. It was moved that the article be adopted as presented. The motion was seconded and passed.

Prof. Brenner then offered a wide-ranging thank you to Pastor Andreas Drechsler for his years serving on the Theological Commission. It was moved, seconded, and passed to officially send him our joint thanks.

Pres. Schmeling announced the Planning Committee's appointment of Jonas Schröter to the Theological Commission and the reappointment for continued service of Ugis Sildeggs and Michael Smith, and he asked for approval. It was moved, seconded, and passed.

John Brenner then presented for membership the application of the Christian Lutheran Evangelical Church (Taiwan) as an associate member of the CELC. Pastor Peter Chen presented the decades-long history of Lutheran mission work in Taiwan leading to today's application for membership, with missionary emeritus Rob Siirila serving as translator. Following the moving presentation, it was moved, seconded, and passed that the CLEC Taiwan be accepted as an associate member church of the CELC. Adoption was unanimous.

Next, CELC Treasurer Mark Schulz presented his summaries of the current financial situation of the CELC, as well as the establishment of a new fund for travel assistance to conventions for those who may need such subsidies. He also presented the results of professional audits of our funds, certifying that they are all in good order. It was moved, seconded, and passed to approve the treasurer's reports.

Next, Pres. Schmeling introduced Vice President Thomas Nass, who began the presentation of the proposed constitutional changes. Proposal #1 was that we officially establish in our constitution the CELC Travel Assistance Fund for conventions, something that has in effect already been established. Without dissent it was moved, seconded, and passed that this fund be established.

The hours having drawn to a close, the rest of the business meeting items were pushed forward to our Thursday session.

At 8:06 CDT, Pastor Artur Villares was asked to close our session with prayer.

THURSDAY, MAY 27

President Schmeling called the assembly to order at 6:01 AM CDT (11:01 UTC). He led us in a devotion on Isaiah 6:1–8, the Old Testament text for Trinity Sunday (May 30 this year), and concluded with a prayer.

Following the devotion, the first motion of the day was made, that Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (Kenya) be welcomed into the CELC as an associate member church. Pastor Mark Onunda presented his church and gave a devotional speech on the words of Ezra 3:11, “They sang to the LORD: ‘He is good; his love to Israel endures forever.’ And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.”

The motion was seconded and unanimously adopted, making this Kenyan church the 34th member church of the CELC.

At 6:19, Pres. Schmeling turned the floor over to Thomas Nass who walked the delegates through the proposed changes to the constitution, beginning with bylaw #2. The rewording suggested by the Planning Committee replaces the THETA Commission with the Global Theological Education Commission (GTEC). This issue was previously discussed at the 2017 convention in Grimma. The constitutional change was moved, seconded, and passed.

At 6:29, the voting process began for the Planning Committee officers, as Erin Abel highlighted the candidates on the Zoom screen. Elected by ballot were Prof. Thomas Nass, president; Pastor Timothy Buelow, Vice President, Pastor Nathan Seiltz, Secretary, and members at large Prof. John Hartwig (reelected) and Pastor Bradley Kerkow.

Following the election, Pres. Schmeling asked that as per our constitution, the convention ratify the Planning Committee’s reappointment of Mr. Mark Schulz as treasurer. It was moved, seconded, and passed.

At 6:47, Proposed Constitution Change #3 was brought to the floor—the elimination of two-tiered membership, by removing the category of associate membership from the constitution. Prof. Nass spoke strongly in favor, noting that there are delegates who have been at every convention, such as Pastor Artur Villares of Portugal, who have never been officially able to vote. Following the ten-minute discussion, the change was approved by 96% of the voters.

MINUTES

At 7:00, delegates voted in favor of proposal #4, the elimination of a phrase which was unworkable and not being followed, namely that “all of the member churches” ratify each new church becoming a CELC member.

Beginning at 7:03, there was a long discussion in regard to adding a “Termination of Membership” section to the constitution. At 7:23 this proposal was sent back to the Planning Committee for further consideration and if so desired, presentation to the next triennial convention.

At 7:26, delegates voted in favor of simplifying the requirements about delegates in Article VI, due to the variation in size and organization of the individual church bodies.

At 7:29, Article VIII of the constitution was amended to reflect the actual practice the CELC has used for many years in nominating candidates for office, namely, “presented by the Planning Committee, with opportunity for additional nominations from voting delegates at the meeting.”

Proposal #8 was presented at 7:36, to update and expand Article IX dealing with CELC regions, including the renaming of our CELC regions. With the addition of Oceania to the Asia region’s name, the proposed expansion of Article IX was approved.

At 7:38, Pres. Schmeling read through the rite of Installation for the new officers of the CELC, including its many scriptural injunctions. Each of the newly elected officers vowed to faithfully carry out their duties and uphold the inerrant Scriptures while following the Lutheran Confessions in the Book of Concord of 1580 because it is a correct exposition of the teachings of Scripture.

At 7:52, Dr. Kebede began his beautiful devotion on God the Son, our Redeemer, based on Hebrews 1:1-4.

The meeting closed at 8:05 and was followed by online fellowship among those who were not in a hurry to leave.

TUESDAY, JUNE 1

Rev. Larry Schlomer welcomed by name those joining the meeting as they arrived.

At 6:02 A.M., with a couple stragglers still joining the meeting, Pres. Schmeling invited everyone to listen to the opening devotion which was led by Larry Schlomer. Pastor Schlomer spoke of the amazing opportunity we have in being granted access to the throne room of God despite our unworthiness, as exemplified by the interaction of Martha with Jesus

in John 11 at the tomb of her brother Lazarus. It was God who gave her the gift of faith which enabled her to interact with the God-man Jesus Christ profitably. It is that faith we share with each other and then proclaim to others. Rev. Schlomer concluded with the words of the *Sanctus*: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of heavenly hosts,” and he led us in prayer.

At 6:15, Pastor Schlomer introduced essayist Prof. Bradley Wordell for the reading of the essay and welcomed also those joining us by watching the YouTube stream. Despite a couple of technical glitches, all were able to follow the presentation in printed, audio, and pre-recorded video format. The essay was titled, “The Trinity: Glory Be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.”

At 7:40, Pastor Schlomer, our moderator, thanked the essayist, who in turn thanked the conference for the assignment and privilege. One of the points more thoroughly discussed was about how much Old Testament believers understood about the Trinity, regarding the term “dim light” which Prof. Wordell used to describe their level of knowledge. While less was available to them in the form of written Scripture, they also had closer contact with God both temporally in terms of the creation, and in some cases by direct communication. While God revealed more as time went on, it corresponded to natural knowledge of God becoming dimmer. Prof. Schmeling pointed out that we are saved by faith in the triune God and therefore the Old Testament believers knew the triune God.

Discussion continued until 8:15 when the formal assembly closed with prayer. Following the formal closing, visiting online once again continued for many until after 8:30 A.M. CDT.

THURSDAY, JUNE 3

Prof. Tom Nass welcomed the day’s participants as they arrived in the Zoom meeting.

At 6:01, Rev. John Hartwig gave the opening devotion on Genesis 15, speaking by phone from Germany. Abraham was a sinner saved by faith in God, who sent his Son to be righteous in our place as our substitute and to suffer the penalty for Abraham’s and our sin as our stand-in. Abraham believed God’s promises and was saved by faith. God counted Abraham’s faith as righteousness. And so are we, too, saved by faith in God’s promises. Paul summarizes this truth in Romans chapter 3. Pastor Hartwig applied this gospel to each listener, reminding us of our baptism which brought us to faith and the Lord’s Supper which keeps nourishing

our faith. Rev. Hartwig concluded his devotion with a prayer for the Holy Spirit's blessing on our churches and our meeting.

At 6:10, Rev. Juhani Viitala began the reading of his essay on "The Formula of Concord Article III: The Righteousness of Faith." Rev. Viitala included a great amount of historical background to the famous/infamous "new Finnish interpretation of Luther" which arose in the early 1980s and taught against the forensic nature of the doctrine of justification in the late 20th century, "pioneered" by Prof. Tuomo Mannermaa of Helsinki University.

At 7:12, the paper was concluded and Rev. Nathan Seiltz stepped in as moderator for the discussion. The majority of those who participated in the discussion began by thanking Pastor Viitala for his excellent essay. Pastor Viitala explained in the discussion that Mannermaa was a dogmatician and not primarily an exegete, which allowed him to make false assumptions and lead himself and others astray. Mannermaa was very influential in the formation of the muddled "Joint Declaration on Justification" agreed to by the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation in 1999.

At the conclusion of the discussion Pastor Viitala thanked the committee for the assignment as it afforded him the opportunity to study the Formula of Concord anew and to review Mannermaa's theology, which he had studied years earlier as a theology student in Finland.

At 7:45, Erin Abel, our Zoom facilitator, explained the breakout rooms which would be opened following the closing prayer. John Hartwig closed the day's session with verses of Paul Speratus' hymn, "Salvation unto Us Has Come" and the Apostolic Benediction.

The breakout rooms were then opened for the four CELC regions. Members of the Planning Committee attended the meetings of those with which they have worked in missions, etc.

TUESDAY, JUNE 8

At 6:05 A.M., with a couple stragglers still joining the meeting, Mark Schulz began the opening devotion in the name of the triune God. Considering the theme of the day's paper, Mark asked the question, "What gave Luther the courage to challenge the papacy?" and he answered: It was the Word of God which Luther studied as a professor of theology in Wittenberg. Mr. Schulz read Ephesians 6:10,11,13 and Hebrews 4:12 and concluded with a prayer.

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At 6:10, Mr. Schulz introduced Pastor Andrés San Martin from Chile who began the reading of his historical paper, “Luther’s Three Essays from 1520: From Roman Captivity to Christian Liberty” via video recording.

At 7:00, Mark Schulz thanked Pastor San Martin and began moderating the discussion. Rev. Larry Schlomer told the group that he had offered to serve as a translator so that the discussion could be carried out in both Spanish and English—and it was. As a result, the discussion easily filled the next hour.

After the discussion and before the closing prayer, incoming President Tom Nass gave some concluding remarks, explaining the Planning Committee’s choice for this convention of altering the past practice of having all doctrinal papers on one topic to instead diversifying the nature of our essays. This year we followed a practice common among pastoral conferences within synods, namely having a doctrinal paper, an historical paper, a paper on the Lutheran Confessions, a practical paper, and potentially an exegetical paper (although we did not have an exegetical paper this year).

Prof. Nass also explained that the Zoom meeting would stay online so the chairmen of each region could meet with the members of the Planning Committee.

Mark Schulz congratulated Gaylin Schmeling on his 48th Anniversary being observed on the day of the session and then closed the session with the verses of the hymn “Lord Open Now My Heart to Hear.”

After farewells, Pres. Nass discussed with the regional heads their plans for regional meetings before our next convention and encouraged these. Then he asked the others what they thought of having CELC news shared periodically by email. After much discussion it was agreed that it would be beneficial to share news from the various churches with the other churches, but that for practical reasons the easiest approach would be to solicit news and share it in the form of “press releases.” Prof. Nass also asked the regional heads how they felt about the choice the Planning Committee made to arrange for the varying types of essays as done this year. The consensus was that this was a good decision. The discussion drew to a close at 8:45 A.M. CDT.

THURSDAY, JUNE 10

On the final day, newly elected President Thomas Nass welcomed the participants as they arrived online.

At 6:01, Prof. Nass began the final session of the 2021 CELC Convention with the reading of Psalm 96, introducing it by pointing out that it urges all nations to worship the one true God. He followed the reading with a prayer reflecting the “international” content of the Psalm.

At 6:04, after an introduction by Prof. Nass, Prof. Anthony Phiri presented the convention’s “practical theology” paper, “Promoting Christian Marriage in the 21st Century,” which he delivered via video, recorded at the seminary of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa in Lusaka. Prof. Phiri reiterated the traditional Christian teaching of the basis and God-given reasons for marriage, including the bearing and raising of children, as well as God-pleasing sexual companionship—something needed today due to the increasing prevalence of cohabitation. Of special interest was the issue of polygamy that still arises in Africa due to tribal pre-Christian values lingering and to Islam’s influence on the continent.

At 7:16, the paper was concluded and Prof. Nass began moderating the discussion. Discussion centered on application in our increasingly post-Christian world. Questions and answers focused also on cultural similarities and differences on the perception of marriage and respect for the 6th Commandment.

At 7:30 Pastor Larry Schlomer was invited by Prof. Nass to read a prepared resolution of thanks to those who planned and coordinated the online convention:

WHEREAS, the Lord has blessed us in so many ways even with a worldwide pandemic, providing the technology that allowed so many to gather together as representatives and guests of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, and

WHEREAS, sister Erin Abel and Third Coast Events have worked tirelessly and thoroughly to plan, organize, and host the Tenth Triennial Convention of the CELC over this online platform, and

WHEREAS, the CELC Planning Committee, including outgoing member, Rev. Larry Schlomer, and led by CELC President, the Reverend Professor Gaylin Schmeling who has served the CELC for many years, starting in 1993 as an essayist, and in varying capacities through the years, including on the Commission on Theology for twelve years, three years as vice president, and four years as its president, has spent much time and effort to facilitate and coordinate the gathering of representatives of many churches from many places in this world, and

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WHEREAS, essayists, worship leaders, the CELC treasurer, secretary, and chairman spent many hours in prayerful and careful preparation to make this meeting a success, and

WHEREAS, all of us have felt most welcome, well met and thoroughly loved by all who spent their time to serve and care for us, Therefore, let it be

RESOLVED, that we thank the Erin and Third Coast Events for their planning and care, and be it further

RESOLVED, that we thank the essayists, worship leaders, preachers, and CELC leaders for their time spent in preparation for the tremendous work that was evident at our convention, and be it further

RESOLVED, that we thank God for the gift of faithful leaders and we thank Gaylin Schmeling and his supportive wife, Rebecca, for these many years of faithful service to the CELC, and be it finally

RESOLVED, that we raise our voices in thanks to our Lord for his grace that made this meeting possible and the amazing display of his love we have heard and seen in the words and service of all who participated here.

The resolution was made, seconded, and passed unanimously.

Following the resolution, WELS Pres. Mark Schroeder spoke of how this convention demonstrated what a blessing it is for us to share a worldwide fellowship of those who share the same faith.

Prof. Tom Nass then shared a thank you to outgoing Pres. Gaylin Schmeling on behalf of the CELC for his service, while showing a brief slide show of his many years of work for the conference which began at the very first convention of the CELC in 1993 where Pres. Schmeling delivered an essay, and included 19 years as an officer.

Pres. Schmeling also delivered a short speech recalling his time serving CELC, including being on the original planning committee leading up to the 1993 constituting convention in Oberwesel, Germany. He left us with three encouragements: that we stress the chief article of the faith, justification; secondly, that we maintain an ongoing emphasis on our Lutheran doctrine of the means of grace; and finally, that we may always have the gospel predominate in our proclamation around the world.

At 7:45, Pres. Schmeling declared the convention closed and turned the microphone over to Rev. K. Vijay Kumar of Christ Evangelical Lutheran

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Ministries of India, who led us via video recording in our closing devotion based on John 14:23–32 on “God the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier.” Pastor Kumar concluded with a wide-ranging prayer for our fellowship and for the victims of the ongoing pandemic worldwide, tragically visible in Rev. Kumar’s homeland, where it has severely affected church life.

Farewell greetings were hearty but short as all signed off to eagerly return to their labors in the Lord.

Respectfully submitted,
Timothy Buelow, Secretary

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PRESIDENT’S ADDRESS

Gaylin R. Schmeling

CELC President

May 25, 2021

Dear friends in Christ, delegates, officers, and guests of the Tenth Triennial Convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference:

Because of the COVID pandemic, we are meeting online for the first time in our history. In this respect, this convention is and will be very historic. We are relying on modern technology. We ask everyone to bear with whatever glitches there might be. We are grateful for all the assistance from our online facilitator, Erin Abel. Any difficulties that occur are probably my fault.

The theme for the tenth triennial convention is “**The Holy Trinity: Person and Work.**” This coming Sunday we will celebrate the Feast of the Holy Trinity. The Scripture reveals that there are three divine persons in the one divine being or essence: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. As we confess in the Athanasian Creed, “We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity.” The one true God is the Triune God. The Father is unbegotten, or born of none, and is the fount and source of the Godhead (Genesis 1:1; John 1:14). The Son is not created, but begotten. He is eternally born of the Father before all ages (Psalm 2:7; John 1:14). The Holy Spirit is neither created nor begotten, but is breathed out from the Father. He proceeds from the Father and the Son (John 15:26; Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:9).

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity was revealed already in the Old Testament. Remember the Aaronic blessing that ends many of our worship services. Here we bless the congregation with the words, “**The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace**” (Numbers 6:24-26). This is the blessing of each person of the Trinity: God the Father bless you and keep you; God the Son make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; God the Holy Spirit lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace. In the Great Commission in the New Testament, this truth is reiterated: “**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the**

Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18–20).

The work of the persons of the Trinity is creation, redemption, and sanctification. God the Father is the creator and preserver of all things, who bestows upon us blessings without end. God the Son is the light of the world, who accomplished our redemption through His life and death. God the Holy Spirit brings us to faith through the means of grace and preserves us in that faith unto our end. He is the comforter who brings true peace for this life and the next. Thus we pray in the Scandinavian liturgy:

O God the Father in heaven, have mercy upon us. O God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us. O God the Holy Ghost, true Comforter, have mercy upon us.

The Eternal Word, Article VII states:

God the Father planned our salvation in eternity (Ephesians 1:3–6; Romans 8:29,30; John 3:16). In time He sent His only begotten Son to save us from our sins and reconcile us that we might be His children having union and communion with Him. God the Son gave Himself up as the redemptive sacrifice for all people of all time (Galatians 4:4,5; 2 Corinthians 5:19, 21; 1 John 2:2). God the Holy Spirit worked faith in the Savior in our hearts through the means of grace and has united us with all believers as members of His church, the body of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2; Galatians 3:26,27).¹

This salvific work of the holy and blessed Trinity is the heart and center of the New Testament church's proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world and the purpose of the gathering of God's people. An example of this gathering is our meeting today. We are here from around the world as those united in faith and purpose, as partners in the vital work of our Savior's commission to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching the whole counsel of God. We are gathered here to worship our great and holy Triune God. Our salvation is from the Father, through the redemption of the Son, revealed through the Holy Spirit in the means of grace, and we worship the Father in the Holy Spirit through the Son.

¹ Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, “Article VII: The Church: Unity of Spirit—Bond of Peace,” *The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century*, 1–2.

Format of our convention essays: The organization of our four essays is that of a traditional Lutheran pastoral conference. There is a doctrinal paper, a confessional paper, a historical paper, and a practical paper. Together with exegesis, these are the various areas of theological study.

Meeting times: May 25, 6:00–8:00 A.M. CDT—opening devotion and business meeting

Thursday, May 27, 6:00–8:00 A.M. CDT—business meeting with devotion and installation of officers

Tuesday, June 1, 6:00–8:00 A.M. CDT—Essay 1: The Trinity: Glory Be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit —essayist: Bradley Wordell (USA)

Thursday, June 3, 6:00–8:00 A.M. CDT—Essay 2: Formula of Concord III: Righteousness of Faith —essayist: Juhani Viitala (Finland)

Tuesday, June 8, 6:00–8:00 A.M. CDT—Essay 3: Luther's Three Essays from 1520: From Roman Captivity to Christian Liberty —essayist: Andrés San Martín (Colombia)

Thursday, June 10, 6:00–8:00 A.M. CDT—Essay 4: Promoting Christian Marriage in the 21st Century —essayist: Anthony Phiri (Zambia) and closing devotion

Essays: The essays presented in the coming days will be part of an ongoing doctrinal series entitled *The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century*. In this series, the essays presented at each convention are edited by the CELC Theological Commission to form concise statements of our faith. The statements then are made available to our member churches for their libraries, but are also accessible in digital form to all interested parties on the CELC website, www.celc.info. The commission has served us in reviewing Article VIII on sanctification, which will be placed before the convention for adoption.

Treasurer's report: In addition to the study of essays, the convention meets to carry out its business as an association of confessional Lutherans. During the business meeting our treasurer, Mr. Mark Schulz, will again provide an overview of the financial status of our conference. This year we have the added blessing of a travel assistance fund, which will be very beneficial for many of the delegates to our conventions in the future. We trust that each member church is grateful for this assistance and will provide support as it is able. We are very grateful for contributions to the CELC that have come from individuals, pastoral gatherings, foundations,

Kingdom Workers, and the sizeable gift from the Ellen Gawrisch estate. Ellen was the daughter of the first president of the CELC, Professor Wilbert Gawrisch. We once again encourage church body leaders to help their membership see the wisdom of regularly supporting this vital organization.

Application for Membership: This year two church bodies have applied for membership. They are:

- a. The Christian Lutheran Evangelical Church (Taiwan)
- b. The Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (Kenya)

What a blessing for our worldwide fellowship. We look forward to welcoming them into our midst.

Constitutional Revisions: The Planning Committee has reviewed the constitution of the CELC and is proposing revisions of a number of articles in the constitution. The purpose of these revisions is to conform the constitution to our present practice and needs. Possibly the most important proposed revision will be the one ending the distinction between full membership and associate membership.

Regional conferences: In the past years there has been a growth in regional conferences. All of these conferences are a great benefit for mutual support, consolation, and strengthening of the brethren. We urge the present regional conferences to continue and those areas without conferences to consider them.

Elections: Each triennial convention also provides an opportunity for our conference to elect its officers and ratify appointments. A list of nominees and appointees has been provided. Voting delegates are encouraged to take the time to read the biographical information that has been provided on those who have agreed to serve if approved by the convention. Delegates also have the option to nominate additional candidates from the floor, but are asked to provide information on them for the benefit of other voters.

Global Theological Education Commission (GTEC): The 2017 CELC convention considered a recommendation from THETA Commission Chairman Kenneth Cherney, supported by the majority of THETA members, that the THETA Commission be disbanded with thanks because it is redundant and not needed. In collaboration with the WELS PSI and the ELS BWO, the Planning Committee offers the proposed constitution change, which would provide a fresh start for CELC global theological education efforts with a new name, new participants, and new duties. This would begin a new commission: Global Theological Education Commission (GTEC).

Future Conventions: The eleventh triennial convention of the CELC is scheduled for Seoul, South Korea, in 2023. Remember Seoul was the intended location for our convention in 2020, which did not occur. The voting assembly will be asked to make a final determination of where the 2026 convention will be held. Three invitations were received: one from the Lutheran Church in Central Africa, one from the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia, and a combined invitation from the Lutheran Confessional Church in Sweden and the Lutheran Confessional Church in Norway. The Planning Committee will be presenting a recommendation with rationale to meet in Central Africa, but this gathering will make the ultimate decision. We additionally encourage the church bodies in attendance to give consideration to offering to serve as host for the 2029 convention. The more the Planning Committee can know in advance where conventions will be held, the better it can implement the conventions and anticipate the needs of those attending.

