

THE GENIUS
OF LUTHER'S
THEOLOGY

THE GENIUS OF LUTHER'S THEOLOGY

A WITTENBERG WAY OF THINKING
FOR THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

THE GENIUS OF LUTHER'S THOUGHT

Two Presuppositions of Wittenberg Theology

People are known by the company they keep. What are we then to make of the company Martin Luther has kept over the years? A list of his conversation partners in recent decades presents a strange mosaic. Professor Claus Schwambach of Sao Bento du Sul in Brazil has recently brought the sixteenth-century exegete into dialogue with the twentieth-century liberation theologian Leonardo Boff in his book on “the event of justification and the process of liberation, the eschatologies of Martin Luther and Leonardo Boff in critical conversation.”¹ In his work on “theosis in the thought of Palamas and Luther,” the German church historian Reinhard Flogaus joined the Wittenberg reformer in interchange with the fourteenth-century Thessalonican monk Gregory of Palamas.² These are only among the latest in a long line of such books, including *Luther*

1. Leonardo Boff, *Rechtfertigungsgeschehen und Befreiungsprozess: Die Eschatologien von Martin Luther und Leonardo Boff im kritischen Gespräch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004).

2. Reinhard Flogaus, *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther: Ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997).

und Hegel,³ *Ritschl and Luther*,⁴ and *Aquinas and Luther*.⁵ Constructive efforts continue to take seriously the thought of this man, who departed this earth four hundred and sixty years ago, not only as a historical figure but also as a conversation partner in the context of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. This fact suggests that the study of Luther's life and thought may be quite worthwhile for those seeking to bring the biblical message to the people of the twenty-first century.

Many elements provide the raw material for such conversations, both from Luther's thought and from the thought of his conversation partners, such as Palamas, long since dead, and the authors of other books, writing from amid their contemporary concerns. In this volume we focus on two elements of Luther's way of understanding the biblical message: his fundamental presuppositions regarding what it means to be human (part 1) and his understanding of the way God works in his world (part 2). We believe these to be the genius—the pervading and animating orientation, the particular character—that shapes the course of his teaching of every part of the Christian message. These two elements provide the matrix within which the sixteenth-century reformer from Wittenberg studied and proclaimed his faith and conversed about it with his contemporaries.

Martin Luther, Conversation Partner for Twenty-first-Century Christians

In our time, many Christians are involved in conversations with other Christians and with people outside the Christian faith. Some of those conversations project confidence; some are more questioning and reflect a sense of crisis. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Christian churches around the world are in crisis. New challenges to the church's right to proclaim its message and even to exist in certain societies, aggressive opposition to its way of life, questions from inside as well as outside—all are bringing believers to reflect anew on the best ways to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to their ever-changing surroundings.

Lutheran churches share in this confrontation with crises. Certainly, Lutherans have always thought themselves to be in the midst of crisis. *Krisis* is the Greek word for judgment, and Martin Luther experienced the world around him as a world under judgment, at the edge of liberation

3. Ulrich Asendorf, *Luther und Hegel: Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung einer neuen systematischen Theologie* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1982).

4. David Lotz, *Ritschl and Luther: A Fresh Perspective on Albrecht Ritschl's Theology in the Light of His Luther Study* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974).

5. Stephanus Pfürtner, *Aquinas and Luther* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1964).

from all its ills. Luther believed that the God who had revealed himself in the judgment of the cross was present in quite real ways amid all that was going wrong with church and society in the early sixteenth century. He counted on the God of the cross to deliver him, with all those faithful people whom God had chosen to be his children, from the manifold evils of their time. His certain hope and absolute confidence that his Lord is Lord of the world drove him to proclaim that hope for God's people, as Paul had (Col. 1:15–29).

So Luther lived as a free man even though for the last quarter century of his life he stood under the condemnation of emperor and pope, under the threat of execution at the stake. His thoughts on how the gospel of Jesus Christ liberates people caught in the entanglement of evils of all sorts offer twenty-first-century believers, as well as their neighbors who do not know Jesus Christ, fresh ways of examining the biblical message. His reflections on Scripture and the world around him can contribute significantly to the conversation on the propagation and practice of God's Word among Christians of all traditions in this age.