In closing I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the CELC Planning Committee who have worked with me and others to put this convention together. My personal thanks is extended to Paul Fries for his work of managing the CELC website and to Elsa Ferkenstad for all her assistance in preparing for the convention.

Special thanks is extended to Erin Abel, Tim Buelow, John Hartwig, Tom Nass, Larry Scholmer, and Mark Schultz for working so hard to prepare our online convention. Other appropriate thanks to essayists, preachers, etc., will be included in a motion at the end of the convention.

In spite of the separation and cancellations caused by COVID, may the next few days enable all of us to reflect on the great blessings we have in our Triune God. He is indeed the creator, the redeemer, and the comforter. In our three-in-one God we have union, communion, and fellowship with brothers and sisters around the world. The teaching of the Holy Trinity is indeed an essential part of our confessional Lutheran heritage, which we need to promote ever more boldly in these times when so many have lost sight of it. May the LORD enable our CELC to do just that.

Glory be to God the Father,
Glory be to God the Son,
Glory be to God the Spirit:
Great Jehovah, Three in One!
Glory, glory, While eternal ages run!
TLH: 244 v. 1

Essay #1

**The Trinity:
Glory Be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit!**

Bradley D. Wordell
WELS

A Japanese woman once told me about her visit to the pyramids of Egypt: “When I saw them for the first time, I felt tiny. I was scared. I thought I could feel the presence of God.” For me this story illustrates two things: the first is that something grand, even if it is made by human hands, can humble us and make us afraid; the second is that human emotion and human reason are not reliable sources for knowing God.

My Nepalese friend and I drove up the winding roads of a mountain for hours. Finally, we reached the spot from which we could see the Himalayan mountains. The view was almost too wonderful to take in. Those mountains dwarfed us *and the mountain we were on*. Wow!

In many of the countries where CELC members worship and serve the Lord, there are locations from which a view of the nighttime sky will take your breath away. How vast the universe is!

How puny we are!

“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:3-5 NIV84).

If God’s revelation in the “book of nature” instructs us about his majesty and our relative insignificance, how much more God’s revelation of himself in the Bible! Just as the created world instructs us about the invisible qualities of the Creator, so also the doctrine of the Trinity (drawn carefully from his Word) impresses on us the greatness of God.

You asked me to study the doctrine of the Trinity and to tell you what I learned. I learned what a vast doctrine it is! There is no larger, no more comprehensive, no more important, no more incomprehensible, no more glorious doctrine than the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

This doctrine dwarfs me more than the Himalayas do. It makes me feel tiny and inadequate. How could I ever study all that has been said about this doctrine? Who am I to write about the Trinity when the past 2000 years are filled with the scholarly writings of so many gifted theologians?

The doctrine humbles me. And then there is the Lord God who is the reality behind this doctrine! He is all glorious! The seraphim cover their faces and their feet even as they praise him: “Holy, Holy, Holy” (Isaiah 6:3).¹ The glorious God is beyond human comprehension!

But God doesn’t ask us to understand him. He wants us to know him by faith, to love him, to worship him, to seek him and serve him with all our hearts. In our fallenness we might be tempted to think that we will seek the face of God *in spite of* the doctrine of the Trinity. In reality we can seek the face of God *only because* he is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For the triune God, loving us with an everlasting love, has lifted us up and seated us with himself in the heavenly realms. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Using trinitarian language, the Father sent his Son, and the Father and the Son send the Spirit so we can believe and be saved.

Dear brothers and sisters in the Christian faith, I hope and pray that this study of the Trinity humbles you and lifts you up. I hope it encourages you in your faith. I hope it leads you to tremble at his Word, to seek the face of the Lord with all your heart, to glorify him with holy songs and holy living, and to proclaim his Name among the nations.

While this brief paper may seem like an aimless wandering through a vast wilderness, there is a general progression: from biblical theology, to systematic theology, to historical theology, to practical theology. Theology is, after all, the things of God. All theology resides in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The ultimate purpose of all theology is the glory of the triune God.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit!
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.

A Wide-Angle View of God

The Holy Scriptures give us a wide-angle view of God. God is from eternity to eternity. God has interacted lovingly with the world—always! Consider the following statements:

¹Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent Bible quotations are from NIV11.

1. Before God created the world, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit dwelled in and with each other as God.
2. This Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created all that exists.
3. After the first man and his wife fell into sin, God revealed himself to fallen mankind through direct revelation and later through his chosen instruments, the prophets of Israel. He revealed his name to them as the Lord.
4. When the time of fulfillment had come, the Lord sent his Son (incarnation) and his Spirit (Pentecost) into the world, revealing himself to be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
5. Through the evangelists and apostles of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit gave testimony about the glory of God in the face of Christ.
6. Throughout the New Testament era, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are accomplishing the mission of creating a bride for the Son, from every nation on earth.
7. At the eternal wedding feast, all believers of all time will live in praise of the glorious triune God who created, redeemed, and sanctified them.²

We note a few things about these statements. First of all, these seven statements have a chiasmic structure to them. At the center is the historical peak of the revelation of the Trinity: in glorious fashion, with miraculous signs and wonders, to save the human race from sin, death, and hell, the Father sent his Son and his Spirit into the world. The Old Testament and New Testament bracket these events. The creation of the world and God's saving activity in the world bracket his Holy Word. The outer frame is eternity. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.

Secondly, we note that only God knows and can reveal things eternal. The realities of eternity are outside the realm of human experience. With our most powerful telescopes we humans can peer into far-flung galaxies and behold the light of distant stars, but we cannot penetrate heaven to see God who is eternal light.

The Holy Scriptures also teach us the content of points 2 through 6, but in addition to the Bible, we have other testimony as well: the book of nature, human history, tradition, the experiences of others, and our own personal experiences. God has not left himself without testimony!

²In theology methods are arbitrary. This schema is my own. I hope it serves us well.

As with all doctrines of the Bible, so also in this highest of doctrines, the weight we give to the Bible and the methods of interpretation we employ are vital to a proper doctrine of God—and praise of God—in our churches.

Progressive Revelation

In the schema above, we can see that God reveals himself as the Lord and as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit *in connection with salvation*. Statements 2 through 6 can be restated this way:

- The Lord created the world.
- The Lord announced his intentions to save the world (Old Testament).
- By sending his Son and his Spirit, the Lord accomplished this salvation.
- The Lord gave testimony to what he had done (New Testament).
- The Lord continues to bring people into this salvation.

God does not change. His words and his actions bear clear witness to that. But God's revelation about himself has changed in this sense: throughout history God has revealed more and more about himself and his plan of salvation. These two are closely bound together: God's revelation of the gospel and his revelation of himself. The one who saves is three!

This connection is very helpful for our understanding of the Bible and for our defense of the doctrine of the Trinity. It helps us answer the question: "If God is truly triune, why didn't he say anything about that in the Old Testament? Why is there no explicit doctrine of the Trinity, no Athanasian-Creed-like chapter in the New Testament?"

It is a worthwhile exercise for us to ponder and review the *what* of this progressive revelation. At the same time, we must be cautious when inquiring into the *why* of it.

When the Lord God spoke to Adam and Eve in the garden and told them that he would send the seed of the woman to crush the head of the devil and rescue people from the devil's control, the Lord knew that this seed of the woman would be his eternal Son born in human flesh thousands of years later. But God didn't include that information in his first gospel promise (Genesis 3:15).

When God told Abram that all nations would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:3), God knew that his eternal Son would be born of the Jews and atone for the sins of both Jew and Gentile.

But the Lord didn't unpack it that way for Abram or his descendants until that Son came and walked the road to the cross.

When God delivered his chosen people from Egypt, under Moses, without the Israelites contributing anything to that deliverance, the Lord had the single-handed work of his Son in mind. When the Israelites passed through the watery cloud of the Red Sea as a door from slavery (under a cruel master) to service (under a gracious God), the Lord had in mind our baptism in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-4). Through this baptism God drowns the devil for us and makes us his own sons. He makes slaves of unrighteousness into servants of righteousness, citizens of hell into citizens of heaven. But the Father didn't make this trinitarian gospel clear until the Son and the Spirit came 1500 years later. The Lord made it clear at the beginning and end of his Son's ministry: at Jesus' own baptism (Matthew 3:13-17) and in the risen Savior's command to baptize (Matthew 28:18-20). The Lord made it clear in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Son who was filled with the Spirit: conceived by the Spirit, guided by the Spirit all the way to the cross, raised to life in the Spirit and so declared with power to be the Son of God. The Lord made it clear on Pentecost when his saving activity in the age of fulfillment began with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the baptism of 3,000 people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When God brought his people to Mount Sinai and explained his eternal mission to them (Exodus 19:4-6), he called them his treasured possession and his kingdom of priests. At Mount Sinai when God made a covenant with the Israelites and gave instructions for building the tabernacle, God had in mind the realities later made clear by the apostle Peter: "As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:4-5). But God didn't share all those details at Sinai. Instead he gave them shadows in anticipation of the coming reality.

When the Lord promised King David that a King from David's royal line would build a house for him (the Lord) and rule forever and ever (2 Samuel 7), the Lord knew that this Davidic king was his own Son, appointed from eternity. But God was waiting for the right time and place

and audience and manner to say it: a thousand years later, in Nazareth, to the virgin Mary, through his angel Gabriel. “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:30-33).

God inspired David to write the words of the psalm we have already considered: “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:3-5 NIV84). These words indicate at least two different things:

- In God’s created order, mankind has a special place of glory and honor; we are the crown of his creation and caretakers of it.
- The Son of God will become the Son of Man, redeem the world, be exalted to the highest honor, and rule over all things for the benefit of his church. This was the plan of God’s secret and eternal counsel. Before the creation of the world, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit knew the meaning of Psalm 8. But its full meaning wasn’t revealed clearly to the world until Jesus died and rose and ascended into heaven. The Spirit did not unpack all of this through his sacred writer David. He waited to explain it in the New Testament, in places like Paul’s letter to the Ephesians and the letter to the Hebrews.³

In the same way, Psalm 110 prophesied about David’s son, calling him David’s Lord, explaining that he would be both a Davidic king and an eternal priest, in the order of Melchizedek. As the words of Psalm 110 resounded for a thousand years—in Solomon’s temple, among the exiles in Babylon, in Jewish synagogues throughout the world, and in the second temple—the worshipers could only ponder what these words meant. The meaning of this psalm was illuminated when the great High Priest came down out of heaven, was born as a descendant of David, spoke to the religious leaders in the temple courts, offered himself as the once-for-all

³This has implications for the translator: “son of man” or “Son of Man”? It depends on whether a person is wearing OT or NT eyeglasses. One approach is to write “son of man” in the psalm itself and to sing the Gloria Patri after the psalm. The *Gloria Patri* does the capitalizing: Son of Man.

sacrifice for sin on the cross, and ascended as the God-man into the tabernacle of heaven, where the blood of God's own Son pleads for the sons of men in the presence of the Father.

In all these examples, the triune God revealed himself and his plan of salvation in advance, but only partially and progressively. The triune God didn't fully reveal his three-ness fully until the Son and the Holy Spirit arrived in the world as heavenly gifts from the Father. The Son came in obedience to his Father, full of the Spirit. Then decades later, after the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit accomplished our salvation, the Spirit of God inspired sacred writers to record clear testimony about these "wonders of God" (Acts 2:11).

Throughout the Old Testament the triune God was acting and speaking. There were hints of God's three-ness (Trinity) in the Old Testament, already in the creation account (Genesis 1), and throughout God's interaction with the human race. But God did not fully reveal himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit until the coming of "the fulfillment of the ages" (1 Corinthians 10:11 NIV84).

We have looked briefly at the *what* of the revelation of the doctrine of the Trinity. It certainly happened, just as God intended. The New Testament has a name for it: "mystery."

The Mystery (Two Senses) of the Trinity

There is a humorous story about a Lutheran congregation in the United States. It was their custom to have an examination of the students who had studied the catechism in preparation for their confirmation vows to remain faithful to the Lord all their lives. All the students were sitting in rows in front of the congregation, and the pastor was asking catechetical questions of the students. The examination was an opportunity for the pastor to show that he had taught the

catechism well, for the students to show that they had learned it well, and for the congregation to review the truths of the Small Catechism. Each student would speak their answer into the microphone and then pass it to the next student. The pastor asked one girl, "What is the Holy Trinity?" She paused for a moment, then answered nervously, "It's a mystery." The pastor paused for a moment and then said, "Right." Relieved, the student handed the microphone off to the next person. After that, other students used the same strategy. If they didn't know how to answer their question, they would simply say, "It's a mystery" and hand the microphone to the next student.

When we say that the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery, we might be saying two different things, each of them useful in a different way. First, we might be saying that we cannot comprehend that God is one, and that he is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Human reason says God can't be both one and three. By this use of the word "mystery" we mean to say that the deep things of God are too deep for our feeble minds. Surely they are.

When considering the doctrine of the Trinity, this use of the word mystery is very useful! It reminds us to be humble. It keeps our reason in check. As we will discuss later, it prevents us from using our human reason and the other tools in our theological toolbox in a magisterial and destructive way.

There is second use of the word "mystery," and we might call it the biblical one. A mystery is something that has always been true, that God has always known to be true, that the world didn't and couldn't know, and that God waited to reveal until the time of his choosing.

God is in the business of revealing such mysteries to sinners. Consider the following:

- The gospel of salvation accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ is a mystery, revealed by his sinless life, by his death as the Lamb of God, and by his resurrection to life on Easter morning.
- God's intention to break down the wall of division between Jew and Gentile and to create one church through Christ is a mystery revealed in the church by the words and works of Christ, by his Spirit, through his apostles.
- The resurrection of the body on the Last Day is a mystery revealed to us by God (1 Corinthians 15:51).
- That marriage between one man and one woman has as its antetype the marriage of God's Son and his bride is a profound mystery (Ephesians 5:32). God instituted marriage on earth so that every marriage would serve as a shadow of the relationship between his Son and his bride!
- The day and time of Jesus' second coming will remain a mystery, until the trumpet sounds.

Notice that all of these mysteries are connected to the trinitarian gospel.

It was completely clear in Old Testament times that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was one God, not many. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

But the three-ness of God, that he is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—this God kept hidden, at least partially, for thousands of years.

The mystery of the Trinity was hidden. The mystery of the gospel was hidden. The Lord God decided to reveal them together, at the same time, through the Son and by his Spirit, and to testify to these mysteries through the ministry of the apostles who had seen the glory of Christ and on whom the Spirit had been poured.

The apostle John exulted in it: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us” (1 John 1:1- 2).

The apostle Peter proclaimed it as gospel comfort: “He was chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these last times for your sake” (1 Peter 1:20).

The apostle Paul marveled at God’s eternal wisdom: “We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we declare God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Corinthians 2:6-8).

How is this understanding of mystery useful to us? In our CELC churches we are surrounded by many different religions, some of them polytheistic and some of them monotheistic. Polytheistic religions deny the oneness of God. False monotheistic religions deny the three-ness of God.

Within the visible “Christian” church there are church groups—we would call them sects—who deny or downplay the doctrine of the Trinity. Ironically, some Pentecostals, while claiming to have the Spirit in fuller measure, deny what the Spirit has revealed in the Scriptures and what he has guided Christians to believe and confess about God throughout the ages. All false religions have two basic characteristics in common: they deny the mystery of Trinity and they deny the mystery of the gospel. Those two go together, bound together from eternity to eternity. They go together in God’s economy of salvation, and he chose to reveal them together. They cannot be separated. If you deny the Trinity, you deny the gospel. If you want to proclaim the gospel, you must have a trinitarian mind.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit!
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.

Two Analogies of the Mystery of the Gospel

Personally, I am not in favor of using analogies to teach the mystery of the doctrine of the Trinity. I am referring to the word mystery in the first sense we discussed, in the sense of the incomprehensibility of the doctrine. Such analogies (H₂O in three forms, the three parts of an egg, the three parts of an apple, etc.⁴) divide the essence of God or confuse the persons of God. They either teach outright Modalism (one God who shows up in three different ways) or can easily be understood as Modalism. In an attempt to make the Trinity understandable—this sounds noble, but it is misguided from the start—we easily obscure the Bible’s clear and simple teachings that the Lord is one God and that he is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Every analogy limps. In a doctrine as important and comprehensive as the Trinity, such limping can cause great damage to the body of Christ.

There are, however, two analogies that I have found helpful for illustrating the mystery of the Trinity in the biblical sense of the word (the second sense we considered). One such analogy is that of a cherry blossom. In many Asian countries (especially Japan), there are many varieties of cherry blossoms. The most common variety is called Yoshino. There is also a variety called Yaezakura, which means “eight-fold cherry blossom.” In English we call them double cherry blossoms.

The revelation of the gospel can be compared to a cherry blossom. The tip of the bud first became visible when God promised a Savior in the hearing of the first sinners. Throughout the Old Testament, with each new revelation from God, the bud grew larger. The prophet will come! The priest will come! The king will come! The suffering servant will come! The Spirit will come! The Lord himself will come!

And then it happened: that gospel bud, packed so full, burst into bloom. And how beautiful and glorious it was! The Old Testament had set high expectations for the coming of the Messiah, but what happened far exceeded all earthly expectation. The cherry blossom that burst into bloom was eight-fold! Yaezakura! The flower was fuller and more glorious than anyone could have been imagined!

⁴The analogy I feel most comfortable with is that of the church fathers: source, spring, and river. The weakness perhaps is that the distinctness of the three persons is hard to maintain. Every analogy limps.

It was announced by an angel: "Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ, the Lord" (Luke 2:11 NIV84). Not Christ, a great man. Not Christ, an angel. Christ, the Lord! What burst into bloom when Christ came was a double revelation of mystery: of what God was doing (salvation) and of who God is (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)!

The second analogy is that of a light traveling from afar, even from eternity. The Bible tells us that "God is light" (1 John 1:5). Together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the Son is light. He shines on us with the light of life. He is the source of life. He is "God from God, Light from light, true God from true God" (Nicene Creed). Many false theologies make the Son less than the Father, denying that he is co-eternal and co-equal with the Father. Because God is light, he shines from eternity. That light traveled over the people of the Old Testament, providing them with dim spiritual light.

The people of the Old Testament were like an audience at a theatre after the curtain rises but before the lights come on. They could make out that there were people on the stage, but they couldn't see their faces. The believers of the Old Testament were like people sitting in their houses, looking out their window at the first sign of morning light (where I live, about 45 minutes before sunrise.) In the faintest of light God's Old Testament people could make out

God's plan of salvation and God himself. The light increased with time. Finally, at the appointed time, the light dawned, and everything changed. The sun of righteousness rose above the horizon. The shadows gave way to realities. The Lord made his face to shine on us; he turned his face toward us (see Numbers 6:24-26). The Son came. The Spirit came. The light of God's grace was more brilliant than anyone ever could have imagined! It was divine light, the light of God himself!

The gospels record the revelation of this mystery in the sending of the Son and the Spirit. The epistles and the Revelation of John assume this first epiphany (glory shining in connection with the ministry of Christ and his Spirit) and anticipate the second and greater epiphany of eternal life in God's presence. "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:2- 3).

My dear friends in Christ in the blessed fellowship of the CELC, this is what the Lord, in his eternal wisdom, has done. He has done it for us, and

he has made it known to us! “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Why?

In our discussion of the Trinity, we have been talking about the relationship between the two testaments of God’s Word. A proper understanding of that relationship is critical to a proper interpretation of the Scriptures.

St. Augustine is often quoted in this regard:

“In the Old Testament the New is concealed,
in the New the Old is revealed.”

This understanding of the Bible as a whole helps us to be clear and confident about the doctrine of the Trinity. The two testaments complement each other. The Old emphasized that the Lord is one. The New reveals clearly what was concealed in the Old, namely that the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, and the Holy Spirit is Lord. Each is God in divine essence, in divine attributes, in divine honor, and in divine works. Both testaments give this testimony, the first testament dimly, the second testament brightly.

But we may ask, “Why did God do it this way?” When mixed with doubt, such an inquiry needs a review of the facts to quiet it. It needs this encouragement: “We don’t know why, but that is what he did! His ways are above ours. All praise be to him!”

But when asking with simple trust and pure curiosity, let us do so with cautious care, for the ice may be thin. We might ponder and answer as follows:

1. God’s approach reflects the character of each testament: the Old Testament is the age of preparation and the New Testament is the age of completion. “One God” is the preparation for the more complete revelation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. All the nations of the ancient Near East (and the world) were polytheistic and idolatrous. In such an environment, the people of Israel (and the nations around them) needed clear and strong teaching about the one true God.
3. God’s approach of concealing the New in the Old would give Old Testament believers what they needed to believe and be saved, while at the same time providing evidence for New Testament believers that “prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke

from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21 NIV84). In other words, the Holy Spirit wrote the Old Testament also with New Testament believers in mind.

4. God’s approach kept the devil guessing about the coming of the seed of the woman who would crush his head (see Genesis 3:15).

It could be said that these thoughts don’t add much to the biblical evidence we have already considered. If that is true, the ice was not so thin. In any case, we move back to solid ground as we consider the traces of the Trinity in the Old Testament and what we might call a “dialogue approach” to the persons of the Trinity.

Old Testament Traces

In our discussion of God’s revelation, we watched the prophetic bud of the gospel grow larger and larger as the coming of the Savior and his work drew near. In our discussion of mystery (in the biblical sense) we noted that when God revealed his wisdom in the sending of the Son and the Spirit, he unveiled not only his gracious work of salvation, he unveiled himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This means, if we continue to use our two analogies, that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were (and are) packed into that thick bud of Old Testament prophecy. It means that when the Old Testament believers saw God in the dim light of his first-covenant revelation—as he revealed his name the Lord to them—that the Father was there, the Son was there, and the Holy Spirit was there. And it means that New Testament believers, using the brilliant light of New Testament revelation, will recognize and understand Old Testament traces of the three more clearly than the original audience. Abraham rejoiced as he looked ahead to the day of Jesus Christ. He was content not to know all the details. He was saved by faith in the Savior, even without knowing all the details of the Savior. From our vantage point, we do our looking with possession of all the blessed details. We rejoice as we look back to see Jesus Christ, the glorious and eternal Son of God. As best we know, Abraham did not have a full understanding of trinitarian theology, but the God he believed in was the triune God. We believe in the same Lord as Abraham. Abraham is the father of all believers, both Old Testament and New Testament believers.

Can we say confidently that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in the Old Testament? Absolutely! But there is a difference between providing proofs of the Trinity in the Old Testament and identifying traces of the Trinity in the Old Testament. The phenomenon of revelation would sug-

gest that we need the events recorded in the Gospels and the testimony of all the New Testament to prove the doctrine of the Trinity.

Because the orthodox Lutheran theologians were battling the anti-trinitarian Socinians,⁵ and because a favorite arrow in the Socinian quiver was the claim that the doctrine of the Trinity must be denied because the Old Testament did not teach it, our theological forefathers spent much of their theological effort on these Old Testament trinitarian traces. At times they crossed into the territory of trying to provide trinitarian proofs from the Old Testament. (While it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine their faithful efforts, they are to be commended for their theological approach to defend this biblical doctrine.)

As we briefly consider the trinitarian hints which the Holy Spirit embedded into the Old Testament, let us note, first of all, that these hints are everywhere: in Moses, in the historical narratives, in the wisdom literature (especially the Psalms), and in the early and later prophets. The Trinity is embedded not only in the words of the Old Testament, but also in God's gracious dealing with his people Israel and in his saving work among them.

These hints include, but are not limited to, the plural name of God (*Elohim*); God's use of the plural when he says, for example, "Let us make mankind in our image" (Genesis 1:26); the appearances of the angel of the Lord and the commander of the Lord's army (Christophanies); references to the person and work of the Holy Spirit; passages where God is speaking to God; places where there is a strongly-implied three-ness to God (e.g., the Aaronic blessing in Numbers 6 and the seraphim's praise of God in Isaiah 6); and passages in which Father, Son, and Spirit all seem to be present (e.g., Isaiah 11, 61).

Because we live in the age of fulfillment—after Son and Spirit have come, and with the clearer and brighter testimony of the New Testament—we are able to shine New Testament light on the Old Testament and clearly see what Old Testament believers saw only dimly.

One of the best and most fruitful places we do this is in the Psalms, that part of the Old Testament which Luther calls the "little Bible" inside the

⁵The Socinians, who have Lelio Sozzini (1525-1562) as their father, battled both the Lutherans and the Calvinists with their unyielding anti-trinitarian theology. Their theology is reflected in the *Racovian Catechism* of the Polish Brethren, published first in 1605

Bible.⁶ With New Testament clarity we are able to see the divine person and work of the Son of God in the Psalms, and we are able to perceive that the Son of God was actually speaking through the Psalms of the Old Testament. The first David was the type. The second and greater David is antetype, the one to whom the type was pointing. Jesus is the real Anointed One, the eternal Son of God. The Psalter of David is really the Psalter of Christ, and David's story is really Christ's story. It is true that we sing the Psalms with David, but there is a better way to say it: "The believers of both testaments (including King David) sing the Psalms with the greater David." King David was a shepherd- king shadow. Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd, King of kings reality. David's bringing of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6, 1 Chronicles 16, Psalm 96, 105, 106) was a shadow. The Son of God processing to the temple in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and his ascending to the right hand of his Father are the realities (see Colossians 2:17).⁷

Even before he was born as a descendant of David, the eternal Son of God was speaking through David. In the Psalms, the Holy Spirit, too, adds his voice and gives his testimony. Throughout the psalms we see the Holy Spirit and his active work among God's people: proclaiming the wisdom of God, leading sinners to repentance, keeping their eyes on the coming Messiah, guiding them in God's ways, enabling them to bear up under the sufferings of the cross, filling their mouths with Hallelujahs, and through Israel proclaiming God's name among the nations.

It has not been the approach of New Testament believers to try to identify occasional sightings of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the Psalms. The New Testament church has long recognized that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are woven into the very fabric of the whole Psalter.

⁶In his preface to the Psalms in 1545, Luther writes: "The Psalter ought to be a precious and beloved book, if for no other reason than this: it promises Christ's death and resurrection so clearly—and pictures his kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom—that it might well be called a little Bible. In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible. It is really a fine enchiridion or handbook. In fact, I have a notion that the Holy Spirit wanted to take the trouble himself to compile a short Bible and book of examples of all Christendom or all saints, so that anyone who could not read the whole Bible would here have anyway almost an entire summary of it, comprised in one little book" (*Luther's Works*, 35:254).

⁷While the term needs to be used with caution, some have called this approach a "re-reading" of the Old Testament. With our New Testament eyeglasses we are able to see clearly and point out the trinitarian gospel gems which the Holy Spirit concealed there. Luther does this in one of his most detailed treatments of the doctrine of the Trinity: his *Treatise on the Last Words of David*, recorded in 2 Samuel 23 (*Luther's Works*, 15:265-352).

While we don't know the exact origin of the *Gloria Patri*, we know it was in use in the 2nd century, and it may have been in use even before the New Testament canon was complete, certainly before the church formally recognized it. How naturally it must have happened that believers baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit would sing praise to the same! From the 3rd century on, Christians have sung the *Gloria Patri* in connection with the Psalms, reflecting the fact that the persons and work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are fully embedded in the Psalms. By singing the *Gloria Patri* in connection with each psalm, we shine New Testament light on the truths which the Spirit concealed there.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit!
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.

When the age of fulfillment dawned and the gospel bud burst into full bloom, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit took center stage. They came as three persons, communicating verbally about each other and to each other. Nowhere is this trinitarian dialogue recorded more clearly than in the Gospel of John. Written as the last of the gospels and written perhaps as a defense of the deity of the eternal Son in response to the heresies of Cerinthus and Gnosticism, the Gospel of John gives beautiful testimony to the three-ness of God. The Father speaks as sender. The Son speaks as one sent. The Spirit testifies about the Father and the Son and opens the eyes of human hearts to see their glory. The Father and the Son send the Spirit to dwell in the saints, teaching them all things and equipping them in every way. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit communicate with and about each other in the work of our salvation, revealing themselves to us. What grace! "The Spirit of truth . . . will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you" (John 16:13-15).

We end this section about Old Testament traces by noting that this divine dialogue, voiced in the New Testament and embedded in the Old, goes back even farther. Looking backwards from our vantage point, in the Gospel of John, for example, we hear the Father and Son speaking to each other. Jesus' prayer in the upper room (John 17) is one such example. Can there be a more striking example?! With the apostles we can only listen and marvel at such dialogue! Hints of this conversation—same speakers, same subject—are embedded in the Psalms (e.g., Psalm 2, 110) and in the prophet Isaiah (e.g., Isaiah 49). The Father and the Son are speaking about the Son's work in obedience to the will of the

Father—all of it with the purpose of redeeming and saving a world of helpless and undeserving sinners. This conversation between the sender and the sent, between Father and Son, goes all the way back to before the creation of the world. What Father and Son discuss in time, they were discussing from eternity. The conversation the Spirit embeds in the Old Testament and records clearly in the New is really an eternal discussion. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

“It is not enough for you to be my servant raising up the tribes of Jacob and restoring the protected ones of Israel. I will also make you a light for the nations, to be my salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6 CSB). In this Old Testament conversation, the “I” is the eternal Father, and the “you” is the eternal Son. This approach to divine dialogue, this *prosoponic* (from the Greek word *prosopa*, which means “persons”) identification of speakers in the Old Testament, gives strong support to the idea that the Father and the Son did not begin their sacred dialogue in the New Testament era. What we hear them saying to each other in the Gospels they have been discussing forever.⁸

Prosoponic identification of divine speakers is a method, an approach to understanding the Holy Scriptures, a tool in the theologian’s toolbox. The Creator has designed human beings with the capacity to think and analyze, to design and use tools. Believers use human reason and the tools they have developed in their service to him. We turn our attention now to the use of theological tools.

Theological Tools

Earlier we mentioned the book of nature, by which the Creator gives testimony about himself. Mankind has the ability to develop and use tools in the study of this book. From 1963 until 2016, the Arecibo Telescope in Puerto Rico was the largest single-aperture telescope in the world. It was in use until 2020 but is currently being deconstructed. Scientists used this powerful tool to study the universe. It helped astronomers conclude that there are hundreds of billions of stars in every one of the hundreds of billions of galaxies. “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1).

⁸We can take the same approach with the words of the prophet Joel: “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people” (2:28). The Spirit is clearly the Holy Spirit. Is the “I” referring to the Father? To the Son? To both? These are *filioque* questions, and we are getting ahead of ourselves.

But here is the amazing thing: among scientists the same powerful tool can be used to reach two contradicting conclusions. One scientist might say, "The universe is so vast that it must be millions and billions of years old. The idea of a creator is unthinkable." Another scientist using

the same telescope and looking at the same stars and the same data might say, "The use of this telescope has impressed on me the majesty, power, and wisdom of God. To him be all glory!"

In our study of the doctrine of the Trinity we are also investigating God's revelation, but it is a different mode of revelation. Instead of God's picture book we are studying God's Word, his book with words. And just as scientists use tools to investigate the book of nature, so also theologians use tools to investigate the "Book of Books," the Bible.

But theologians using the same tools in the same generation and in the same context might reach contradicting conclusions. Invariably they do.

In the history of the doctrine of God, many theologians, using the tools at their disposal, have come to the same conclusion as the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) and the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381): that God is one in essence, but that the same God, one in essence, is three-fold in person.

Again, this agrees with the Biblical witness. On the surface, the Old Testament shows a monotheistic God interacting with his sinful people Israel. The Gospels show three persons, working together and in dialogue with each other and interacting also with the people of Israel. The main protagonist in the Old Testament is the Lord God (with hints of three-ness). The main protagonists in the New Testament are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (with clear indications of perfect unity). This shift in revelation is clear and abrupt; it is impressed on our minds with an unforgettable scene at the public inauguration of Jesus' ministry. The Father speaks. The Son has been sent and begins his work willingly. The Holy Spirit, by whom this man was conceived, gives testimony to John the Baptist and to Israel and to the world that the Lord God of the Old Testament is in the mode of hyper-fulfillment and hyper-revelation. The Lord has come to save his people. "This is my Son, whom I love; with him and I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). The decisive battles of an eternal war are about to begin: the devil against Son and Father and Spirit.⁹

⁹The Eastern church celebrates the Holy Trinity on the first Sunday after the Epiphany. Let the preaching in all our CELC churches be robustly trinitarian as we preach on the baptism of Christ! The Western church celebrates the Holy Trinity on the Sunday after Pentecost.

As we have noted many times, the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of salvation are inseparable, like the double helix of a DNA strand. Theology proper (the study about God) and soteriology go together. Soteriology is rooted in the triune God. Without the Trinity, there is no soteriology. When we confess the Trinity, we are confessing truths that the devil has attacked over and over again but has been unable to destroy. The Word remains! The trinitarian gospel remains!

But the battle also remains. In the midst of controversy, using the same theological tools, many heretical theologians have come to anti-trinitarian or unitarian conclusions. And, sadly, they have deceived many others.

Same object of study (the Bible). Same environment. Same tools. Opposite conclusions. What makes the difference? It is the heart and mind of the theologian and his posture towards the Word of God. Does the theologian use his tools in a magisterial (arrogant and ruling) manner or a ministerial (humble and serving) manner? Does he take all his thoughts captive to the Word of God? Or does he use his human reason to deny what God has said and done? Does he use his tools to understand the Word? Or does he use his tools to construct and promote his own understanding?

The scientist who studies the stars and praises the glory of the Creator is informed by the Word of God. The scientist who cannot fathom a creator even as he studies what God has made is being informed by corrupt human reason. He is blinded by the devil. In the same way, the trinitarian theologian is informed by the Word of God, while the unitarian, who cannot fathom a triune God even as he studies what God has said and done, is letting human reason be his master. He uses his theological tools to destroy the mystery of the Trinity (in the first sense) because “three in one” is incomprehensible to him. He uses his tools to destroy true theology, the mystery of the Trinity (in the second sense), because he doesn’t like the idea of progressive revelation and can’t accept that the Lord would do it that way.

The Trinity is beyond human reason. So is the gospel of full and free forgiveness purchased on the cross by the holy, precious blood of God’s one and only Son. It should not surprise us that the Socinians and their unitarian descendants teach a “salvation” by works. When the eyes of people

Let this custom not give excuse to a less-than-robust preaching of this doctrine throughout the year. As someone has said, “Thanksgiving is not a one-day-a-year thing. God’s people give him thanks every day.” Our ancient liturgies will provide much aid for having “Trinity Sunday” every Sunday.

are closed to the eternal Trinity, those eyes are closed to the eternal gospel as well. Unitarians preach the brotherhood of man; they focus on earthly matters. When the eyes of people are closed to the Son, who was with the Father in eternity and who returned to his glorious place at the right hand of the Father, those eyes will be closed also to the “adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:5 NIV84) and “heirs having the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7) petals of that beautiful flower we call the gospel. Without a proper doctrine of God you can’t have a proper doctrine of salvation. Without a proper doctrine of God and a proper doctrine of salvation, you can’t have a proper eschatology either. Such a person will imagine there is no heaven, no new order of things (see Revelation 21:5). He will be unable to sing the *Gloria Patri* in true faith.

When we have a proper doctrine of God (Trinity) and a proper doctrine of salvation (the gospel), we will have our hearts and minds set “on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1). And it will radically change our lives.

The implications for our beloved Lutheran fellowship are clear. As we consider our Lutheran heritage, we give humble thanks to God that our forefathers used their theological tools with a deep respect for the Word of God. As they used their theological tools, they prayed humbly that they would be taught by God (see John 6:45). They trembled and shuddered at the thought of dishonoring God’s name. With eyes wide open to the good news of salvation, the Lutheran reformers had eyes wide open to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who accomplished and who freely offer this salvation.

When we read the Lutheran Confession, we can’t help but marvel and rejoice at what they say, at how they say it, and with what posture and precision the Lutheran theologians went about their work. Clearly, the Spirit of God was in them!

In our CELC churches we want to follow in a long line of godly and pious theologians (e.g., the church fathers, the Lutheran reformers, and the confessional Lutherans between them and us) whose careful and humble study of the Word, using all the tools at their disposal, led them to believe in, confess, defend, glorify, and proclaim the triune God. By God’s grace, we as confessional Lutheran pastors and congregations around the world will continue to sing that ancient doxology:

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit!
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.

The Need for Theology

We might call the *Gloria Patri* a weaving together of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) and the declaration that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). We praise one God, in three persons and in three tenses—past, present, and future. This song accommodates our time-boundedness and our inability to think in terms of eternity. Singing the *Gloria Patri* makes us feel tiny. If it weren’t for his grace, we would sing in terror, or not at all. But “since we have justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand” (Romans 5:1-2).

If the devil and the world would leave us alone as we sing our *Glorias* today, tomorrow, every day, there would be no need for us to do so much theological work. But the devil cannot remain silent about the salvation accomplished by Father, Son, and Holy. He must raise doubts and speak his lies, everywhere and always.

That is why there is a need in every country and in every age for theologians to do their work. Just as worshipers gather at churches to praise the Trinity with their *Gloria Patris*, theologians sit at their desks to praise the Trinity with the tools of their trade. Theologians do their work so that the singing of the saints never stops.

Theologians use human reason and various other tools—schema, terminology, arguments, etc.—to examine God’s Word. As we go about this work of theology ourselves and as we study the work of others, it is important for us to remember a few things. First, the theological method is arbitrary.¹⁰ The Bible is perfect, clear, powerful, and inerrant. We have no freedom to change God’s Word. But as we use tools to ponder, explain, and defend the Bible’s teachings, there is no one right way to do it. As one example from the history of trinitarian theology, many different words have been used to answer the question, “Three *what* in one *what*?” Our preferred way, inherited through the ecumenical creeds, is this: “Three distinct persons in one divine essence.” With Luther we say, “This is the best we can do.” The ongoing theological task is to explain what is meant (and

¹⁰This is reflected in the fact that we use various dogmatics texts in the training of pastors in CELC churches. I have included some of these in the bibliography: Pieper, Lange, Deutschlander, etc. Wisconsin Seminary uses its *Dogmatics Notes* which are available at wisluthsem.org. These notes reflect especially the theological efforts of Adolf Hoenecke and John P. Meyer.

not meant) by the terms “distinct person” and “essence,” and to do this in a way that puts on “the belt of truth” and extinguishes “all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Ephesians 6:14-16).

Second, we must remember that the schema, terminology, arguments, and the other tools of theology are shaped by our environment, by what is available, by the language of the day, and especially by the strategies and claims of those who are attacking God’s Word. In every age, the work of theology is shaped by context. The church fathers used Neo-Platonic terms that came with metaphysical baggage—baggage they needed to remove. The Lutheran theologians employed the Aristotelian language of the scholastics, aware of the need to use these tools with caution and care. The church fathers were responding, among other things, to the claim of Arius that “there was a time when the Son was not.” The Lutheran theologians were responding to the false claims of the Socinians that the Old Testament rules out any trinitarian theology. This explains why the Lutheran reformers are often drawing up their battle lines in the Old Testament.

Third, theologians and those who examine their work need to be humble. In his 1537 sermons on the Holy Trinity, Martin Luther uses the words “stutter and stammer” to describe what theologians do as they talk about the relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (*Luther’s Works* 78:3). Theologians use language and terminology of their choosing to clarify what the Spirit has said, and they are often working in the midst of controversy. There is good stammering and bad stammering, distinguished, as we have said earlier, by a ministerial or magisterial use of reason.

Even good theologians are stammering. With that humbling thought, we continue on to the topic of *filioque*.

Filioque

If the Father is unbegotten and if he has begotten the Son, can we call the Father the source of the Son? If so, can we say the Father is greater than the Son or that the Son is less divine or less eternal than the Father? When Jesus Christ says that the Father is greater than he (see John 14:28), is that in respect to his humanity only, or also in respect to his divinity?

The words “Father” and “Son” and “begets” are the Spirit’s words for revealing these things of God to us, and we understand that this begetting was from eternity (see Psalm 2:7, John 1:14; Hebrews 1:5). Just as an earthly father begets children who are just as human as he is, so also the divine Father begets a Son in eternity who is just as divine as he is. The Father did not create the Son out of nothing, as he did the world. The

Father begets the Son of himself, and this Son is the one and only (see John 1:18).

Did Jesus become the Son of God when he was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary? Is it possible that the Father-Son relationship which we see and hear in the Gospels is different from their relationship in the secret presence of God? Theologians will address these and other questions using a variety of terminologies and schemas:

- *Opera ad intra* (God's works inside of himself) in contrast to *opera ad extra* (God's works in relation to the world)
- Inner-Trinity in contrast to outer-Trinity
- Ontological Trinity in contrast to economic Trinity
- The processions of the Son (begotten as God) and Spirit (eternally proceeding) in contrast to the missions of the Son (begotten as man) and Spirit (breathed/sent into the world)
- The order of the persons of the Trinity¹¹

Especially in connection with the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit, the visible church remains divided over the *filioque* question: Does the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father only, or from the Father *and the Son*. Because the CELC is blessed to have member churches around the world, in both East and West, and because CELC papers on the doctrine of the Trinity do not happen very often, we will address this issue briefly.

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed stated that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. In A.D. 589, at a Western church council in Toledo, Spain, in response to the growing threat of Arian heresy, the Western church added *filioque*: "Who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*."

In his 1537 sermons, Luther mentions several times that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (*Luther's Works* 78:4, 6, 16). Writing almost 1000 years after the Council of Toledo, Luther shows his agreement with Augustine and the theology of the Western church. In his treatise *On the Trinity*, Augustine affirmed that it is God the Father "from whom the Holy Spirit principally proceeds." Augustine explained further:

"I have added the word *principally*, because we find that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son also. But the Father gave him this too,

¹¹ It is beyond the scope of this paper to define these terms sufficiently. They are presented here and explained only as is necessary for a cursory treatment of filioque.

not as to one already existing, and not yet having it; but whatever he gave to the only-begotten Word, he gave by begetting him. Therefore, he so begat him as that the common Gift should proceed from him also, and the Holy Spirit should be the Spirit of both.”¹²

I must admit that I have studied this controversy in and from the perspective of my western context.¹³ We will neither solve nor exhaust this centuries-old controversy between the Western and Eastern churches. My goal, rather, is to summarize the reasons why I think we can and should say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, though *principally* from the Father, and from and through the Son.¹⁴

A complicating factor in this discussion is the relationship between the word “proceeds” and the word “sends.” The Eastern church uses the word “proceeds” in reference to the inner-Trinity but the word “sends” in reference to the outer-Trinity. In other words, the Holy Spirit proceeds only from the Father, but he is sent by both the Father and the Son. The Western church on the other hand, does not make this distinction so clearly. The Western church says that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both and is sent by both.

The only passage that uses the word “proceed” in reference to the Holy Spirit is in the Gospel of John: “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out¹⁵ from the Father—he will testify about me” (John 15:26).

So, what are the reasons why the Western church continues to stand by *filioque*? Generally, the Western church has made five arguments. The first argument is that the Spirit is called *the Spirit of Christ* in several

¹²Allison, *Historical Theology*, 241. He cites *On the Trinity*, 15.17.29, in *Nicene- and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st series, 3:216.

¹³The resources in the bibliography give varied attention to the *filioque* controversy: Thompson (147-149), Lange (8-9, 123-124), Deutschlander (89), Schmeling (146-154), and Beckwith (218-243). The reasons stated in this section are drawn mostly from Thompson, Schmeling, and Beckwith.

¹⁴In Appendix #2 illustration B depicts the Eastern Orthodox conception of the Trinity, while illustration C depicts the Western church’s conception. Illustration A, sometimes called the “Shield of the Trinity,” is not meant to depict the structure of God, but to summarize the teachings of the first part of the Athanasian Creed. This “shield” can be misleading, as it might imply that there is an essence called God, and three persons besides.

¹⁵The NIV does not translate *ekporeuetai* as “proceeds.” By way of comparison, the ESV: “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.”

New Testament passages (Romans 8:9, Galatians 4:6, Philippians 1:19, and 1 Peter 1:11). The Spirit is of the Son and of the Father. Especially in light of how closely the New Testament presents the Father and the Son—of the same eternal essence, will, glory, and purpose—the Spirit must be of the Son, just as he is of the Father.

The second argument is that Christ is the sender of the Holy Spirit in passages such as John 15:26, John 16:7, and John 20:22. Jesus has the power or right to send the Spirit just as the Father does. The inference is that Jesus' breathing of the Holy Spirit on his disciples is an indication that the Spirit proceeds eternally from the Son.

The third argument is based on John 16:13-15 which says,

¹³But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.

This passage implies an order to the Trinity. The Father begets the Son. The Spirit receives from both the Father and the Son. The Son is the center of the Trinity in the sense that God's will (the salvation of sinners) is accomplished by him. The Spirit testifies to him. The Father is known and worshiped through the Son in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:18). Why would the Spirit proceed only from the Father and not from the Son, when the chief gift of the Spirit given to believers is the ability to confess the Son as Christ and Lord, through whom and in whom we have redemption and life?¹⁶

The fourth argument of the orthodox Lutheran theologians is that Revelation 22:1 uses a synonym of "proceed" to describe the waters of the Spirit flowing from the throne of God and from the Lamb in the new order of things.