Luther believed that the church of his youth had played power games that obscured the simple truth of Christ's victory over evil through death and resurrection. In so doing, the reformer and his associates charged church leaders with neglecting the care of the people of God. The Reformation Luther led with his colleagues at the University of Wittenberg arose out of the crisis of pastoral care that plagued the late medieval church. That crisis had its roots in a crisis of proclamation: there was too little preaching in the fifteenth century, largely because pastors were ill trained or not trained at all. Most knew little theology and had little idea of how the gospel might make a difference in people's lives. Theologians lived trapped in their own intellectual constructs—although Luther's instructors from the theological school labeled "Ockhamist" or "nominalist" gave him much of the raw material that helped him mine the Scriptures. From that study of the Word, he was able to teach and proclaim the richness of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Luther did not learn alone, and he did not think and teach alone. Together with his Wittenberg colleagues and others from his circle of conversation partners, he developed his approach to the Word of God. With his way of thinking theologically and within a framework of presuppositions, Luther approached Scripture and the world, to which his doctoral oath obligated him to bring the message of the Bible. Because these presuppositions are embedded in the conceptual matrix within which the various elements of his teaching were presented and related to each other, they sometimes escape our notice when we look at what the faculty at Wittenberg taught. Nevertheless, these presuppositions guided the ways in which Luther, his closest colleague and most significant

contributor to his reform program, Philip Melancthon, and their circle treated the various topics of biblical teaching.

Presuppositions as the Framework of the Wittenberg Way of Practicing Theology

This volume looks at two vital elements that constituted the matrix within which Luther developed other topics from biblical revelation and the genius that channeled their unfolding: the anthropological presupposition that God shaped human life according to two dimensions (two kinds of righteousness), and the theological presupposition that God works through his Word in its manifold forms. The first presupposition posits that what makes human beings genuine human creatures of God in his sight is his grace and favor alone, to which we respond with total trust in him; what makes us genuinely human in relationship to other creatures is our performance of the works of love, which God designed to be our way of living out our trust in him. The second presupposition posits that his Word does not merely provide us with information about his heavenly disposition. Instead, the God who spoke the worlds into being (Gen. 1) speaks through his Word in oral, written, and sacramental forms as it actually effects and delivers new life on the basis of the Word made flesh, the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.

These two presuppositions formed vital elements of Luther and Melancthon's practice of theology and the delivery of the biblical message to their contemporaries in the sixteenth century. In this volume, we intend to present these presuppositions in such a way that they become useful for pastors and laypersons in the twenty-first century as they bring the promise of life in Christ to their neighbors in our time. The matrix offered in these two presuppositions enables us to evaluate our own formulations. Such a matrix aids us as we construct our own formulations of God's truth and interface in ways appropriate to our time and place with the unchanging edifice of God's biblical message and formulate our applications of the Word's power to the situations confronting us. These principles help us sort out Scripture passages that our ways of posing questions may put in conflict (Paul's and James's statements on faith and works, for example) or to frame a fresh approach to questions from our society that do not seem to fit a biblical worldview at all. These presuppositions guide our thinking as we tread the path of the sometimes strange and occasionally forbidding future that God presents us.

The practice of theology Wittenberg style involves a regular pattern of searching the Scriptures, looking at the world around us, and examining ourselves and the manner in which we engage the thought world

into which God has called us, here and now applying the good news of God's promise of life in Christ. With Luther we must honestly confront the inevitable tendency of Christians to mix the sound of God's Word with other sounds from the world around them. Therefore, he believed that the entire life of believers, individually and as a group gathered together, the church, is a life of being called back from the way misrepresentations of reality divert us from the truth of God. The whole life of the Christian, he wrote as he began his call for reform in the church, is a life of repentance.⁶ By repentance Luther meant a life lived out in the rhythm that God set in motion through his baptismal Word of life. Using Paul's words in Romans 6, Luther described the ongoing significance of the Holy Spirit's baptismal action in his Small Catechism. He summarized the Christian life as a life in which "the Old Adam in us is drowned through daily remorse and repentance and dies with all sins and evil lusts, and a new human creature daily arises, who lives eternally in God's sight in righteousness and purity."⁷

Luther's reminder that God calls Christians in the midst of a sinful world to turn from their mistakes, failures, and disobedience each day of their lives reminds theologians of their need to return to Scripture continually to check out whether they are faithfully reproducing God's message. This is true not only because students of God's Word can make false formulations but also because Satan's deceptions take so many forms and God's gift of humanity has so many facets. In different situations and in confrontation with various forms of evil, God's message for a fallen world takes on new and different expressions. The unchangeable truths of Scripture must be proclaimed to specific human beings in their specific environments as the gospel addresses their realities and brings its power to change those realities through forgiveness and the promise of new life in Christ. God's Word not only describes reality but also creates it. In the beginning God said, "Let there be . . . ," and reality came into existence. God says, "I forgive," and the reality of a new creature comes into existence or is sustained in life as a child of God. Luther risked his life, and many of his disciples laid down their lives, in order to bring this message—this act of God—to reality in the lives of others.