Finally, a fifth argument from the Western church, based on history, is that before the controversy between East and West became politicized, the procession of the Holy Spirit from both Father and Son was confessed by the Third Ecumenical Council as well as Eastern

¹⁶Diagrams B and C in Appendix #2 are an attempt to illustrate the different conceptual views of the Western and Eastern churches.

church fathers such as Epiphanius of Salamis, Basil the Great, and Cyril of Alexandria.¹⁷ The Athanasian Creed also states that the Holy Spirit is of the Father and the Son, neither made nor created nor begotten, but proceeding.

It should be noted that the Western church does not teach a double procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son separately, but an eternal procession of the Spirit *principally* from the Father, but also through and from the Son.¹⁸

Beckwith provides a summary of the significance of this biblical teaching:

We end our unit on the scriptural identity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with a discussion of the *filioque*. There is something fitting in that. At the very least, the *filioque* shows us that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are never parted from one another; they not only mutually indwell one another but also make themselves known to us in such a way that our thoughts always move from one person to the other in a never-ending figure eight.¹⁹

When the Holy Spirit makes our bodies his holy temple (1 Corinthians 6:19), the Father and the Son, from whom the Spirit proceeds, also make their home with us (John 14:23). This is the confidence of all who have been baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:27). For “baptism into Christ” is baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).

What Does This Mean?

So what does this mean? Is it possible that some CELC churches would include *filioque* in their confession of the Nicene Creed while others do not? What if one of our churches, for historical or contextual reasons, felt uncomfortable including it? In my view, that would not be disruptive to our unity, as long as the decision not to include it was not rooted in false teaching, for example, in

¹⁷Thompson, *The Ancient and Medieval Church*, 149.

¹⁸In this regard, Beckwith quotes Quenstedt: “The Son, as he is not from himself, but has his essence from the Father through eternal generation, so also he has not the power of working from himself nor does he act from himself, but from the Father. In the same sense, as the Holy Spirit proceeds also from the Son, he speaks not from himself but speaks whatever he receives from Christ, as it is said in John 16:13-14.” See *The Holy Trinity*, 333.

¹⁹Beckwith, *The Holy Trinity*, 263.

sympathy with the Arian teachings which led the Western church to add it in the first place.

In our CELC churches it is not imperative that we all use the same language, terminology, schema, tools, etc., to teach the doctrine of God. Nor is it imperative that we all borrow the language, terminology, schema, tools, etc., of a certain generation of trinitarian theologians.

While there is great benefit in studying the theologies of others (especially good stammerers), those theologies are not divinely inspired or mandated.

In our theological efforts in the doctrine of God, what is imperative, however, is that we believe, teach, and confess what the Holy Scriptures reveal about the eternal Father, the eternal Son, and the eternal Spirit, who are not three eternals, but one eternal. And it is imperative that, in our engagement with people in our corner of the world, we study the local doubts about God and attacks against God, so we can use our theological tools in a ministerial way and a contextually appropriate way, contending for “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3 NIV84).

In other words, every member church of the CELC has as their God-given mission the holy privilege of proclaiming the trinitarian gospel in their own context. Not only has God set the times and the places for us to live, but he has also given us to each other in this blessed fellowship of faith, to teach, encourage, exhort (after careful listening), and spur one another on in praise of God and in mission zeal. In the work of the harvest, our song is this:

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit!
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.

Practically Speaking

In our discussion about the Trinity, we have wandered from biblical theology to systematic theology and historical theology. What about practical theology? What does the doctrine of the Trinity mean for our CELC practically? How shall we conclude?

In our blessed Lutheran fellowship, we have holy things—by the Holy Spirit’s grace—in common. We have the same trinitarian theology, the same soteriology, and the same eschatology. Our trinitarian theology informs everything we hold dear and everything we do: our doctrine, our worship, our preaching of the Word, our administration of Holy Baptism

and the Lord's Supper,²⁰ our gospel ministry, our love for one another, our witness to the world, and our eternal hope.

Our fellowship is with and to the Father, with and through his eternal Son, with and in the Holy Spirit (see 1 John 1:1-4, Romans 11:33-36). Our joy is complete! Because of this fellowship with God, we have fellowship with each other. There is no doctrine more important, more comprehensive, or more glorious than the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

If it is true that our fellowship is rooted in the gracious activity of the triune God, and it is, then it is also true that our unity in doctrine and our expression of fraternal love to each other can only be enhanced as we continue to grow in this blessed doctrine of God. A proper doctrine of God and proper faith in God are vital to our lives of worship, witness, and love.

Ideally, this fellowship is enjoyed among us at every level: among individual brothers and sisters in Christ, among local gatherings of believers around the world, among our church bodies globally and regionally, and in our partnerships in theological training, humanitarian aid, and outreach. As confessional Lutherans we express the unity of our faith and our familial love in personal interactions, in worship, at the Lord's Table, in prayer, in conferences like this, and in all our work together.

What brought us together into such a blessed fellowship with God and each other? Three answers come to mind:

1. The Lord of the church, the Holy Spirit himself has brought us together!
2. The Word of God—both testaments—which the Spirit has written and preserved for our learning has brought us together!
3. The Lutheran Confessions, which display a proper hermeneutic, which are guided by the Word of God, and which provide a correct and reliable exposition of God's Word have brought us together!

All three of these are rooted in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All three of these are evidence of their gracious activity among us.

This paper was supposed to be presented in Seoul in 2020. It wasn't. It was rescheduled to be presented in Seoul in 2021. It won't be. COVID-19

²⁰Let it be emphasized: the evangelical Lutheran church's doctrine and practice of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion are evangelical and trinitarian. This administration of the sacraments is evidence of the trinitarian gospel among us.

has affected many things, including our ability to enjoy and celebrate our sweet fellowship face-to-face.

The events of the past year have made people aware of the need for overall health and for various vitamins and minerals in their diet and in their blood. I have heard many people talking recently about vitamin D deficiency (a common problem in places where there is little sunshine). Let's not be "vitamin T" deficient! As confessional, evangelical Lutherans, we don't do "Trinity-lite"! May Father, Son, and Holy Spirit continue to shine on us brightly with eternal grace and favor!

Let's celebrate our fellowship under God in the CELC with a robust trinitarian-gospel running through our veins, in all we do: in our learning (in church, home and seminary), in our liturgies (in every aspect of worship), and in lives of faith (holy lives of humble repentance and abundant fruit, in step with the Spirit, through the merits of the Son, offered daily to the glory of our Father in heaven).

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit!
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.



Bradley Wordell, Essay #1

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Appendix #1

Illustrations of God's Progressive Revelation (with thanks to my son Benjamin)

A. The buds of Old Testament progressive prophecy:



B. The gospel in full bloom:



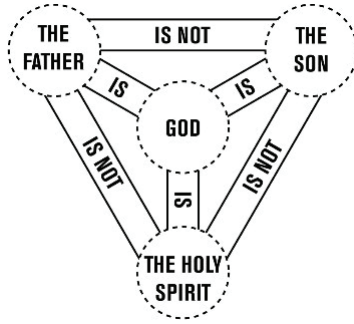
C. The gospel and the Trinity in full bloom:



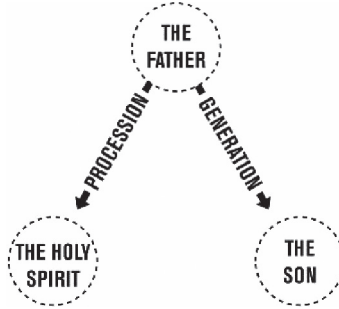
Appendix #2

Trinity Diagrams (with thanks again to the “son of my right hand”)

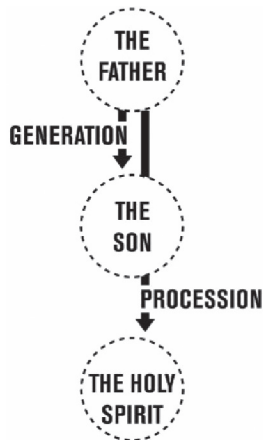
A. The Shield of the Trinity:



B. The Eastern Orthodox conception of procession:



C. The Western church's conception of procession:



Appendix #3

This 1511 Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) woodcut entitled “The Holy Trinity” is considered by many to be the pinnacle of his artistry. God the Father receives God the Son as the sacrifice for the sins of the world, while the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, hovers over them. The angels look on in wonder, holding in their hands the instruments of his sufferings and death.



The Formula of Concord Article III: The Righteousness of Faith

Juhani Viitala
Finland

I was asked to write the essay “Formula of Concord Article III: The Righteousness of Faith.” The assignment mentioned that the essay might be interesting for me as a resident of Finland, since a “new Finnish interpretation of Luther” has surfaced in recent years. I studied Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses at Helsinki University in the early 1980s under the professor of ecumenical theology, Tuomo Mannermaa’s authority. Prof. Mannermaa, who died in 2015, is called the father of the new Finnish interpretation of Luther. I found Prof. Mannermaa to be a kind, competent man dedicated to systematic theology. As he lectured, he had Luther’s Latin Ninety-Five Theses in his hand and he translated them one by one directly into Finnish, and he explained to his students the meaning of Luther’s words. However, I began to estrange myself from him when he, who was formerly known as a conservative Lutheran scholar, informed us students that he had found a solution to accepting women’s ordination without violating the scriptural doctrine. I couldn’t accept his doctrinal change and in the end, I chose another professor, Eero Huovinen, to supervise my theological studies. Later I understood that Huovinen also supported Mannermaa’s thinking and is often mentioned as a representative of the Finnish School of Tuomo Mannermaa.¹

In 1979, Prof. Tuomo Mannermaa published his famous book, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther’s View of Justification*, which examined Luther’s theology of justification as demonstrated in his lectures on Galatians and found a point of intersection between Lutheran and Eastern Orthodox theology. According to Mannermaa, Luther’s idea of Christ’s presence in faith and the forensic understanding of justification defined in the Formula of Concord are mutually exclusive.² It is not possible to engage in ecumenical dialogue without resolving this inner inconsistency.³

¹Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, vii.

²Vainio, “Justification and Participation in Christ,” 3.

³Timothy Schmeling expresses the Lutheran confessional view of the Mannermaa school’s ecumenical tendency this way: “The ‘new’ Finnish interpretation of Luther’s thought . . .

However, in the Lutheran confessional view there is no contradiction between the doctrine of justification in the Formula of Concord III and the reformer Dr. Martin Luther. They both stand within a pattern of confessional continuity in opposition to Rome and Andreas Osiander.⁴ There is a doctrinal unity in the Book of Concord, a unified commitment to the teaching of the Scriptures. Luther wrote three of the works in the Book of Concord. After Luther died all kinds of controversies and misunderstandings broke out among the Lutherans in Germany. After years of debate and monumental attempts at settling the doctrinal issues, the Formula of Concord was written in 1577. This was a joint undertaking of a great many Lutheran theologians who wanted to settle the disputes and remain faithful to the Lutheran heritage. The Solid Declaration III:6 of the Formula of Concord names justification by faith the chief article of the entire Christian doctrine without which no poor conscience can have any abiding comfort or rightly understand the riches of the grace of Christ. In support of this thesis, Philip Melancthon's Apology of the Augsburg Confession (IV:2,3) is invoked and Martin Luther's writing is cited.⁵

As member churches of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, as disciples of the Scriptures, we accept the confessions in the Book of Concord to be a correct exposition of the pure doctrine of the Word of God. We believe that the imputation of Christ's righteousness is the very heart of the Lutheran doctrine of justification. Sanctification is regarded logically—but not temporally—consequent to subjective justification. "God forgave the sins of all and declared all to be righteous, because Jesus made the payment for all. This truth, called universal or objective justification, gives each of us the certainty that our sins are paid for and we are indeed redeemed."⁶ "The saving work of Christ is personally received through faith. We have personal or subjective justification as we are moved to believe in Christ."⁷ "When people come to faith in Christ,

has clouded Luther's teachings in the name of ecumenical unity with Eastern Orthodox." See "Life in Christ," 2.

⁴The formulators of the FC, one of them Martin Chemnitz, did not consider the FC and Luther's theology as contradictory. See FC SD III:67.

⁵Dr. Luther wrote, "If this one teaching stands in its purity, then Christendom will also remain pure and good, undivided and unseparated; . . . but where this falls, it is impossible to ward off any error or sectarian spirit" (*LW* 14:37, Luther's comments on Psalm 117 in 1530).

⁶"Ninety-Five Theses for the 21st Century," #55.

⁷*Ibid.*, #56.

they have a new self that hates sin and is eager to live a holy life filled with good works. This new life of sanctification flows from a heart that knows it has been justified by grace and desires to thank God.”⁸

The CELC follows here the teaching of the Apology. “The imputation is a *synthetic* judgment which, because it is God’s almighty and gracious reckoning and verdict, is effective and creative. The imputation makes a sinner righteous. Melancthon means just this when he says that the verdict of justification ‘makes’ (*efficit*) righteous men out of unrighteous men (Apology IV, 72).”⁹ Its basis, and also what is imputed to the believer, is Christ’s foreign righteousness.

The “mature” Luther¹⁰ teaches forensic¹¹ justification and sanctification to be simultaneous, but logically the latter is a result of the former. Luther wrote against antinomians in the year 1537: “Whoever, therefore, lays hold of this benefit of Christ by faith has by way of imputation fulfilled the law and receives the Holy Spirit, who renders the law, which otherwise is annoying and burdensome to the flesh, enjoyable and gentle.”¹² Logically God’s external promise of forgiveness for Christ’s sake precedes and creates faith, so imputation (forensic justification) precedes sanctification. The distinction between justification and sanctification was present in the mature Luther even though such terminology was not characteristic of his writings.¹³ Personally, I learned to know this mature,

⁸Ibid, #65.

⁹Preus, *Justification and Rome*, 74.

¹⁰The “Catholic” Luther (1509–1518) had placed sanative healing in the center of his doctrine of justification. However, the later, mature Luther (1528–1546) “carefully separated the gift of the new life of sanctification from the initial gift of grace in justification.” See Green, *How Melancthon Helped Luther Discover the Gospel*, 57, note 42.

¹¹According to Gerhard Forde, Luther never uses the term “forensic” as such, but repeatedly speaks of “imputation” as the divine act through which righteousness comes to the sinner. He does on occasion speak of the divine “tribunal,” e.g., WA 34/2:140, 6. See “Forensic Justification and the Law in Lutheran Theology,” 279.

¹²WA 39, I, 388, 4. English translation from *Only the Decalogue Is Eternal*, 55.

¹³Already in his polemics against Latomus (1522), justification was separate from and preceded the sanative healing. This healing was the fruit of faith. In later years Luther would normally not describe the new life of the regenerate as sanative healing. Rather, he would use a concept which later theologians called sanctification. See Green, *How Melancthon Helped Luther Discover the Gospel*, 76. Alistair McGrath writes: “In his earlier phase, around 1515–1519, Luther tended to understand justification as a process of becoming, in which the sinner was gradually confirmed to the likeness of Jesus Christ through a process of internal renewal. . . . In his later writings . . . dating from the mid-1530s and beyond, perhaps under the influence of Melancthon’s more forensic approach to justification, . . .

confessional Luther from the writings of Finnish theologian, the late Dr. Uuras Saarnivaara.¹⁴

We turn now to the Formula of Concord III, which sums up the Apostle Paul's teaching on our justification before God.¹⁵ I restrict my essay to the doctrine of the Formula of Concord III¹⁶ and explain mainly in the footnote the history of the Formula of Concord III.¹⁷

Luther tended to treat justification as a matter of being declared to be righteous, rather than a process of becoming righteous." See *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 460.

¹⁴Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel*, 92-120.

¹⁵Preus, *Getting into the Theology of Concord*, 49

¹⁶The Formula of Concord was presented in 1577 and first published in the Book of Concord in the year 1580, 34 years after Luther's death. The original Formula of Concord version was written in German, and the Latin authentic translation was published 1584. The Formula of Concord contains treatments settling disputes on original sin, freedom of the human will, justification by faith, good works, the distinction of law and gospel, the third use of the law, the Lord's Supper, Christology, Christ's descent into hell, adiaphora, election, as well as rejection of teachings of the Anabaptists, Schwenkfelders, New Arians, and anti-Trinitarians. The Formula of Concord has two parts: The Epitome, a brief and concise presentation of the Formula's twelve articles and the Solid Declaration, a detailed exposition of the twelve articles. The Epitome was written by Jakob Andreae. He first defines the historic status controversiae, the controversial question in this dispute, and then he presents approved doctrine in theses and rejected doctrine in antitheses. Martin Chemnitz, David Chytraeus, and Jakob Andreae each contributed more than one-quarter of the final text of the Solid Declaration. The other three signatories were Nicolaus Selnecker, Andreas Musculus, and Christophorus Cornerus. All pledged in 1577 that the Formula of Concord was their faith, doctrine, and confession, in which by God's grace they were willing to appear before the judgement seat of Christ to give account of it.

¹⁷The instigator of the debate over justification by faith was Andreas Osiander. Already as a Lutheran pastor in Nuremberg, he had been involved in a small skirmish over the meaning of this doctrine. In the 1530s he had objected to the general absolution often announced from the pulpit after the sermon in evangelical parishes. Both Luther and Melancthon responded by defending the practice, but neither seemed to notice that Osiander's position on the absolution was related to his Platonic philosophy. Osiander had studied Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Hebrew he studied in 1515-1520 under Melancthon's uncle and mentor Johannes Reuchlin. However, Osiander absorbed not only the text of the Old Testament but also neoplatonic literature of medieval Jewish philosophy and theology, as found in the system of thought known as the Kabala. The Kabala's mystical metaphysic embedded itself in Osiander's mind, and as his conceptual framework it shaped the way in which he assimilated Luther's thought. Kabbalistic studies led him to understand the righteousness that avails before God in a different way than did Luther.

Humanist and theologian Andreas Osiander was a reformer and close colleague of Luther and Melancthon. In 1523, when the eucharist was served in both forms in Nuremberg for the first time, Osiander was there. Two years later, when the city of Nuremberg officially

joined the reform movement, Osiander had a great influence on its development. Osiander sided with Luther on the eucharist against Zwingli, and at the Diet of Augsburg he looked after Melanchthon, preventing him from conceding too much to the Catholics. In 1532, Osiander and Johannes Brenz established the church orders for Nuremberg-Brandenburg. He was present at Schmalkalden in 1537 where Luther published his articles. In 1548 Osiander fled Nuremberg to Königsberg since he fiercely opposed the hated Augsburg Interim, which would have forced Protestants to accept the traditional Catholic ceremonial, offering them in return only the chalice and clerical marriage as concessions. The so-called *adiaphora* controversies surrounding the Leipzig Interim caused a split in the Lutheran side between Philippists and Gnesio-Lutherans.

In Königsberg, Osiander became professor at the new university even though he had no advanced theological degree. In his inaugural disputation in 1549, Osiander set forth a doctrine of justification which did not acknowledge God's imputation of Christ's vicarious obedience. Osiander's colleague, Friedrich Staphylus, who soon returned to Catholicism, reported privately to Philip Melanchthon that Osiander held another view of justification than the Wittenbergers.

In a 1550 tract arguing that Christ would have become incarnate even if human beings had not sinned, Osiander spoke of God in ways that began to cause concern among both Philippists and Gnesio-Lutherans. God was a single, inseparable, pure essence whose essential presence always carried with it God's attributes. Thus, to become righteous in Christ meant that a human being had to be touched by God's essence and thereby receive God's perfect righteousness. Osiander viewed justification as a process whereby human creatures came into direct contact with the essential righteousness of God, not simply with verbal signs of that righteousness. He failed to grasp Luther's more biblical, Hebraic understanding of God in terms of relationship and promise, and preferred instead to view theology in terms of essence and spirit.

Soon Osiander was arguing that Christians were justified precisely when they received the divine essence of Christ's righteousness. Thus, Christ's divinity, not his humanity, is the source of the believer's righteousness. Faith is the channel for receiving this divine essence into the human being. In justification, the soul of the believer participates in the divine righteousness of Christ. In his opponents' eyes this undercut both the Word of God, which was a mere sign for Osiander, not the bearer of God's creative work, and Christ's redemption on the cross, which was an event in the past for him. Osiander insisted that Christ's human nature was not the source of our righteousness, only his divinity was.

In the debate that followed, Osiander was attacked from all sides. The young ducal librarian in Königsberg, Martin Chemnitz, who was later one of the chief authors of the Formula of Concord, studied the church fathers for refutations of the view. As a result, he became very familiar with the theology of the ancient church, and he became friends with Osiander's chief opponent among the Gnesio-Lutherans, Joachim Mörlin. At the same time, Melanchthon joined the fray, realizing that the chief article of the faith was under attack. Not only did Osiander's position seem to undercut the centrality of Christ's incarnation and his death on the cross, it also rejected outright the center of Melanchthon's understanding of justification. He taught that God pronounces us righteous through his

Righteousness of Faith in the Epitome III¹⁸

The authors of the FC had two purposes in mind as they composed Article III. On the one hand there was a fight among Lutherans about which nature of Christ—human or divine—actually bestowed righteousness on us. On the other hand, and less obviously, the concordists were also reacting to some of the teachings of their Roman opponents, especially as expressed at the Council of Trent.¹⁹

In defining the correct doctrine of justification, the FC teaches that “the righteousness which avails before God: 1) is based on Christ’s vicarious

promise, to which faith clings, trusting that promise to be our righteousness in Christ before God. Only Johann Brenz, the reformer from Württemberg, who had never studied with Luther, gave faint credence to Osiander’s position in part because of earlier personal contact between the two when both were reformers in South Germany. Brenz thought Osiander’s teaching differed from Lutheran doctrine in terms and phrases rather than in substance. Melanchthon and Luther advised Brenz in their joint letter to the better theology (See Vainio, “Justification and Participation in Christ,” 75-76).

When Andreas Osiander denied that the human nature of Christ contributes to salvation, Francesco Stancaro, who had been driven out of Catholic Italy because he openly expressed his support for the reformers, held that Christ is our righteousness before God only according to his human nature. Stancaro, as a specialist in ancient languages, had been called to the university in Königsberg in hope that he could bring something new to the dialogue between Melanchthon and Osiander. He could not. Stancaro stated that both Osiander and Melanchthon were fools and antichrists. The presence of Stancaro intensified the atmosphere to an extent that weapons were carried into the disputation hall. Stancaro joined the Osiandrian controversy by claiming that Christ is the righteousness of the sinner on behalf of his human nature, which he considered to be the view of Peter Lombard. In order to maintain the idea of God’s immutability he was ready to separate Christ’s divine nature from satisfaction. God sent only the human nature of the human-divine person to save humanity. The human nature, not the divine nature, sheds blood for the sins of the world. Stancaro was attacked by everyone. In 1553 Melanchthon answered Stancaro’s teaching and taught that satisfaction involves not only suffering and fulfillment of the law but also victory over death and crushing the head of the serpent, something mere human nature cannot do. Rather, both human and divine natures are at work in salvation. Stancaro later returned to the Roman Church.

In this short history of the FC III, I follow Arand, Kolb, and Nestingen, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of the Book of Concord*; Wengert, *A Formula for Parish Practice*; and Vainio, “Justification and Participation in Christ.”

¹⁸References to the Formula of Concord are from Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*.

¹⁹The Council of Trent, held between 1545 and 1563 in Trent in northern Italy, has been described as the embodiment of the Counter-Reformation. Trent maintains that justification does not only consist in the remission of sins “but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward being.” The Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Decree on Justification, Chapter 7. Quoted in Preus, *Justification and Rome*, 69.

satisfaction; 2) requires possessing of the whole person of Christ, both his divine and his human nature, in faith; 3) means the imputing of Christ's perfect obedience to the sinner by pure grace through faith, not inner renewal (which is part of sanctification)."²⁰

Already in 1551, Philip Melanchthon advised Andreas Osiander that, while the essential righteousness of Christ effects renewal in believers, they have forgiveness of sins and are reputed to be righteous before God on account of the merit of Christ, whose blood and death appeased the wrath of God.²¹ Luther had pithily taught the same forensic doctrine in his 1529 Small Catechism. "Where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation" (Sacrament of the Altar, 6).

Pitting forensic justification against its effects was certainly not an issue between Luther and Melanchthon.²²

The Epitome III gives an introduction to what it means to be justified.²³ Justification before God is about grace alone. God forgives our sins by sheer grace.²⁴ Justification is about faith alone. Faith alone is the means and instrument through which we lay hold of Christ.²⁵ This faith is not a mere knowledge, but a gift of God in the Word.²⁶ Thus justification is not about feelings or some essential qualities poured into our souls, but it is about the Word alone.²⁷

After asserting that the word "justify" in this article means to pronounce free from sin, the FC explains that in the Apology "regeneration" is sometimes used in place of "justification." The FC says that when this occurs, the terms

²⁰Laato, "Justification: The Stumbling Block of the Finnish Luther School," 338.

²¹Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord*, 157. Osiander taught that "the righteousness of faith is the eternal, essential holiness of the divine nature of Christ inhering and dwelling in man." See Bente, 155.

²²Mattes, "Luther on Justification as Forensic and Effective," 265.

²³In this paragraph I partly cite Wengert, *A Formula for Parish Practice*, 50-51.

²⁴"God forgives us our sins by sheer grace, without any works, merit, or worthiness of our own" (FC Ep III:4).

²⁵"Faith alone is the means and instrument through which we lay hold of Christ and, thus, in Christ lay hold of this 'righteousness which avails before God'" (FC Ep III:5).

²⁶"This faith is not a mere knowledge of the stories about Christ. It is instead a gift of God, through which in the Word of the gospel we recognize Christ truly as our redeemer and trust in him" (FC Ep III:6).

²⁷"To justify' in this article means 'to absolve,' that is, 'to pronounce free from sin'" (FC Ep III:7).

mean the same thing. Otherwise the term regeneration refers to renovation and must be completely distinguished from justification by faith.²⁸

To sum it all up, despite our weakness and frailty, we need not doubt this righteousness, reckoned to us through faith, but “should regard it as certain” that we “have a gracious God for Christ’s sake, on the basis of the promise and the Word of the holy gospel” (FC Ep III:9).

The heart of justification is precisely this certainty, which is not a feeling.²⁹ Our feelings change easily. “A young child in a toy store wants everything he or she lays eyes on. Based on this principle, grocery stores long ago learned to put a display of candy in the checkout line.”³⁰ In the same way an adult in the Myeongdong Shopping Street in Seoul or on Madison Avenue in New York or in Mannerheim Street in Helsinki finds so many temptations to buy things he knows he should not. For years Martin Luther went despairing because he sought certainty of salvation in his own feelings and contrition and faith. It was only after he abandoned faith formed by love (*fides charitate formata*) and discovered that faith saves because it grasps the precious pearl Jesus Christ and his alien righteousness that he found peace and security for his conscience.³¹

Righteousness of Faith in the Solid Declaration III³²

The Epitome gives an introduction to the forensic doctrine of justification and the Solid Declaration III explains in more detail what the righteousness of faith means in the Scriptures.

According to the Lutheran Confessions all Scripture should be divided into two chief doctrines. In some places Scripture teaches law, understood

²⁸“We believe, teach, and confess that according to the usage of Holy Scripture the word ‘to justify’ in this article means ‘to absolve,’ that is, ‘to pronounce free from sin.’ . . . When in place of this the words *regeneratio* and *vivificatio*, that is ‘new birth’ and ‘making alive,’ are used as synonyms of justification, as happens in the Apology, then they are to be understood in this same sense. Otherwise, they should be understood as the renewal of the human being and should be differentiated from ‘justification by faith’” (FC Ep III:7-8).

²⁹In the Lutheran Confessions justifying faith (trust) is an activity of the intellect and will of the person, not his emotions. The pietists stressed increasingly that justifying faith (trust) is an emotion of the heart. In the Confessions the heart of the believer is associated with his will. See Preus, *Justification and Rome*, 134-135, note 92.

³⁰Wengert, *A Formula for Parish Practice*, 51.

³¹Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel*, 114.

³²In this section I follow and freely cite Johnson’s essay “Justification According to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession and the Formula of Concord,” 185-199.

as Decalogue; in others, Scripture teaches the promise of Christ, which is to be understood as forgiveness, justification, and eternal life (Ap IV:5). This promise is not conditional upon any merits of ours; it offers justification freely.

a) Faith and Promise

The FC says that justification effects two realities: 1) absolution from sin and 2) adoption as a child of God by sheer grace through the obedience, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (FC SD III:9). The FC testifies that these are true spiritual treasures which are offered by the Holy Spirit in the promise of the gospel and that faith is the only means whereby sinners can apprehend them and make them their own.³³

The FC emphasizes the correlative relationship of the faith and promise when it confesses that faith is solely instrumental. Grace and forgiveness of sins are realities offered by God in the promise of the gospel. Faith does not constitute a cause (*causa*) of grace or forgiveness. The sinner is not justified on account of faith (*propter fidem*) but through faith (*per fidem*).

The FC stresses that the object of saving faith is God's gracious promise of forgiveness. In sharp contrast, the law only accuses the sinner. Only the promise calls forth that faith by which the sinner is accounted righteous before God.

b) Faith and Justification

The FC quotes the Apology as teaching that the article of justification by faith is the chief article of the Christian doctrine. Then the FC defines the article in terms of the sinner being absolved and declared utterly free from all sins and from the verdict of damnation.³⁴

This forensic justification is offered in the gospel. And faith apprehends it. Faith justifies precisely because it lays hold on the merit of Christ in the promise of the holy gospel. In this context the word "justify" is to be understood as declaring righteous and free from sins.³⁵

³³"The Holy Spirit conveys these benefits to us in the promise of the holy gospel. Faith is the only means through which we lay hold of them, accept them, apply them to ourselves, and appropriate them" (FC SD III:10).

³⁴"Poor sinful people are justified before God, that is, absolved—pronounced free of all sins and of the judgment of the damnation that they deserved" (FC SD III:9).

³⁵"Accordingly, the word 'justify' here means to pronounce righteous and free from sins and to count as freed from the eternal punishment of sin because of Christ's righteousness, which is 'reckoned to faith by God' (Phil. 3[:9]). This is consistent with the use and

The FC teaches that renewal follows justification. Renewal must not be confused with justification.

The FC employs such linguistic precision in order that the article of justification remains pure. That which precedes faith and that which follows faith must never be inserted into the article. Good works are the unfailing consequence of justifying faith. True faith cannot coexist with mortal sin; neither is it ever without the fruit of good works. Luther is cited: "It is faith alone that lays hold of the blessing, apart from works, and yet it is never, ever alone."³⁶

The FC rejects the notion that believers are justified before God both through the imputed righteousness of Christ, which is by faith, and through their own inchoate new obedience. It also rejects the notion that believers are justified in part by the righteousness of Christ and in part by their own obedience, imperfect though it be.³⁷

c) Faith and Righteousness

The FC (SD III:4) refers to the statement of the Augsburg Confession IV that the righteousness of faith is remission of sins.³⁸

meaning of this word in Holy Scripture, in the Old and New Testaments. Proverbs 17[:15]: 'One who justifies the wicked and one who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord.' Isaiah 5[:23]: 'Woe to those who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of their rights!' Romans 8[:33]: 'Who will bring any charges against God's elect? It is God who justifies,' that is, who absolves from sin and pronounces free" (FC SD III:17).

³⁶"For good works do not precede faith, nor does sanctification precede justification. Instead, first of all, in conversion, the Holy Spirit kindles faith in us through the hearing of the gospel. This faith lays hold of God's grace in Christ, and through it a person is justified. Thereafter, once people are justified, the Holy Spirit also renews and sanctifies them. From this renewal and sanctification the fruits of good works follow. This is not to be understood as if justification and sanctification are separated from each other in such a way that a true faith can exist for a while along with an evil intention, but rather this only indicates the order in which the one thing precedes or follows the other. For what Dr. Luther correctly said remains true: faith and good works fit beautifully together and belong together. But it is faith alone that lays hold of the blessing, apart from works, and yet it is never, ever alone, as has been explained above" (FC SD III:41).

³⁷"We must . . . reject the following and similar errors: . . . that believers are justified before God and are righteous both because of the righteousness of Christ reckoned to them and because of the new obedience begun in them, or in part because of the reckoning of Christ's righteousness to them and in part because of the new obedience which has begun in them" (FC SD III:44, 50).

³⁸"It is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous

The FC links the righteousness of faith to the obedience of Christ. Through faith this obedience is reckoned by pure grace to all believers as righteousness.³⁹

By the obedience of Christ the FC means the holy and sinless life of Christ, lived in obedience to the law and under the law of God, an obedience involving the whole of his life, right up to the bitter end on the cross, and then the glorious resurrection. The work of Christ affects every man, for it was vicarious. It was a merit, a work, an obedience, in the place and stead of all men, so that the obedience of Christ is in God's eyes the obedience of all men.⁴⁰ By his active and passive obedience Christ satisfied the demands of the law of God and paid for our sins. This is called vicarious satisfaction or atonement.

This is what the Holy Spirit offers through the gospel and sacraments, to be appropriated by faith.⁴¹ In stressing the total obedience of Christ from his holy birth to his death, the FC wants to insist that our righteousness before God rests neither upon the divine nor the human nature of Christ, but upon the entire Christ as he gave himself to the Father for sinners (FC SD III:55-58).

As to the relationship between the essential righteousness of God and imputed righteousness, the FC says that the Triune God dwells by faith in those who have been justified. But this indwelling of the righteous God follows the righteousness of faith, which is the gracious acceptance of sinners on account of the obedience and merits of Christ.⁴²

before God out of grace for Christ's sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight, as St. Paul says in Romans 3[:21-26] and 4[:5]" (AC IV:1-3).

³⁹"We are accepted as children of God for the sake of Christ's obedience alone, which is reckoned as righteousness through faith alone, out of sheer grace, to all who truly believe. Because of this they are absolved from all their unrighteousness" (FC SD III:4).

⁴⁰Hamann, "Article III, The Formula of Concord," 149. See FC SD III:14.

⁴¹"For this merit must be applied to us and appropriated through faith if we are to become righteous through it. . . . As a result of his total obedience—which he performed on our behalf for God . . . in life and death—God forgives our sin, considers us . . . righteous, and grants us eternal salvation. This righteousness is conveyed to us by the Holy Spirit through the gospel and in the sacraments. It is applied to us, appropriated and accepted through faith" (FC SD III:13, 15-16).

⁴²"God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is the eternal and essential righteousness, dwells through faith in the elect, who have become righteous through Christ and are reconciled with God. . . . However, this indwelling of God is not the righteousness of

d) *Faith and Works*

The FC stresses the absolute necessity of good works on the part of the justified Christian.⁴³

But the FC teaches that in our justification before God, all human works and merits as in any sense constituting a meritorious cause of justification must be excluded. Even faith does not justify as a good work, but only because faith lays hold on the merits of Christ in the promise of the gospel.⁴⁴

The FC quotes Luther and says that faith and good works fit beautifully together and belong together. But it is faith alone that lays hold of the blessing, apart from works, and yet it is never, ever alone (FC SD III:41).

The FC explains the proper order of faith and good works in its reference to the “exclusive terms” (*particulae exclusivae*) like “without works,” “without the law,” “freely,” “not of works,” and “through faith alone” (FC SD III:43). Faith makes people righteous only because it, as a means and instrument, accepts God’s grace.

The FC sets forth a distinction between what invariably is associated with justification and what actually constitutes justification (FC SD III:24-43). “The only essential and necessary elements of justification are the grace of

faith, which St. Paul treats [Rom. 1:17; 3:5, 22, 25; 2 Cor. 5:21] and calls *iustitia Dei* (that is, the righteousness of God), for the sake of which we are pronounced righteous before God. Rather, this indwelling is a result of the righteousness of faith which precedes it, and this righteousness [of faith] is nothing else than the forgiveness of sins and the acceptance of poor sinners by grace, only because of Christ’s obedience and merit” (FC SD III:54). Both Augustine and Luther are agreed that God graciously gives sinful humans a righteousness which justifies them. Augustine argued that this righteousness was to be found within believers; Luther insisted that it remained outside believers. For Augustine the righteousness in question is internal; for Luther it is external, an “alien righteousness.” God treats or reckons this righteousness as if it were a part of the sinner’s person. In his Romans lectures of 1515–1516, Luther developed the idea of the alien righteousness of Christ imputed—not imparted—to us by faith, as the grounds of justification. See McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 457. However, Preus found McGrath’s assumption that later Lutheran Orthodoxy in its doctrine of justification bears little relation to that of Luther as “uncritical and cavalier.” See Preus, *Justification and Rome*, 119, n.7.

⁴³“This in no way suggests that . . . good works should not, must not, or may not follow from faith (as certain, inevitable fruits) or that believers may or must not do good” (FC SD III:36).

⁴⁴“For faith does not make people righteous because it is such a good work or such a fine virtue, but because it lays hold of and accepts the merit of Christ in the promise of the holy gospel” (FC SD III:13).

God, the merit of Christ, and the faith that receives this grace and merit in the gospel's promise" (FC SD III:25). "The concomitants of justification by faith, both those that precede and those that follow, are held to be necessary concomitants but not parts of justification itself. These concomitants, with some overlapping, are: contrition, true repentance, love, good works, renewal, sanctification, and the new obedience."⁴⁵

In conclusion we can say that according to the FC, while it is impossible to separate works from faith, such good works are completely excluded from the article of justification (FC SD III:36-43).

Tuomo Mannermaa and Formula of Concord III

As professor of ecumenical theology at Helsinki University and as one of the leading scholars in the ecumenical dialogue between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church, Tuomo Mannermaa attempts to look for a theological motif in the Lutheran concept of Christian faith which would be analogous to the Orthodox notion of divinization⁴⁶ (*theosis*) and could thus serve as a point of contact in the dialogue. Mannermaa finds this point of contact in Luther's doctrine of the believer's union with Christ, which Mannermaa equates with the righteousness of faith. According to Mannermaa, Luther does not separate the person of Christ and his work from each other. Instead, Christ himself, both his person and his work, is the Christian righteousness, that is, the righteousness of faith. Christ—and therefore also his entire person and work—is really and truly present in the faith itself (*in ipsa fide Christus adest*). The favor of God (i.e., the forgiveness of sins and the removal of God's wrath) and his gift (*donum*, God himself, present in the fullness of his essence) unite in the person of Christ.⁴⁷

Although Mannermaa says that, according to Luther, the person of Christ is always in his saving work and the saving work is always in his person, Mannermaa discusses the person of Christ, but is silent about the work

⁴⁵Hamann, "Article III, The Formula of Concord," 144.

⁴⁶See Schumacher, *Who Do I Say that You Are?* 20, note 2: "The theology of Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism identifies 'deification' with justification, which distorts the meaning of the biblical expressions." For examples, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§260, 460, 1692, 1999. Luther very occasionally—about 20 times—uses the medieval mystical term "divinization," but he always distinguishes Creator from creature. Luther viewed divinization as "the vain wish of the first sinners, not God's goal in shaping the human creature." See Kolb, Martin Luther: *Confessor of the Faith*, 128-129.

⁴⁷Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 5.

of Christ.⁴⁸ This is a fundamental error.⁴⁹ Mannermaa says that salvation is participation in the person of Christ,⁵⁰ the divine attributes,⁵¹ and the divine essence of Christ.⁵² Mannermaa never mentions participation in the cross and resurrection of Christ, although it is mentioned several times by Luther in the quotations reproduced by Mannermaa.⁵³

Unlike Luther, Mannermaa does not refer to the cross or resurrection as Christ's victory over evil powers. According to Mannermaa, this victory of Christ took place at the incarnation.⁵⁴ Luther instead teaches that the incarnated body of Christ bears and takes away the sins of the world on the cross, not before the cross on the basis of incarnation alone (*LW* 26:277).⁵⁵ Misreading Luther, Mannermaa says that in the incarnation Christ takes the sinful human nature and so has all the human sins in his human nature. In his person Christ's divine nature overcomes the sin in his human nature. Sin, death, and curse are first conquered in the person of Christ and thereafter the whole of creation is to be transformed through his person. Salvation is participation in the triumphant person of Christ,⁵⁶

⁴⁸Ruokanen, "Remarks on Tuomo Mannermaa's Interpretation," 7. Ruokanen, a not so enthusiastic supporter of Mannermaa, is the professor emeritus of dogmatics at Helsinki University and nowadays a professor of theology in Nanjing, China.

⁴⁹Preus cites Francis Pieper: "It is the fundamental error of modern positive theologians when they make the person of Christ the object of faith to the exclusion of the work of Christ, i.e., His fulfillment of the Law and His suffering of the penalty of the Law in the place of man. . . . We do not believe in Christ to our justification . . . unless we believe in Him as the One who was crucified for the expiation of our sins." See *Justification and Rome*, 89.

⁵⁰Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 16.

⁵¹"Luther believed not that 'faith communicates divine attributes' to believers but rather that Christ's word of forgiveness restores the perfect attributes of God's human creation." See Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 128.

⁵²Mannermaa's view "ignores the nature of the 'union' of bride and bridegroom that Luther employed so frequently (in which the two participants in the union do not become 'one essence' but retain their distinctiveness), and his understanding of the preposition 'in' when Luther uses the Hebraic concept of two distinct entities being 'in' each other (that is, in a close association which does not merge them but brings them together in intimate relationship)." See Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 128.

⁵³Ruokanen, "Remarks on Tuomo Mannermaa's Interpretation," 9.

⁵⁴Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 13-14, 16.

⁵⁵Mannermaa teaches that in incarnation Christ didn't take the neutral human nature but concrete and actual human nature (Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 13), which must mean that Christ had a sinful human nature. According to the Scriptures Christ was born as sinless but he took our sins upon his own body and atoned for all sins on the cross. See 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; Heb 4:15.

⁵⁶Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 13, 16.

i.e., divinization. Luther instead teaches that the human nature Christ assumes is sinless. The whole Christ according to both of his natures is sinless.⁵⁷ However, the sin of humankind was imputed to him. In his own person the perfectly righteous Christ conquered the power of sin—imputed to him—on the cross, not through an internal fight between the two natures of his person. Salvation is imputation to us of the victory of Christ on the cross. We take hold of it with a sure and certain faith.⁵⁸

In Mannermaa's main work *In ipsa Fide Christus Adest* (*Christ Present in Faith*) there is no mention of the Holy Spirit effecting justifying faith and converting the unbeliever into a believer. Mannermaa also doesn't say that the presence of the Holy Spirit is a synonym of the real presence of Christ in the Christian.⁵⁹

"Mannermaa's central point is that Luther's concept of *unio*"—the believer's participation in God's very nature itself—"has much in common with the Orthodox doctrine of deification in Christ."⁶⁰ Mannermaa finds the classic quotation on God's essential indwelling in the believer (*inhabitatio Dei*) in the Formula of Concord III.⁶¹ According to the FC, God, in the very fullness of God's essence, is present in those who believe in God. The text of the FC explicitly rejects the notion that God in himself would not dwell in Christians and that only God's gifts would be present in them.⁶²

However, Mannermaa finds it problematic for Lutheran self-understanding that the FC's "one-sidedly forensic" definition concerning the relationship between justification and divine indwelling is different than what Mannermaa thinks is Luther's view. In the FC, justification by faith denotes the forgiveness of sins that is imputed to Christians on the basis of the perfect obedience and complete merit of Christ. The *inhabitatio Dei* is made logically subsequent to justification. Justification

⁵⁷And this "person" who is innocent and righteous is none other than the whole Christ, according to both natures: "The Son of God born of the virgin." *LW* 26:277. "Luther distinguished sin from humanity as God's good creation. Jesus assumed the gift of that good, created human nature, in order to restore sinners to their original goodness." See Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 111.

⁵⁸Schumacher, *Who Do I Say that You Are?* 48-49.

⁵⁹Ruokanen, "Remarks on Tuomo Mannermaa's Interpretation," 16.

⁶⁰Schumacher, *Who Do I Say that You Are?* 95.

⁶¹Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 3.

⁶²Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 4.

by faith precedes the presence of the Trinity in faith. Indwelling follows justification and is the result, the consequence of justification. In the concept of the FC, the *inhabitatio Dei*, or *unio mystica* if we follow the language of the later Lutheran dogmaticians, is understood to be in the area of sanctification.⁶³ Mannermaa places the *inhabitatio Dei* in the area of justification.

Mannermaa argues that there are fundamental differences between Luther's theology and the theology of Melancthon and the FC. For Luther, according to Mannermaa, the presence of the Trinity in faith is the same "*phenomenon*" as the righteousness of faith, but for the FC indwelling logically follows justification. Mannermaa says that the FC draws on the later theology of Melancthon, on which much of Lutheran theology after Luther has relied.⁶⁴

Mannermaa compares the forensic view of the Formula of Concord on justification with the view of Luther on justification. The FC's problem, according to Mannermaa, is that it separates justification by faith and God's indwelling by faith from each other.

At the same time, the *inhabitatio Dei* is made a separate phenomenon, logically subsequent to justification.⁶⁵

Mannermaa argues that Luther defines the divine indwelling in the believer differently, and this way doesn't separate justification from indwelling.

He does not separate the person (*persona*) of Christ and his work (*officium*) from each other. Instead, Christ himself, both his person

⁶³Biblical and Lutheran theology testifies to at least two kinds of grace. *Gratia imputa*, favor of God, is saving grace and is forensic in nature. *Gratia infusa* is sanctifying grace and is not saving grace. The FC and Lutheranism have used the term *unio mystica* exclusively in sanctification since this term is associated with *gratia infusa*. See Schmeling, "Life in Christ," 52-53, 105, 114.