The Form and Framework for Teaching the Biblical Message

This volume does not follow a traditional model of presenting Lutheran doctrine, namely, one topic at a time. That mode of summarizing

6. The first of the Ninety-five Theses, *LW* 31:25; *WA* 1:233.10–11.

7. Small Catechism, Baptism, question 4, *Book of Concord*, 360; *BSLK*, 516.

Lutheran teaching has served the church since the days Philip Melancthon first followed the models of Peter Lombard and John of Damascus in devising his *Theological Topics* (*Loci communes theologici*) nearly five hundred years ago. Instead, readers will find in these pages two extensive essays (parts 1 and 2) that portray the genius that guided the crafting of Wittenberg teaching, sketching a “Wittenberg way” of thinking biblically and theologically. Both essays intend to anchor their framework for such thinking historically, and both intend to offer readers foundational insights for the practice of theology, a matrix for the faithful formulation of the message of Scripture in the twenty-first century. As mentioned above, these two essays deal with two presuppositions the Wittenberg reformers formulated to guide their expression of biblical teaching.

We presume that the formal, public teaching of the people of God may best be described as Luther and Melancthon themselves described it, through the metaphor of the body.⁸ The whole of biblical teaching that commends itself for presentation to the people of God and those outside the faith is constituted, as Melancthon envisioned it, as a series of “articles” or “members” of a body that functions as an organic whole.⁹ But the church’s body of public teaching is not composed merely of these topics with which every Christian is familiar: God, the human creature, sin, salvation, church, the end times, and many others. The way in which believers teach these topics is governed by principles or guidelines that we may compare to a nervous system or a circulatory system. These presuppositions or governing principles provide the energy and the direction for our formulation and application of the truths of Scripture as expressed in the many articles of faith or doctrinal topics that help us organize our processing and delivery of the biblical witness to God and his interaction with his human creatures. This is the manner in which Luther’s anthropological presupposition of two kinds of human righteousness and his theological presupposition of the Word of God serving as God’s instrument of presence and power in the world function in the Wittenberg theology.

To use another metaphor, these essays provide discussions of two road maps that Luther designed to help travelers move through the landscape of biblical revelation, or two systems of lighting and signage that the traveler needs to traverse the territory of Scripture’s content and engage the adventure of exploring how God is bringing his message to the people of our time and our places. Like all other Christians, Luther,

8. Irene Dingel, “Philip Melancthon and the Establishment of Confessional Norms,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 20 (2006): 146–69, esp. 152–59.

9. *Book of Concord*, 7 (par. 7).

along with Melanchthon and their colleagues, mapped out their way of understanding what God has said in Scripture to his people, and they also shaped their own way of formulating and conveying that message. They conducted their instruction of theological students largely through lectures on books of the Bible, but their lectures went beyond examination of exegetical details of the text. For their students they constructed a scaffold on which these future preachers learned to climb around on the edifice of God's Word, so that they might better present it, in all its power, fresh and appealing in its fundamental delivery of God's saving will for humankind. The content of the Wittenberg reformers' understanding of the biblical message also dictated its own method for applying it to the lives of individuals. We dedicate this little volume to helping readers grasp how Luther and his colleagues practiced the study and the proclamation of God's Word.