⁶⁴Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 4. In reality the differences between Luther and Melancthon are more ones of emphasis and terminology than of real substance. Luther prefers "marriage" and "blessed exchange" images; Melancthon prefers metaphors that set justification within a specifically legal context. Preus says: "What the Lutherans viewed as necessary concomitants and fruits of justification"—like regeneration, receiving the sanctifying Holy Spirit, and uniting with Christ and the Holy Trinity in the most intimate *unio mystica*—"Rome insisted were an essential part of the process itself." See *Justification and Rome*, 69. Compare Trueman, "*Simul justus et peccator*," 89. Prof. Trueman represents Calvinism.

⁶⁵Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 4.

and work, is the Christian righteousness, that is, the righteousness of faith.⁶⁶

It seems that Mannermaa doesn't want to make the necessary distinctions between Christ for us and Christ in us in the way that he could at the same time maintain the solid connection between the work and the person of Christ. Mannermaa's student, his school's younger representative, Dr. Olli-Pekka Vainio is more cautious than his teacher. Vainio says that the FC doesn't separate the work of Christ, his obedience, from his person, because the work of Christ belongs to the person of Christ. The work and the person of Christ are closely intertwined in the FC.⁶⁷

We confessional Lutherans teach that the FC clarifies the distinctions between the righteousness of faith and the indwelling of Christ in the believer. Furthermore, we teach that these distinctions were implicit already in Luther's own theology.⁶⁸ Differences in style, origin, and volume between Luther's works and the Lutheran Confessions make it easier for people to misquote Luther than to misquote the Confessions. However, there is no real doctrinal difference between Luther and the Confessions on justification. Luther distinguishes the grace of justification, which is outside of us, from the gift of sanctification, which is inside of us. Although the two go together, they are clearly distinguished.⁶⁹

The FC teaches that the believer is united with Christ, and that the whole Trinity dwells in the believer (FC SD III:54). This indwelling of God is a new reality which results from faith, and God's eternal and essential (*olemuksellinen* in Finnish) righteousness does become present in the

⁶⁶Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 5.

⁶⁷Vainio, "Justification and Participation in Christ," 212. However, as a representative of the Mannermaa School Vainio doesn't often mention the cross of Christ in his research but emphasizes the indwelling of Christ in the believer as a basis for justification. See "Justification and Participation in Christ," 53: "As stated, this imputation (of Christ's righteousness) is always based on Christ's presence in faith."

⁶⁸Schumacher, *Who Do I Say that You Are?* 141. "Luther defined trust [fiducia], not an indwelling presence of the divine, as the central human characteristic that brings all else in human life into harmony with the Father who created his people and rescued them from evil through Christ's death and resurrection." See Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 129. "When used in the context of justification, the New Testament word *pisteuō* always means to trust." See Preus, *Justification and Rome*, 81. Luther's 1519 commentary on Galatians offers a new concept of faith as fiducia, trust in God. Under Melancthon's tutelage he dropped the medieval idea of faith as a *habitus* or infused substance, and correctly defined faith as fiducia or trust in God. See Green, "The Young and the Mature Luther," 124-125.

⁶⁹Brug, "Osiandrianism—Then and Now," 8-9.

believer as a power which moves them to act properly. But the FC makes two crucial distinctions⁷⁰ about the indwelling of God and its relation to justification which Mannermaa doesn't make.

First, this new reality results from justification and thus cannot be simply identified with it. The true righteousness of faith is thus not a matter decided on the basis of the ontology of the believer—the ontology of one in whom God dwells. The true righteousness of faith is the forgiveness of sins and the acceptance of poor sinners by grace, only because of Christ's obedience and merit. "The imputed reality of the gospel, this new 'ontology of the word,' results in a completely different kind of life for the Christian, namely an 'alien life,' (*vita aliena*), the life of Another, just as the Christian's righteousness is *iustitia aliena*. . . . The point of this expression is not the location; Christ's life remains my 'alien life' even when it is 'in me.'"⁷¹ In this way the FC rejects Mannermaa's notion of justification.

The second distinction made by the FC is between the personal union of the divine and human natures in Christ and the indwelling of God in the believer. A real exchange (*realis communicatio*) has occurred between the divine and human natures in Christ's person (FC SD VIII:63).

Here the FC speaks of a "real-ontic" union—the term emphasized by Mannermaa—which allows Christ's human nature to share the divine glory, power, and omnipresence.

The human nature in Christ has received this majesty according to the mode of the personal union, namely, because "the whole fullness of deity" [Col. 2:9] dwells in Christ, not as in other godly people or angels, but "bodily"⁷² as in its own body. (FC SD VIII:64)

This glorification of Christ's human nature is unique and cannot be predicated of any other human creature.

In this way there would be no difference between Christ according to his human nature and other holy people; this would deprive Christ of his majesty, which he has received above all creatures as a human being, according to his human nature. For no other creature . . . can or should say, "All authority in heaven and on earth has

⁷⁰Concerning these two crucial distinctions in the FC, I follow and freely cite Schumacher, *Who Do I Say that You Are?* 176-178.

⁷¹Schumacher, *Who Do I Say that You Are?* 49.

⁷²"Bodily" in Col 2:19 is interpreted as "personally." See Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 628, note 290.

been given to me,” and likewise God dwells with the “fullness of his deity,” . . . in the saints, but not “bodily” in them, nor is he personally united with them, as in Christ. (FC SD VIII:69-70)

The FC excludes the possibility that the union of the divine and human natures in Christ can be regarded as paradigmatic of the union that takes place in believers. There is a difference between the glorified, “deified” human nature of Christ and the human nature of other holy people in whom Christ dwells.

The FC places special emphasis on the salvific role of Christ’s human nature, and points out the promises by which believers are united to Christ according to his human nature.

He instituted his Holy Supper as a certain assurance and confirmation of this, that also in the nature according to which he has flesh and blood he wants to be with us, to dwell in us, to work in us, and to exert his power for us. (FC SD VIII:79)

The FC, citing Luther’s “Great Confession Concerning the Lord’s Supper” (1528) and his “Treatise on the Last Words of David” (1543), says that Luther likewise stresses the real humanity of Christ and its importance for the salvation and comfort of human sinners. So according to the FC and Luther in his cited writings, our union with Christ involves especially union with his human nature (FC SD VIII:80-85). Even when the FC talks of a “twofold eating of Christ’s flesh” and identifies the first as the spiritual eating of faith, this is directly connected with Christ’s human nature, not just his deity (FC SD VII:62).

Mannermaa virtually ignores the human nature of Christ in his version of the union of the believer with Christ.⁷³ It seems Mannermaa bases justification solely on the divine person of Christ and the atonement, the reconciliation and the redemption by the cross of Christ as well as the resurrection of Christ are underemphasized.⁷⁴ However, the soteriology of the Lutheran Confessions depends on Christ having a human nature rather than on us believers having a divine nature.⁷⁵ Mannermaa concentrates entirely on the divine nature as the real source of Christian righteousness. “The human nature of Christ recedes quickly into the background, and is not involved in any ‘real’ (i.e., ontological) way in the righteousness that

⁷³Schumacher, *Who Do I Say that You Are?* 179.

⁷⁴Ruokanen, “Remarks on Tuomo Mannermaa’s Interpretation,” 4.

⁷⁵Schumacher, *Who Do I Say that You Are?* 179.

counts in the sinner's justification."⁷⁶ It seems Mannermaa doesn't seek the "reality" of justification in the historic suffering and death of Jesus but "in the realm of being itself—and the 'real-ontic' transformation of the believer who 'is' in union with Christ."⁷⁷

Luther instead teaches that it is the alien righteousness that justifies a person before God. This alien righteousness is due to the fact that God accepts you or accounts you righteous only on account of Christ, in whom you believe, and not because Christ indwells the Christian.⁷⁸

Luther's Forensic Understanding of Justification⁷⁹

Throughout Luther's writings, Christ's atoning work in salvation history precedes faith. Because Christ is the object of faith (God's favor), he is present in faith as gift (*donum*). Therefore, for Luther, salvation is based not on the indwelling Christ who deifies, but forensically on Christ who died for us. Indeed, Mannermaa's view leads to an unnecessary dilemma: favor is construed as objective while *donum* is somehow subjective. Instead, Mannermaa argues, the truth is that we have here a two-fold objectivity. A spoken, external Word—which is God's favor in the form of a gift, grounded both in the objectivity of the cross and also in the proclamation to sinners as a benefit that requires such distribution—imparts both death and life to its hearers. Just as God's will is an active Word ordering creation in Genesis, God's favor here is not God's own possession or essence but is precisely God's gift, applied to the unrighteous while and as they are unrighteous. Only on account of this truly objective foundation of imputation as forgiveness for Jesus' sake is the gift (*donum*) of the present Christ preached and so given—not to the old creature as old, but to the new creature as the act of new creation itself. Undoubtedly Luther affirmed

⁷⁶Schumacher, *Who Do I Say that You Are?* 182.

⁷⁷Schumacher, *Who Do I Say that You Are?* 183.

⁷⁸Mattes, "Luther on Justification as Forensic and Effective," 268. Righteousness outside the believer is foreign righteousness, it is external, not located in the believer. God treats or reckons this righteousness as if it were a part of the sinner's person. Through faith the believer is clothed with alien righteousness, the righteousness of Christ. God covers our nakedness with this garment. Faith is the right relationship to God. We remain sinners inwardly, but are righteous extrinsically, in the sight of God. By confessing our sins in faith, we stand in a right and righteous relationship with God. In Luther's words, we are simultaneously totally righteous and totally sinners, totally righteous in Christ and totally sinners in ourselves. See McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 457-458.

⁷⁹In this section I follow and freely cite two essays. First, Mattes, "Luther on Justification as Forensic and Effective," 267-268. Second, Kolb, "Luther's Truths, Then and Now," 12-13.

that the believer is united with Christ in faith. But it is equally clear that the Christian is justified on the basis of nothing else but Christ's imputed righteousness. Luther often uses the term imputation to describe how God delivers the benefits of Christ's work to sinners.

Mannermaa sincerely wants to cultivate devout Christian living, but he misinterprets Luther both historically and theologically when he ignores what forensic justification means within the context of Luther's thought. God speaks us righteous. The absolutely forensic character of justification renders it effective. Justification actually kills and makes alive. God's forensic judgement—when he imputes sinners righteous, when he pronounces his verdict of innocent upon them—that Word of the Lord, like his Word in Genesis 1, determines reality effectively.

God's saying that we are righteous moves us to recognize that we are passively righteous in his sight. In faith we cannot do anything else but live out that passive righteousness actively, in active righteousness of love and service to the rest of God's creatures. God's Word makes us alive, not to sin the more that grace may abound (Rom 6:1), but to demonstrate to the world that our identity, bestowed by God's grace apart from any merit or worthiness of our own, is real. That Word of forgiveness restructures our entire way of thinking and therefore of acting. The new creature it has called into existence produces the fruits of faith, the fruit of the Holy Spirit. If one finds that not to be the case, it is time to hear again the law that calls to repentance. Luther understood that justification meant that the justified sinner acts like a child of God and combats temptations, killing desires to act against God's will, in daily repentance.

Conclusion

Andreas Osiander argued that while redemption took place through Christ's suffering on the cross, this did not constitute the believer's righteousness before God. Instead, the believer was justified by the indwelling of Christ's divine nature, which made a person essentially righteous before God. He attacked the notion that a believer's righteousness was constituted by the declaration of forgiveness, imputed righteousness.

The Formula of Concord, which belongs to the Lutheran confessional books, rejects Osiander's view of justification without mentioning his name. The FC recognizes as a biblical truth that God, not only his gifts, is present in the heart of the believer. At the same time, the FC teaches that this presence cannot be equated with justification, which is the imputed, foreign righteousness of Christ according to his human and divine nature,

conferred upon us through faith. The indwelling of Christ is a consequence of this, and this presence is said not to be our righteousness before God. The FC defends a forensic understanding of justification and teaches that our righteousness consists in God's forgiveness without our past, present, or future worthiness.

Tuomo Mannermaa's view of justification, namely, "Christ present in us is our righteousness," which he created as a Lutheran contact point with Russian Orthodox teaching of deification, comes close to Osiandrianism, according to whom the presence of Christ's divine nature is our justification before God. Mannermaa virtually ignores the human nature of Christ in his version of the union of the believer with Christ. Mannermaa doesn't link justification with the work of Christ, i.e., with his cross, atonement, reconciliation, redemption, and resurrection.

For Luther, justification is forensic, because God as a judge determines reality, determines what happens. Luther rejects all human performance by the reconciled sinner as self-righteousness. Justification means that God kills and makes alive. Sinners must die and be resurrected to life in Christ. God in his judicial action as the just judge demands the death of the sinner and as the new creator gives new life as unconditionally as he did in Eden. Luther understood justification as the execution of the wages of sin upon sinners (Rom 6:23a) and simultaneous resurrection to new life in Jesus Christ, "the free gift of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23b).

Pitting forensic justification against its effects is certainly not an issue between Luther and the FC. Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther tells more about his ecumenical endeavors than the object of his interpretation, the reformer Martin Luther.



Juhani Viitala, Essay #2

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Luther's Three Essays from 1520: From Roman Captivity to Christian Liberty

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To begin, it is important we remember that last year (2020) we commemorated two fundamental events in our beloved church: the five-hundredth anniversary of the writing of Luther's most clearly anti-Catholic works, and particularly the definitive break between Luther and the Vatican which occurred when he burned the papal Bull *Exsurge Domine* on December 10th of 1520.

In the year 1517—even within the Ninety-five Theses themselves—we find a Luther who is still a devout priest, yearning to find God through the “Holy Mother Church.” By 1520, however, Luther has openly broken from that very church. Let's remember that in twenty of the Ninety-five Theses, Luther declares his continuing faithfulness to his vows and obedience to the pope. He honestly believed that the spiritual and material fraud being carried out in the cities of Saxony with the sale of indulgences was done without the knowledge or permission of Leo X in Rome.

But with his three written works of 1520, Luther demonstrated that, without a doubt, he had now lost all hope of changing the situation “inside” the church. Therefore, there remained no other remedy than to distance himself from Romanist heresy. All of this is ratified later, when on July 4th of that year, Luther received the Papal Bull *Exsurge Domine* (“Rise, O Lord!”) in which he was given a definitive deadline. By the end of the year, the bull stated, he must retract his writings or be excommunicated, with all that excommunication entailed in the sixteenth century.

In fact, the principal motivation for the existence of said bull was the three texts which we will now study *and not* the Ninety-five Theses. Luther, for his part, did not wait until the deadline, and on December 10, 1520, he burned the papal bull in front of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, sealing his excommunication.

¹Written June 15, 1520.

Now we can properly talk about Luther the rebel, at war with Rome and its heresy. We can most definitely affirm that as the true beginning: the day the church was forged outside of Rome and its heresy, *and not* before. Until the composition of those three texts, Luther's works were academic, pastoral, analytic, and, unlike the three in question, they were not openly polemical. His earlier writings obviously were also not considered as rebellious, seditious, or heretical in the eyes of the Vatican.

Luther's prodigious activity began in earnest in that year, and he became ever clearer in his doctrine. We now have a Luther speaking of the "papal jackass" and the "friar cow," among other colorful monikers. Evidently, but not formally, there was no turning back in the rupture with Rome. It is notable that the printing press aided in the spread of Luther's ideas and of the Bible itself, thereby contributing to the numerical increase in adherents to Luther's work.

However, why are Luther's three written works from that year—*To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate*, *The Freedom of a Christian*, and *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*—so important? Collectively these three texts are referred to as "The Scriptures of the Reformation."² But to understand their importance, we need to dig deeper into each one.

To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation

It can be said, in summary, that this text was a treatise for national reform, written for German laypeople. It is composed in a forthright style, worded to be easily understood by the average German. It is evident that his intention was to win the German people over to the Reformation cause. It had an original print run of four thousand copies—astoundingly large for the day—but sold out in less than a week.

In this writing, Luther proposes a great panorama of possible reforms for his country, presenting twenty-seven proposed reforms in great detail which he considered good to carry out. Just as God had helped Joshua's cause at Jericho, he should help the cause of the German people so they might throw off the chains of that distant people called Rome and its curia.

Luther describes three types of walls the Romanists were defending: 1) The arrogant papal claim of having jurisdiction over the temporal powers of kings and princes. According to Luther, their authority should be limited

² "Die Reformationsschriften."

to only the spiritual life of the faithful and of nobody else. 2) The likewise heretical papal claim of not only having the exclusive authority to interpret the Holy Scriptures, but also to be *over them*. What's more, if the pope was the only authority allowed to interpret Scripture, what need would there be of Scripture? If this papal claim were true, his word would suffice. Nothing more would be needed. 3) The papal claim of being the only authority allowed to convene a general council of the church. In other words, a council is the patrimony of the pope, not of the Christian Church. This wall was easy to tear down since there is no historical basis for such a claim. The authority lay within the church, as is shown in Acts 15. Even an emperor could convene a council, as occurred in the case of the Council of Nicaea in 325. Clearly, the call for an ecumenical council never had been a prerogative of the papacy.

This wall could also be torn down by tearing down the anti-biblical differentiation between Christian laity and Christian clergy. This may be the first example of Luther expounding the universal priesthood of all believers, which he so strongly emphasized throughout his career. The church was not a puppet in the hands of the clergy, but rather, the clergy was a servant of the church.

It also should be mentioned that this is the first of Luther's writings in which he refers to the pope as the Antichrist, speaks of the separation of political and clerical power, and expounds the universal priesthood of all believers which emanates from Baptism and the Christian faith and places all believers on equal footing, be it layperson or presbyter, bishop or cardinal. If that was not enough, *for the first time Luther speaks of the reformation of the Christian Church*.

Here he throws out papal authority, puts in doubt the authority of councils, and proposes something which today seems obvious (but at the time was absolutely revolutionary), namely, that work—any work—if it is carried out in an honest way, was just as sacred as the office of the priest. Luther calls on the princes, nobles, and magistrates to fight against the tyranny of Rome and, because they were such influential members of God's people, to work toward living a more Christian life. Luther highlights the doctrine of the universal priesthood.

Why was the universal priesthood of all believers so important to the great reformer? Because, as a fruit of Baptism and of the Christian faith, it places *all* Christians on an equal footing before God. That is why 1 Peter 2:9 declares us kings and priests. It leaves by the wayside the idea that there is only a small group of kings and only one priest, the pope.

Luther even asserts that the pope should not allow the founding of new clerical orders and that monasteries should not exist unless they are led by competent and spiritual men. What's more, he lays aside obligatory priestly vows of celibacy, leaving it simply as an option which brings no additional spiritual blessing to the priest.

Luther's fiercest attacks on the papacy, however, are in his assertion that there is absolutely nothing of spiritual benefit for the Christian, neither in the papacy nor in Canon Law. Both simply crave money and imprison true believers. Luther even declares that for a Christian, Baptism, the Eucharist, the preaching of the Word, and love for neighbor are more important than all the saints in heaven, especially considering that many of those saints were popes, which in the end were the blind leading the blind.

The Freedom of a Christian

This is probably the most beautiful writing about Christian spirituality written by Luther. Ironically, it was written as a show of courtesy to Pope Leo X himself, as a fruit of the meeting between Luther and the papal legate Karl von Miltitz on October 11, 1520. In the preamble, Luther still refers to the pope using terms like the High Pontiff, Father, and Most Blessed. Of the three writings analyzed in this paper, it is by far the most serene and cordial.

Luther's great interest in this treatise is evidenced by the fact that he wrote it simultaneously in German and Latin. On one hand, he wanted it read by the German people, but he also wanted it read by the clergy, scholars, and humanists.

This treatise highlights a theme which runs throughout Luther's writings from 1520: *freedom*. This is not a spiritual freedom from the Vatican, mind you, nor much less a political freedom, but an internal, spiritual freedom by virtue of the faith given us through the merits of Christ.

Luther declared that the Christian is a free man, the master of all things. He is subject to no one. Yet the Christian is also an obedient servant. He submits to all. The soul, illumined by grace, has the certainty that it has been set free from everyone and everything except God, no matter what happens to the "outward man." God has become the stronghold of the soul.

The fortress of the soul, however, is threatened by natural man's selfishness and inherent sin. That's why the Christian should remain alert and seek a higher level of sanctification, but without thinking that such ascetic exercises (which each person is free to choose according to their own per-

sonality) will lead to salvation. Salvation is given first; good works naturally follow. God, who is love, inspires a selfless love to him and to our neighbor. God's faithful people will submit without reservation, just as Jesus did.

In this writing, we find Luther's famous phrases, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none" and "A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all" (*Luther's Works* 31:344). As a spiritual being, the Christian is, regarding sin, free, not by his own merits or doing, but by the Word of God preached by Christ, which requires faith and confidence in the divine promises. It is necessary, however, to be clear that the freedom to which Luther refers is exclusively an internal and spiritual freedom and not a socio-political or economic freedom. Such outward freedom is what the liberation theology of the twentieth century proposed and what is still adamantly defended and generously financed by the Lutheran World Federation today.

Therefore, in order that this freedom be effective, Luther leaves no place for passivity or inactivity. We need to act! Thus, we return to the paradox: the Christian, being free, needs no works, but by being a servant, he must work. This is surprising considering this writing is so laid back and serene compared to Luther's other writings. What isn't surprising is that the Holy Scriptures—especially Paul's letters—are once again the spring from which our reformer drinks. As Luther himself points out:

Let us then consider it certain and firmly established that the soul can do without anything except the Word of God and that where the Word of God is missing there is no help at all for the soul. If it has the Word of God it is rich and lacks nothing since it is the Word of life, truth, light, peace, righteousness, salvation, joy, liberty, wisdom, power, grace, glory, and of every incalculable blessing. (*Luther's Works* 31:345)

In reading *The Freedom of a Christian*, we might wonder whether Luther, at the time he wrote it, knew that the pope—to whom he writes so respectfully—had already begun the process of his excommunication. But beyond this, at least in what we see in his writings, this letter was the reformer's last attempt at achieving an improbable reconciliation with Rome. After this letter, all diplomacy between Luther and Rome and vice versa had come to an end.

So, what is the purpose of the rites and ceremonies mentioned in Scripture which can be summarized in the law? Simply to convince man of his sin and of his inability to do what God not only demands but deserves. In

this way, by being made aware of his sinful state, the believer, yearning for justification, enters into the other phase: that of the gospel. In the gospel, faith in Christ worked by grace gives us justification, peace, and Christian liberty. It is not the believer, however, who earns the merit of these gifts, but rather Christ, who has fulfilled the law's demands.

Therefore, faith not only frees us from the works of the law which cover us with sin, but it also transforms us. The Christian not only receives forgiveness, justification, and faith, but also the right to be called king and priest with all that such titles imply. If, for Luther, there truly is no place for complacency or the setting aside of works, then we must understand that, for Luther, they are not *for* obtaining faith, but rather *because* we have been blessed with it. What this means is that works—the action in the believer—give no merit and therefore have no place in earning salvation, but simply are thanksgiving brought about by the faith given us and the testimony which offers to the world our fruits of faith.

This text, because it asserts that good works are not necessary, has lent itself to many false accusations against Luther and the Reformation as a whole. A simple review of the second part of Luther's text quickly obliterates such accusations. For, if we as Lutherans truly speak of salvation being "by faith alone," then this writing clearly establishes that the Christian, by being a slave, also should act in conjunction with his faith.

The Babylonian Captivity of the Church

In one paragraph, our great reformer summarizes the content of this entire treatise: "To begin with, I must deny that there are seven sacraments, and for the present maintain that there are but three: baptism, penance, and the bread. All three have been subjected to a miserable captivity by the Roman curia, and the church has been robbed of all her liberty" (*Luther's Works* 36:18).

Announced on August 31 and published on October 6, this is the strongest of Luther's three writings from that year in its criticism of the Vatican and the pope. It was written in Latin, directed primarily to the Roman clergy, and then translated into German. *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* pulls no punches against the abuses of papal authority, calling its teachings "sophistries and superstitions." Without a doubt, it is the first literary document of the incipient Reformation. It is evident that Luther's intent in this text is to throw out one of the most basic and yet fundamental of Rome's heresies: the unbiblical existence of seven sacraments. Even if they could in some way be considered healthful rites, the Roman Church,

instead of giving us freedom through them, enslaves us. Romanism has clearly perverted even the ones which are undeniably biblical (Baptism and the Eucharist). The idea is evident in the very title of the work. Just as the people of Israel were kept in physical captivity in Babylon, the center of worldly idolatry of the day (2 Kings 24), the Christian Church was now physically and spiritually enslaved in the powerful hands of Romanist idolatry. And if that were not enough, our reformer also declares transubstantiation in the Eucharist and the infused grace of Baptism to be human inventions taught by the Vatican.

The reason to remove the term "sacrament" from these rites is simple: The Bible does not declare them as such. Apart from being such a strong criticism by Luther of Romanist doctrine, the most revolutionary part of this work is his stance regarding priestly authority. This was to be expected, though, considering how Roman clergy had become so blinded by power, regardless of what doctrine the people maintained. What was important to the clergy was not doctrine, but hoarding for themselves political, military, social, and, of course, economic power. Luther therefore asserts that papal authority was the product of ecclesiastical tradition alone and not the revelation of Holy Scripture. In fact, we can assert that by declaring we are all kings, Luther places the first brick in what would, in the eighteenth century, come to be known as democracy. For him, the leaders of the church, including bishops, should be elected by members of the church.

Luther affirms in this work that the Holy Scriptures should be the foundation, not only for the life of a believer, but also for the life of the church. The church owes its very life to the Word and its promises. Therefore, God's promises are what give the church its place and not the other way around. The church does not give legitimacy to the promises of Christ and his Word.

From the content of this text, we can clearly take away that the church needs a ministry which is led by the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. Luther saw this as a direct consequence of the gospel as the promise of salvation and the word of grace.

Regarding the sacraments, Luther says that through them Rome subjects the entire Christian life to the control of a hierarchy. The means of grace have been converted into a means of domination. The church cannot through Baptism erase original sin, because the sacrament does not possess such magical power. Baptism means the free grace of the Lord, the Father's blessing over his creatures.

Regarding the mass, Luther laments and condemns the fact that the cup was denied to the faithful. The logic is that if they deny one of the elements of the eucharistic sacrament, they could just as easily deny the water in Baptism, which is an essential part of the sacrament. He also points out that when the mass is conducted in Latin, the majority of those attending are unable to understand. He also rejects transubstantiation. For when the priest consecrates the mass, he is not carrying out again the sacrifice of the cross which took place once and for all at Calvary. Christ told us clearly from the cross, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). The Sacrament of the Altar is not a sacrifice we are making to God through which we can exercise some sort of influence over him. Thus Luther writes, "The mass is a divine promise, which can benefit no one, be applied to no one, intercede for no one, and be communicated to no one, except only to him who believes with a faith of his own" (*Luther's Works* 36:48). Luther then continues by rejecting suffrages,³ masses for the anniversary of the dead, and other rites, as well as the supposed spiritual means through which the church robbed money from the people.

The rest of the so-called sacraments are clearly rejected. They are mere inventions with no real foundation. That's why Luther particularly rebukes Rome for making aural confession a fearful weapon of extortion and threat to God's faithful people. For Luther, once they have received the grace of faith, they have been made free. Any attempt to subvert this "glorious freedom of God's children" is contrary to the freedom which Christ has given his church.

The Babylonian Captivity was released on October 6, 1520. For Luther this appears to have simply been a prelude and Rome effectively heard nothing more than the first notes of what was to come. By making the distinction between the church and the ravenous beast, Luther plants the possibility of liberating the church and of reorganizing it.

In a sarcastic tone, Luther says that being attacked has led him to reflect on several points which he would never have considered otherwise. Indulgences were simply a pretext. Time has shown that everything they produced had no value. His conclusion is summarized in one rock solid statement, written in all capital letters: "INDULGENCES ARE WICKED DEVICES OF THE FLATTERERS OF ROME" (*Luther's Works* 36:12).

³The prayers prescribed or promised for specific intentions. More particularly, suffrages are the Masses, prayers, or acts of piety offered for the repose of the souls of the faithful departed.

Luther doesn't stop there, though. He reflects on the papacy, calling it the enclosed sanctuary of the Bishop of Rome. This bishop, however, does not limit himself to his own diocese. He has created a system of exclusive power and privilege which allows him to take advantage of the world in every arena: economic, political, or military. Nevertheless, this dominion is about to end because it is based on the theory of the sacraments which keeps the church in a state of servitude. Luther is going to show how they are not what Rome presents them to be.

The three authentic sacraments have been changed from their true sense by the papacy. Baptism, which in essence is the remission of sins, loses this meaning with the invention of other remedies against sin, like indulgences, which Luther had attacked in his Ninety-five Theses.

The Eucharist has fallen into an even worse servitude. It is spoken only in Latin, but the words should be heard and understood by every believer. They deny the cup to the laity. They invent the dogma of transubstantiation. In the end, they transform the sacrament into a sacrifice—the sacrifice of the mass—even though its profound meaning is offered only in Christ's sacrifice as food for the faith of the faithful.

Grace, therefore, is reduced to a strengthening of faith through the announcement of the Savior's death. The Roman Church has perverted and transformed this gift from God to men into a giving from man to God. In other words, instead of receiving, we are supposedly offering. An inevitable consequence of this is that grace ceases to be the origin of faith. Their intent is to extort God through the mass, which has devolved into several private offices, celebrated by priests who seem to have been ordained exclusively for this function.

The root of this evil is the love of money. Believers are to give money so that masses can be said and priests can celebrate them, without ever teaching the people. This just leads to more ignorance on the part of God's people.

In regard to penance, Luther maintains his original position. Penance is disqualified as a sacrament since it lacks an outward sign such as the water in Baptism and the bread and wine in the Eucharist. Curiously, Luther does not advocate the abolition of the practices we have mentioned. What he deeply desires to change is the meaning Rome gives to them. In a radical way, he wants to open the door to a Christianity which breaks with all Roman tradition. His ultimate goal is to distance the Church from Rome in order to bring it closer to the Scriptures.

As far as the Romanist sacrament of confirmation, Luther simply considers it an “adornment of the episcopal office,” tying it to the fact that the mass is something to be *received* and not *offered* in sacrifice. For this very reason, Christ did not establish in the church dominion, power, and tyranny, but rather ministry and service.

From a tactical point of view, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* takes away from our great reformer’s enemies their most powerful weapon. For three years, Rome has accused Luther of straying from the Catholic truth, of which it has claimed itself the only judge and jury. This would serve to demonstrate that their supposed orthodoxy was nothing more than a pretense, a fraud, which cannot stand before the spirit or letter of the Holy Scriptures.

As we have seen, the entire contents of these three texts make it abundantly clear that the dispute between Luther and the Vatican was not simply a difference of opinion. It was a divorce which we rightfully and without a doubt can call schism and heresy. There was no going back, as became evident again in 1521 at the Diet of Worms, and even more so with Luther’s translation of the Bible, published in 1534.

There is an underlying question within these three writings which we have analyzed. Considering the biblical content of these texts, was it necessary for Luther to be so harshly treated by Rome and finally excommunicated? The answer is a resounding *yes*. If the Vatican had not condemned Luther for heresy because of these and his other writings, it would have been for them a recognition that Luther was right. They would have had to renounce their eternal claim to being the source and owner of Christian truth. The Vatican’s dilemma was simple. Either accept the Bible and recognize their own error, or stubbornly stand their ground in heresy. We know well that they have chosen the second option to this very day. For the Vatican to recognize their need for a true reformation was contrary to their principles, impractical in its means, and destructive in its possible consequences.

There is another pertinent question to our discussion: Was the Reformation inevitable? For any serious historian or analyst, including Catholic ones, there is no doubt that reformation was necessary. The answer, however, is a resounding *no*. It was not inevitable. The Vatican and its bureaucratic machine refused to admit that retaining Germany as a country loyal to them was as easy as it was necessary. Rather, they confronted Luther and his followers, completely underestimating his abilities, calling him a “simple drunk monk from Saxony.”

The now cold and ancient rhetoric of the Vatican, which for a thousand years had perverted and hidden biblical Christianity, was spiritually, literally, and metaphorically bankrupt. Luther belonged to a Catholic Church that had held the same heresies for already a thousand years. The difference, however, was that in Luther's day, every type of greed, corruption, and immorality flowed from the Vatican—and most especially from the papacy—as from an open sewer, just as Luther pointed out in the three texts we have analyze.

After the writing of these texts and Luther's burning of the papal bull, *Exsurge Domini*, on that glorious December 10, 1520, Pope Leo X finally declared Luther's excommunication on January 3, 1521. The Apostolic Nuncio of Worms pronounced the condemnations of the Bull and compared our great reformer to the martyr John Huss.⁴ Without a doubt, Luther would have considered that a great honor. The break was now here to stay. Then, the movement initiated by our reformer only consolidated and increased, with the spread of the Bible in German, the Confessions, the Catechisms, and other writings. We can add to that the stubbornness of the Vatican to not allow any form of reconciliation, which was made official at the Council of Trent beginning in 1545.⁵

After the publication of these writings and his excommunication, our great reformer lived another twenty-six years. He was called to the Lord's presence on February 18, 1546, in Eisleben, the same town where he was born. He was a German of refined sensibilities who had a strong personality and prideful tenacity. We can affirm with all certainty that the fruit of his ministry surpassed his highest and most positive expectations. The message of Christ's grace—of law and gospel—spread. He translated the Bible into the German language and created the modern German language: *Hochdeutsch*. He began a true cultural revolution without historical precedent. Most importantly, he returned the Bible to Christianity.

To summarize Luther's Christian life, you could say he was a man who loved Christ and despised everything which contradicted Christ as a work of the devil. In that love for Christ, Luther proved himself to be one of the most faithful of God's people. Our great reformer's firm conviction was his worship of Christ and faithfulness to God's Word. He recognized his own weakness, but at the same time trusted fully in God's mercy. It is

⁴Considered a pre-reformer, Huss was burned at the stake for heresy after the Council of Constance in 1415.

⁵The Council ended in 1563. It was also called the Counter-Reformation.

for that very reason, we, as confessional Lutherans, should condemn the heresy of the past, avoid the heresy of the present, and prevent the heresy of the future.

Until Luther's time, the majority of the great religious and political leaders rose to and maintained power through the use of weapons and oppression. In that context, the works we have analyzed are even more powerful against the Romanist heresy, the heresy supported by the Inquisition and its *auto-da-fé*. Without a doubt, this heresy of the Vatican militarily defeated most of its enemies, but all of those "victories" were darkened by the cloak of oppression and death. That oppression not only was an example of the Vatican's heresy and cruelty, but most especially of its failure. It demonstrated that the only way it could keep its membership faithful was through fire and terror, far away from Christian love, the Bible, and evangelization.

The reformer Martin Luther, however, could on his last day, sit back, look to God with gratitude for his life and work, and remember that he had defeated the Vatican, the greatest empire of the Middle Ages, not with the iron sword, but with the sword of pen and paper, the Holy Scripture. Therefore, may our fervent prayer always be that this same sword guide our beloved church and lives, that with open Bibles—just as Luther—we understand that whatever is achievable with Christ should become reality from Christ's hand. May we say together with the great reformer what he said on April 18, 1521, as he confronted Emperor Charles V at Worms, "Our consciences are held captive by the Word of God!"

To God's glory and the edification of our beloved church.
In memory of Rev. Manuel Arrizaga.
Thank you and may God bless you.



Andrés San Martín, Essay #3

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Promoting Christian Marriage in the 21st Century

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Definition of Marriage

Marriage is an institution established by God the Creator for mankind as part of life in this world. It is a long-lasting, faithful, fruitful relationship between one man and one woman as they live on earth. The opportunity for men and women, in general, to recognize the other gender as a complementary partner in life remains evident in God's love for mankind. The opportunity for a particular man and woman to enjoy each other in a special, one-flesh integration of lives is a gift of love from the Creator. Marriage is a union that God brought about. Marriage was instituted before the first proclamation of the gospel (Genesis 3:15). It concerns itself with temporal relationships. It was not instituted in the interest of sinners' eternal salvation. The blessings promised through marriage are purely temporal (Matthew 22:30).¹

Marriage is God's Plan

From the beginning, marriage was God's idea. It was not man's idea. Marriage was planned by God to meet the human need for companionship, love, mutual encouragement, practical help, and sexual satisfaction (Genesis 2:18; 1 Corinthians 7:2-3). It was God's plan that children should be born and raised in the security and love created by one man and one woman in a marriage committed to each other for a lifetime (Psalm 127:3; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 19:6).²

When God created Adam in the Garden of Eden, he created a perfect man. But there was one thing Adam was lacking. God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18). God decided to make a perfect partner for Adam. Adam needed the companionship of another human being. God had made the other

¹Schuetze and Habeck, *The Shepherd under Christ*, 268.

²Kennedy Idigu. "Does Your Man Look Over the Fence? Find Out." reachyouthafrica.com/sex-dating-and-marriage.

creatures male and female (Genesis 6:19). Since Adam was a male, God took one of Adam's ribs and made a female partner for him. By doing this, God gave Adam a lifelong companion and helper and a sexual partner in marriage. Through the physical union of Adam and Eve, God planned for the human race to be continued (Genesis 1:27-28; 2:24).

Marriage Was the First Institution in Human Society

Marriage was established by God before all other human institutions. This shows us that marriage is the first foundation of human society. Marriage was established before man's fall into sin. This shows us that marriage is holy. God is pleased with marriage.³ The miracle by which Jesus changed water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11) shows us that God wants people to enjoy marriage to the full. He wants men and women to experience love and acceptance and to be complete.⁴ Marriage was made for this purpose.⁵

In God's plan, marriage is the basis for a morally and socially stable society. This is part of the reason why God hates adultery (Exodus 20:14), sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3-6), incest (Leviticus 18:6), and homosexuality (Romans 1:24-28). These things disrupt and twist God's plan for a stable human society.⁶ The Bible warns us, "God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Hebrews 13:4).

Part of the reason why many societies today are morally and socially unstable is that people have determined to live without regard for God's laws. Unfortunately, there are severe consequences for sexual sins. The great increase in broken homes caused by divorce and the worldwide epidemic of AIDS are just two of these consequences.⁷

Marriage is God's plan for all people and all cultures in the world (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:3-9). The family cannot be replaced by any other institution in God's plan for mankind. If someone corrupts family life, he is interfering with God's plan for the whole human race. It was God

³"Family Concerns and Related Issues." sithri.blogspot.com/2017/06.

⁴GoodFriday N. Aghawenu, "Family Life and Single Parenthood: A Moral Assessment," *International Journal of Innovative Psychology & Social Development* 7:3 (2019): 45.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Longil Ayuba Dachal "Understanding the Biblical Concept of Marriage as a Remedy for the Rampant Break-Down of Christian Marriage in Contemporary Nigerian Society." grin.com/document/344357.

who performed the first marriage in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:21-25).⁸ It is people who have spoiled marriage through their immorality and unfaithfulness.

Aspects of Marriage

God gave marriage as a gift to Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:24). They were created perfectly for each other. Marriage was not just for convenience, nor was it brought about by any culture. It was instituted by God and has three basic aspects: (1) The man leaves his parents and in a public act promises himself to his wife. (2) The man and woman are joined together by taking responsibility for each other's welfare and by loving the mate above all others. (3) The two are united into one in the intimacy and commitment of sexual union that is reserved for marriage. Strong marriages include all three of these aspects.⁹

God's Design for Marriage

God planned that there should be one woman for one man. God made one woman for the man he created (Genesis 2:22-24). He intended this partnership between one man and one woman to last for a lifetime. In Matthew 19:5-6, Jesus said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. . . . Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate."

This lifetime commitment is important for several reasons. First, it assures care, provision, and protection for the wife throughout her life (Colossians 3:12-13; 1 Peter 3:7). Secondly, there is a need for the emotional security and development of the children. Children need a secure and stable environment if they are to grow and develop the way God intended. When parents separate or get a divorce, children feel great emotional pain. Part of God's purpose in establishing marriage was to provide an emotionally stable and loving home environment in which to raise godly children. Malachi 2:15 says, "Has not the LORD made them one? . . . And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth."

Another reason why God planned one woman for one man for a lifetime has to do with a woman's need for emotional security. A woman needs to know that she is the only woman her husband truly loves. A woman's

⁸Aghawenu, "Family Life," 45.

⁹Derrick Colton, "On Marriage." panaceaministry.org/151.

emotional needs cannot be properly met in a polygamous home. When a man has more than one wife, there will always be jealousy and resentment between his wives. Men and women are equal before God (Galatians 3:28). It is just as important for the husband to meet his wife's emotional needs as for the wife to meet her husband's physical needs.

God's Plan for Unity in Marriage

In God's plan, marriage involves a threefold unity between a man and a woman. This threefold unity corresponds to the threefold nature of human beings in body, mind, and spirit.

Physical Unity

The first kind of unity in God's plan for marriage is the physical relationship of sexual oneness. When God brought the woman to the man in the beginning, they were both naked and unashamed (Genesis 2:25). The Lord said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). The Bible teaches that the physical union of marriage is good and holy in God's sight (Genesis 1:27-28, 31; Proverbs 5:18-19; Hebrews 13:4).

Children are born out of the physical unity of marriage, and mutual responsibility for the home is established. The husband is responsible to work to provide for the family (Genesis 2:15; 3:17-19). The wife is responsible to bear the children and to care for the home (1 Timothy 5:14; Titus 2:5).

Mental and Emotional Unity

The second kind of unity in God's plan for marriage is mental and emotional unity. Mental and emotional unity comes when two people live in harmony and agreement. To find this unity, the husband and wife must have at least some common values, common goals, and common interests in life. The birth of children helps to produce these common values, goals, and interests. Having the same culture and language encourages mental and emotional unity. It is this kind of unity which meets people's need for companionship, acceptance, and value as human beings.

Spiritual Unity

The third kind of unity in God's plan for marriage is spiritual unity. This is the unity created when both the husband and the wife are Christians and both of them want to follow the Lord. God wants spiritual unity in marriage. The strongest expression of spiritual unity is when the husband

and wife study the Scriptures and pray together. Spiritual unity brings great peace and blessings to a marriage. It will give the family the peace which comes when Christ is the center of the home (John 14:27). It will also enable the family to be a strong witness for Christ. God wants Christian couples to pray together. The Bible says, "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (1 Peter 3:7).

Blessings of Marriage

God instituted marriage for the happiness and good of the people he created. Through marriage, God gives a man and woman great blessings. Its three blessings are: (1) companionship, (2) sexual life pleasing to God, and (3) children.

Companionship

God created people with the desire to be with other people. People are not doing the natural thing if they try to live alone, away from all other people. It is natural to seek companionship for life. The first man, Adam, also needed companionship. He could not find a proper companion for himself from among the animals, so we read in the Bible, "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'" (Genesis 2:18). God made Eve out of the rib of Adam and brought her to Adam so that the two would have suitable companionship. Eve was a helper, who in every way corresponded to man, agreeing with him mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Hence in marriage God brings two people together so that they may have companionship. God answers one of man's basic needs. A man and woman who come together in marriage are each blessed with a close companion to love and live with until God dissolves that union.

Sexual Life Pleasing to God

God created human beings with a strong desire to have sexual companionship. The force of this desire makes it difficult for human beings to remain pure without marriage. To avoid unholy living, God commands marriage so that everyone will be kept pure. Sexual intercourse practiced within marriage is proper and pleasing to God. When it is practiced outside of marriage, it becomes a sin against God's Sixth Commandment. The apostle Paul sounded a warning to those who were unmarried in the Corinthian congregation, "It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am.

But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Corinthians 7:8-9).

Young Christians in the church should watch out for this temptation. The devil seeks to lead people to live unholy lives. The apostle Paul writes, “Since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband” (1 Corinthians 7:2).

Within marriage, a man and a woman can answer their need for sexual companionship in a God-pleasing way. They will not become guilty of an immoral or unholy life. Therefore, this is indeed a blessing of marriage.

Children

Children are a great blessing of marriage. They are the most precious of all gifts God gives to husband and wives. God brings life into the world through this union of a man and woman. God brings happiness to a married couple by giving them children. Psalm 127:3-5 reminds us that children are a gift from God and that they bring happiness into their parents’ lives: “Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.”

Too often children are seen as liabilities rather than assets. But the Bible calls children a gift from the Lord and a reward. We can learn valuable lessons from their inquisitive minds and trusting spirits. Those who view children as destruction or a nuisance should instead see them as an opportunity to shape the future. We dare not treat children as an inconvenience when God values them so highly.

The power or ability to have children comes from God alone. He told Adam and Eve and then repeated his words to Noah and his sons: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28; 9:1).

Through these words, God gave these people the ability to have children. So today, children are a gift of God which is given by his power to be a wonderful blessing of marriage.

Marriage is not merely a private institution nor is it created or re-created by governments or states. It is the foundation of the family, where children learn values and virtues that make them good Christians as well as good citizens. Marriage is important for the upbringing of the next generation, and therefore it is important for society.

Men and women are equal as persons. As males and females, they are two different ways of being human. These differences relate to each other in a total and complementary way. They make possible a unique union of persons in which spouses give themselves and receive each other in love. This union of persons has the potential to bring forth human life and thus to produce the family. No other human relationship can symbolize life and love as marriage does.

The unitive purpose of marriage means that husband and wife participate in God's self-giving love. The two become one flesh, giving mutual help and service to each other through their intimate union. The children who result from this union are the supreme gift of marriage. Some couples experience the tragedy of infertility and may be tempted to think that their union is not complete. However, it remains a distinctive union of persons.

Challenges of Marriage

Since the fall of man into sin, the world has been posing serious dangers to the institution of marriage. Modern society poses fundamental challenges to the meaning and purposes of marriage. Some of these challenges are premarital sex, cohabitation, same-sex union, divorce, and polygamy.

Premarital sex

Younger people in Africa and the western world are having sex before they are married. Very often this encounter is with a person they will never marry. In addition to violating the Word of God and the will of God (1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6), there is the obvious risk of an unwanted pregnancy. There is also a high risk of being infected with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) which can lead to prolonged sickness and death.

Another great loss to those who commit sexual immorality is something which young people today rarely consider. It is the loss of a priceless and once-in-a-lifetime experience. God has created human beings that they never forget their first experience of sexual intercourse. When it is reserved for the beginning of marriage as God intended, it is an experience that brings great happiness and unity to a new husband and wife. To throw that once-in-a-lifetime moment away to momentary pleasure or lust with the wrong person will never be able to restore what he or she has lost.

In his creation of a woman for Adam, God spoke of this act as "becoming one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Nothing in modern man's experience will change the way God created human beings. Those who make the foolish

decision to waste that moment outside of the will of God will have a lifetime to regret it. Those who reserve that moment to begin their marriage will be able to enjoy and renew that special experience each time they come together.

To those who have sinfully wasted that moment, there is still good news in the gospel of Christ. God forgives sin (1 John 1:9). Beyond that, he helps those who have repented of their sin and who desire to live a godly life. It will not be the same as for the person who has kept his or her virginity until marriage, but such a couple can still experience the grace and mercy of God (John 10:10; 15:7)

Cohabitation

Cohabitation is an arrangement where two people are not married but live together. It often involves a romantic or sexually intimate relationship on a long-term or permanent basis. The term cohabitation can mean any number of people living together. To cohabit, in a broad sense, means to coexist.

According to different researchers, couples who cohabit before marriage, and especially before an engagement or an otherwise clear commitment, tend to have less-satisfying marriages and are more likely to divorce than couples who live apart before marriage.

One of the biggest reasons why marriage is more successful than cohabitation is commitment. With marriage, a man and woman make a pledge before God, their family, and friends. Everyone knows that they're married and it's a public declaration. In marriage, each member of the couple is more likely to make sacrifices for their mate and to strive to make the relationship work. Additionally, divorce is costly, both emotionally and financially. By its very nature, cohabitation encourages a lack of commitment and independence and is an easy out for the partner that wants to pack a suitcase and leave.

The Bible teaches that each person planning to enter into marriage must be ready to follow God-pleasing ways because the whole meaning of marriage is expressed in each marital act. Cohabitation closes off the possibility of having a legitimate marriage and violates the rules of holy matrimony and the meanings of marriage. Many couples live together in a sexual relationship without practicing rules for entering a marriage. This is always wrong and objectively sinful because the complete gift of self can only take place in a public, permanent commitment of marriage. Cohabitation can have negative effects on couples themselves, as well as on the children who

are part of the relationship. This is objectively wrong and is essentially opposed to God's plan for marriage and proper human development. Deliberate cohabitation can damage or destroy the plans for marriage and bring many other negative consequences, both personal and social.

Engagement, followed by courtship, is supposed to lead to a happy marriage. Engagement merely is a set time agreed upon by two people to engage in an activity. The most commonly recognized definition according to *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* is "an appointment for a specified time; especially a social engagement between two persons of the opposite sex." Joseph and Mary were engaged when the supernatural conception and birth of Christ was announced (Matthew 1:18). Joseph was faced with a difficult choice after discovering that Mary was pregnant. Although he knew that taking Mary as his wife could be humiliating, Joseph chose to obey the angel's command to marry Mary. His action revealed admirable qualities of righteousness, discretion, sensitivity, responsiveness to God, and self-discipline. These qualities can help believers who are engaged but struggle to make the right decision.

But marriage cannot be happy if it is not built on the right foundation. Many couples have no idea that the foundation of a successful marriage begins long before the wedding day. Besides, a direct by-product of the wrong foundation is that many people have no idea how to select the right mate.

Consent, not cohabitation, establishes a marriage bond. Christians should recognize that once they have given a firm commitment to marriage, they ought to consider themselves bound to this before God for the rest of their lives. However, sexual relations may begin only after God's guidelines on proper marriages have been understood.

Same-Sex Unions

Same-sex marriage (also known as gay marriage) is the marriage of two people of the same sex or gender, established by a civil or religious ceremony. There are records of same-sex marriage dating back to the first century though there is no legal provision in Roman Law, and it was banned in the Roman Empire in the fourth century. In the modern era, same-sex marriage started being legalized at the beginning of the 21st century. Today, it is available in many countries. One of the biggest threats that same-sex marriage poses to marriage is that it would probably undercut the norm of sexual fidelity in marriage.

If same-sex civil marriage is institutionalized, our society would take yet another step down the road of de-gendering marriage. There would be more use of gender-neutral language like “partners” and—more importantly—more social and cultural pressures to neuter our thinking and our behaviors in marriage.

But marriages typically thrive when spouses specialize in gender-typical ways and are attentive to the gendered needs and aspirations of their husband or wife. For instance, women are happier when their husband earns the lion’s share of the household income. Likewise, couples are less likely to divorce when the wife concentrates on childrearing and the husband concentrates on breadwinning.

Male-female complementarity is essential to marriage in Lutheran Orthodox church teaching. It makes possible authentic union and the generation of new life. Attempts to make same-sex unions the equivalent of marriage disregard the essential nature of marriage. Since marriage and same-sex civil partnerships are different realities, it’s not discrimination to talk about their dangers, but these unions pose a serious threat to the legitimacy of marriage and to the fabric of society that affects all people.

The Bible clearly says, “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders. . . will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Paul is describing the characteristics of unbelievers. He doesn’t mean that all those who indulged in sexual sin are automatically and irrevocably excluded from heaven. Christians come out of all kinds of different backgrounds. They may still struggle with evil desires, but they should not continue in these practices. Paul clearly says that even those who sin in these ways can have their lives changed and their sins are forgiven by Christ. However, those who say that they are Christians but persist in these practices with no sign of remorse will not inherit the kingdom of God. Such people need to re-evaluate their lives to see if they truly believe in Christ.

Divorce

Marriage is meant to be a lifelong covenantal union, which divorce breaks. Troubled couples, as well as divorced persons, are encouraged to rely on God’s help and to use the resources of the church for support and healing. An annulment is a possibility for some divorced persons.

The marriage bond joins the two spouses in a lifelong union.¹⁰ It is not only the man and woman who through their vows established the bond, but it is God who joined them together in marriage. God has reserved for himself the right to dissolve it. Jesus, referring to the institution of marriage in Genesis 2:24, concludes with these words: “Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matthew 19:6). God dissolves the marriage bond when he intervenes through death. Paul says that a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. Upon his death, she is loosed from that bond and is free to marry again. Taking another husband then does not make her an adulteress (Romans 7:2-3). The same is true of the man if his wife dies. Scriptures refer to only this one manner by which God dissolves a marriage. Any dissolution of a marriage bond during the life of both husband and wife comes about through man’s sin. Sin is always involved in a divorce.

Divorce, however, is usually much more emotionally painful and hard on the injured wife or husband than polygamy, because it involves the outright rejection of one person. Divorce is also extremely painful for children.

God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). Divorce destroys God’s plan for marriage and the family. Children who see the love of their parents turn to hatred and eventually see them divorce are deeply hurt for life. They often become bitter and negative about marriage and angry at everyone. When a divorce has taken place in a home, the children are the ones who are most hurt. The children often develop such a low view of marriage that they repeat the same pattern of immorality and divorce which they saw in their parents.

Although God hates divorce, he recognizes that it takes place. He deals with people where they are. He will forgive this sin, just as he forgives other sins (Psalm 103:3). Divorce is becoming a serious problem in the 21st century, especially in big cities. Very few people are willing to make marriage the lifetime commitment which the Bible teaches (Matthew 19:6). This bond was not meant for breaking by a husband or wife. When young people are far away from the influence of their extended family, they often lose their moral and spiritual values. They may become involved in sexual immorality and adultery. These are the sins that lead marriages to divorce.

¹⁰This paragraph quotes freely from Schuetze and Habeck, *The Shepherd Under Christ*, 286-287.

What does God want a person to do when his or her marriage partner has been unfaithful? He wants people to forgive one another. “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13). Repentance, forgiveness, and healing of broken human relationships is always God’s perfect will. Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times” (Matthew 18:21-22). This principle of forgiveness can be seen in the life of the prophet Hosea. In the case of Hosea, God told him to reconcile with his unfaithful wife, Gomer, even though she was a prostitute and had betrayed Hosea many times (Hosea 3:1-3).

According to an article in the *Zambia Daily Mail*, over 28,000 divorce cases were recorded countrywide in Zambia in 2019 mainly because of infidelity between spouses. According to the latest statistics from the local court office, Zambia recorded 28,101 divorces across the country’s ten provinces. The average age of couples seeking divorce was between 20 and 45 years. The major causes of divorce included adultery, desertion, cruelty between spouses, the love for money and material things, lack of proper marriage counselling, interference from friends and family members, as well as poor communication, ill-treatment, and fear of contracting HIV from cheating spouses. Research indicates that divorced adults are more likely to become impoverished while their children experience psychological and economic stress which hinders their social development.¹¹

It is a fact that a strong family is a foundation on which society is anchored. Needless to say, if marriages and families fall apart, then society cannot stand. If marriages are being dissolved at such a rate, chances of having more delinquent children and subsequently increased crime rates are equally very high. As a church, we cannot keep our arms folded and watch our society’s main pillar crumble. There is a need for all stakeholders—the church, families, government, non-governmental organizations, and others—to put our heads together to find a lasting solution.

Analysing the reasons cited for divorce, it is clear many people enter into marriage for the wrong reasons. We live in a society where people spend so much money and time preparing for the wedding ceremony as opposed to preparing themselves for the lifetime union. This has led to many people entering marriage ill-prepared and the results are what we

¹¹“Divorce Cases from the Courts,” *Zambia Daily Mail*, August 28, 2017.

are struggling with today. This is why at any adversity like unemployment a marriage crumbles. The high divorce rate should also be a wake-up call to rethink our values and attitude as Christians.

For instance, we live in a society where it is subtly considered an anomaly for a man or woman of a certain age to be single. This has exerted pressure on individuals, especially women, who have ended up in wrong relationships for the sake of shaking off the stigma of being single. The reasons cited for divorces, such as infidelity and gender-based violence, also point to the fact that the church has a daunting task at hand to point couples to Christian values, which are a solution to most of the challenges faced in marriages. There is certainly a need to intensify premarital counselling for couples intending to marry. This will help couples understand the seriousness of vows made on their wedding day and the commitments thereafter. Let couples know, too, that vows exchanged on their wedding day are not just slogans but a covenant of what they pledge to abide by “till death do part them.”

With God’s grace, couples are encouraged to grow in holiness. A happy marriage is made up of many virtues. Fundamentally, the couple lives out the biblical directives of faith, hope, and love. Love is the heart of the vocation of marriage. It calls spouses to imitate Jesus by their willingness to sacrifice themselves in everyday situations for each other and their children. Couples must also grow in the moral virtues of prudence, justice, and temperance. Two virtues that are sometimes overlooked are chastity and gratitude. Marital chastity means that the couple’s love is total, faithful, and exclusive. It protects a great good: the communion of persons and the procreative purpose of marriage.

Marriage is a school of gratitude, in which husband and wife are thankful for the gift of each other. They express their joyous gratitude in giving themselves completely to each other. Their gratitude leads them to be open to children and to be generous towards others. Growth in virtue is a lifelong journey, in which the spouses become more like Christ so that they can more perfectly love each other as Christ loves his church.

Polygamy

Polygamy is defined as marrying more than one wife. It is a difficult problem in the world and especially in Africa. Since God provided one woman for one man at creation, polygamy is not the will of God. Polygamy did not have a good beginning. The first polygamist mentioned in the Bible (Lamech) was also a murderer (Genesis 4:23). Polygamy, however, is the

same thing as adultery. Polygamy is a common practice in many traditional African cultures.

Many men whom God used in the Bible times, like King David, were polygamists. Some people use this fact to justify polygamy in African life. Although God used these men for his purpose, he did not want them to be polygamists. Regarding kings, God said “The king. . . must not take many wives” (Deuteronomy 17:16-17). The truth is that God allowed Old Testament polygamists to suffer the consequences of taking more than one wife. This can be seen in the life of Abraham (Genesis 16:1-6).

From the time he took Hagar as a second wife, Abraham had no happiness in his home. There was jealousy between Hagar and Sarah and jealousy between Isaac and Ishmael. The jealousy and hatred between Isaac and Ishmael and their descendants have continued for many years to the present day.

There are strong cultural arguments in support of polygamy such as:

1. Having several wives has been a symbol of power, wealth, and influence.
2. A man in traditional society needs to continue his family name into future generations. Having several wives usually ensures that he will have many male children to continue his name.
3. Closely related to the continuation of one's family name is the idea that by having many children and grandchildren, one will be remembered and honored long after death.
4. In agricultural societies, several wives are a way to ensure having many children and hence the necessary laborers for farming, cattle herding, and housework.
5. Polygamy solves the problem of single-parent mothers.
6. To have several wives and many children makes a man feel secure about his care in old age.

All of these arguments suggest that polygamy makes sense from a traditional point of view. However, the Bible is clear that this is not the will of God. Although polygamy is not presented in the Bible as a great sin, it is certainly not approved by God in any way. Polygamy is a man-made arrangement to satisfy the desires of a person with a non-Christian world view. The Bible indicates that a large earthly family can be a blessing (Psalm 127:3-5). But this blessing will not come when people violate the will of God for marriage. It will not come when polygamous husbands

eliminate harmony and peace for their wives and children by taking additional wives.

The argument based on improving morality deserves special attention. Yes, immorality is wrong, but polygamy is not God's solution to the problem. The solution is a regular sexual union between one husband and one wife. If the wife resists this, the husband should seek wise counsel from the church leaders concerning immorality in general. The truth is that many men continue to indulge in adultery whether they have one wife or several wives. The problem of lust is not cured by polygamy. There are many cases where a man commits adultery and then later takes the woman as a wife to legalize his adultery. King David did this with Bathsheba even though he had several wives, but God condemned David for his sin (2 Samuel 11:26-27).

It is not the Christian solution to polygamy to require a converted polygamist to drive away all but one wife. That would be unjust and irresponsible behavior from a husband who has committed to care for his wives (Numbers 30:1-2,16). Instead, the solution is supportive prayer and counsel from the pastor and elders of the local church so that God may work things out in his perfect way. Only God can work out a solution that will not hurt people unnecessarily. Only God can work out the problem in answer to prayers. God's solution is always compassionate and perfect, but God's way may take many years to work out. Prayer and patience are the ways for a polygamist to find God's answer to his situation.

The problems associated with polygamy are very difficult to solve. Let this be a warning to those who are not yet married. It is a great mistake for a man to take more than one wife. The polygamist must not assume any leadership role in the local church. The Bible says, "Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2). This is because God wants his plan of one woman for one man in marriage to be visibly seen in the lives of the church leaders.

Polygamy is not the will of God. It is an act of rebellion for a Christian to take a second wife. It is a sin and the church must deal with it. God planned for one man to have only one wife. The Christian who takes a second wife must be disciplined by the local church (1 Corinthians 5:11-13).

The Solutions to Challenges Facing Christian Marriages

Some of the solutions to challenges facing Christian marriages are premarital counselling, respecting the position of each other, trust, confidence, and reconciliation.

*Premarital Counselling*¹²

Ideally, parents should provide all the needed preparation, guidance, and teachings that are required by youths for them to understand the important step of marriage that they will one day take. Parents and guardians will influence the views of the marriage relationship for good or evil. The church should teach parents and children what God's Word says about marriage, family life, and the respective responsibilities of husband, wife, and children in a home. In doing this it will help to build Christian homes where children will by example and precept receive the preparation for marriage that is needed. At the same time, children will learn from the Word of God what considerations and attitudes should be prominent as they approach the choice of a spouse and marriage.

The pastor will in his instruction classes, in young people's group, and wherever opportunity makes it possible seek to provide additional guidance to the youth of the congregation for eventual marriage. He has the ongoing responsibility of teaching proper Christian attitudes toward sex, courtship, and marriage.

The church today is faced with an increasing number of homes torn by troubles. The erosion of the family and the growing divorce rate are evident also among the church's members. Counselling with those who are experiencing a crisis in the family requires a great amount of the pastor's time. This points up the importance of providing specific premarital counselling for those intending to enter into wedlock.

Such premarital counselling can serve a dual purpose. By directing the bride and groom to the Word of God, by showing them what the Word of God says about marriage and family life, the pastor can hope to establish a solid union under God, one that with divine help can cope with problems as they arise.

Respecting the Position of Each Other

After marriage, the spouses acquire a new status which is generally recognized by the rest of the community. The man becomes a husband and perhaps later the father of his children, while the woman becomes a wife and perhaps later a mother. Each spouse should recognize their new status and strive to function within this new situation effectively. The wife will need to recognize and respect the position of the husband as the head of

¹²This section quotes freely from Schuetze and Habeck, *Shepherd under Christ*, 292-293.

the newly established family. Remember it is a new and challenging position for him. He has never been a husband before, neither has he had professional training as a husband. He will need all the support of his wife to feel he is the head and to be given a chance to implement his duties as the head of the wife and consequently head of the whole household. The wife will need to help her husband by supporting him morally, not taking over his position by being dominating. Even if he is lacking in many leadership qualities, he is still her husband. Some women are known to command their husbands with strong words and sometimes abuse them physically. Marriage is not a competition but complementation. Even if a husband is not eloquent, the wife should be careful not to put her words in his mouth and finish his sentences for him and continue lecturing him. This amounts to hurting him. The wife should be patient with her husband and let him feel appreciated in his new position. There are those strong and dominating men who want to feel like the person of authority in the home. They too need their wives' support to exercise their authority in love and humility. The best way to help such a husband is to avoid confrontation and look for opportunities for him to see that he does not need to be harsh to be obeyed, but that the wife submits because she loves him.

Trust and confidence

The spouses need to cultivate each other's trust so that they can faithfully confide in each other. This requires that each spouse command the respect and trust of the other from the way each handles the affairs of their home. Spouses need to safeguard against disclosing anything about the other to people outside. They need to protect each other by avoiding the temptation of discussing their negative aspects with friends, parents, and relatives. If there is anything to talk about, your spouse should be the first person to know and the first with whom to discuss the matter. A Chewa proverb says, "*Banja ndi umfiti saulula*," meaning spouses should learn to keep each other's secret no matter what circumstance may arise in their life. They should not wash their dirty linen in public but resolve their differences amicably and trust each other.

A wife should let her husband know that she can keep his secrets. She should encourage him to speak about his problems by being understanding, thoughtful, and patient with him. Some wives have revealed a lot of things about their homes in the so-called "fellowships and community prayers." In this process of sharing with others what God is doing for them in their homes, they end up sharing the disagreements, the unfaithfulness, and other delicate matters in their private life with each other. From there,

members of the fellowship continue to talk about what God is doing for their sister or brother in Christ and this may end up as scandalous gossip. Others share their problems as items for prayers, but this also ends up in a kind of “holy” gossip. When it reaches your spouse, no matter how good he/she is, he will be offended and will not trust you anymore. As a result of such practices, which were not ill-motivated, some spouses have created walls between themselves.

You will find husbands who never disclose their financial investments, loan properties, or other business with their wives. Others may inform the wife about the place where the husband owns the property.

Spouses should pray together, complain about each other to God, but still maintain each other's confidence. This is a necessary skill that every wife and husband needs to cultivate, especially in the 21st century, when families are undergoing great social and economic changes. There is a lot to complain about and to talk about, but let it be done with the right person and in the right place, with your spouse in the secrecy of your home.

Reconciliation

This is an important healing skill for couples in relationships. Spouses need to share their hurts as soon as they occur. They should choose the appropriate moment to sort out the hurts and forgive each other again and forget all the various hurts in a fresh start. They need to live for the present in their relationship. They married each other to be together. Let the husband and wife be greatest friends. Let the spouse be the one person they can call upon to solve internal matters. It is a worthy practice for spouses to go places together as much as possible, e.g., to church, shopping, visiting friends, parties, etc. Recreation and hobbies can help to mend the broken relationship and cement reconciliation.

Conclusion

Marriage is found in all cultures of the world in some form. According to the Bible, marriage was the very first human social institution. It was God himself who planned marriage when he created mankind as male and female and then performed the very first marriage himself.

God planned for one man to be married to one woman as a lifetime commitment of faithfulness, love, companionship, encouragement, support, enjoyment, and mutual help. Other forms of marriage, such as polygamy, same-sex, or cohabiting are man's ideas and not God's will. Divorce destroys God's perfect plan for human happiness in marriage. God hates

divorce. Within marriage, sex is pure and blessed by God. It is the way God grants the blessing of children and the means of pleasure for husbands and wives. All sexual relations outside of marriage, such as sexual immorality and adultery, are serious sins which God has promised to punish.

Marriage only works the way God planned for it to work when husbands and wives follow the commandments of Scripture. For example, in leading their wives, husbands are to follow the example of Christ himself (Ephesians 5:23). Another example for wives to follow in submitting to their husbands is the church's relationship to Christ (Ephesians 5:24). Husbands are commanded to love their wives "just as Christ loved the church" (Ephesians 5:25). This is servant leadership and self-sacrificing love. Wives are commanded to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ (Ephesians 5:24). The secret to this submission is doing it for the sake of Christ. The example for parents to follow in raising their children is the example of God our heavenly Father, as he loves, provides for, guides, leads, teaches, and protects his children (Ephesians 5:1-2). These responsibilities can only be fully carried out with the help of the Holy Spirit.

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Anthony Phiri, Essay #4



Online Zoom Convention in action



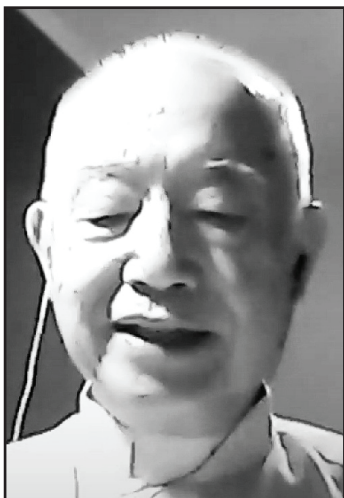
John Hartwig
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