Luther and his colleagues committed themselves to honest intellectual exploration of the world God has given into human care. They likewise committed themselves to search the Scriptures and deliver eternal life to their hearers through their mining of that Word of God. But the study of Scripture, the discipline of theology, was regarded as a thoroughly practical discipline, moving from the university to the world, where God wants his people to be at work. So even though it may be said that the Wittenberg Reformation was conceived in the university, where across its disciplines faith and intellectual curiosity and adventure combined, it must also be said that the Lutheran church was born in Augsburg, in the sixteenth-century equivalent of the halls of Congress, where the reformers delivered the public confession of their faith in the Augsburg Confession of 1530. Therefore, Luther's followers regarded themselves as called to active citizenry in their political circumstances. They also wanted to follow Martin and his wife, Käthe, in their enjoyment of marital and family life. Yet Luther's adherents believed that the life of the church and all its members emerges from God's engagement with his human creatures in the biblical text. Luther and his students committed themselves to engaging the testimony of believers from previous eras regarding what God has revealed of himself there.

At Wittenberg, Luther, Melanchthon, their colleagues, and their students listened to what God was saying through the pages of Scripture, using the best methods and material contemporary biblical scholars were supplying, with an eye always fixed on the needs of people to be called to repentance and to be given new life through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because they believed that God's Word is an active and living agent of his re-creative activity, they emphasized the importance of publicly proclaiming that Word and privately sharing it with others in the family circle

and the wider circle of acquaintances. For these Wittenberg students of the Word, confessing their faith became their way of life.

Because Luther had a price on his head and the emperor's threat of execution hanging over his life in 1530, Melanchthon got the nod as the chief negotiator when the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Charles V, summoned Elector John of Saxony to explain why he was not obediently returning to subjection to the bishop of Rome but instead pursuing reform of the churches in his lands according to Luther's model. Other princes and cities of the German Empire joined John in defining their cause and their church in a document Melanchthon composed for them from materials he, Luther, and their Wittenberg colleagues had been writing. To this day that document, the Augsburg Confession, remains the basic definition of what it means to be a "Lutheran."

In this document Melanchthon brought together a summary of the fundamental core of Luther's understanding of the biblical message, in a compact, concise form, resulting in twenty-one articles of faith. He added to it explanations of why followers of Luther had introduced reforms or were calling for improvements in the life and practice of the church, for Wittenberg teaching was never only theoretical. It always had pastoral and practical implications. Melanchthon considered calling his definition of the Wittenberg plan for the repentance of the church a "defense"—in Greek *apologia*—but instead he decided that this new creed should be called a "confession" of faith.

As Luther's colleague, Melanchthon understood that the Word of God is a dynamic instrument of God's power. The specific content of Wittenberg teaching demanded a specific method for bringing God's Word to people. Melanchthon's conviction that the Word of God in our mouths does things and his perception that the Holy Spirit must daily turn believers from their sinfulness back to God dictated a particular framework for preaching and teaching. God's Word, as we pronounce and proclaim it, brings the judgment of God's wrath on sin, but above all it fulfills his ultimate will for humankind. It makes sinners alive by restoring them to their status as God's children in the sight of our heavenly Father. With this understanding of both God's Word and our repetition of his message for humankind, Melanchthon made a confession. He understood that Word not merely in terms of the content of the document he was writing but also in terms of the action that necessarily conveys that content when one believes it. Melanchthon already knew what Paul tells us in Romans 10:10–17, that when we *believe*, we cannot help but *teach* and *confess* what God has done for us.

At first, Melanchthon's friends and Luther's disciples used the term "Augsburg Confession" for the entire action of explaining the Christian faith undertaken in Augsburg that spring and summer by the supporters

of the Wittenberg reformation. These believers understood confessing the faith to be their way of life. Everything said and done to make clear what Jesus Christ had done for humankind in negotiation with the papal party in Augsburg constituted a confession. In the years following 1530, Lutherans came to define who they were, what it meant to be “Lutheran,” first of all in terms of this document. They also used the term “Augsburg Confession” specifically to designate the content of its teaching, for they viewed biblical “teaching” as the Word of God lifted from the biblical page, full of God’s power to kill the sinners who were ruining his favorite creation, humanity, and full of his power to raise these sinners up as new people through Christ’s death and resurrection.

This Augsburg Confession expressed a great deal about Luther’s practice of theology, both as a university course of instruction and as the nervous system that empowers the entire life of God’s people. The Confession commits Luther’s adherents to specific formulations of the biblical message; its spirit also guides their perception of how the people of God, his church, act as they carry God’s Word from the Bible’s pages into the lives of other people.

First of all, the Augsburg Confession charges its adherents to be proclaimers of the evangel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not true that Luther was “Christomonic,” or “Christomaniac,” as some charge, for he had a rich doctrine of the Trinity. His strong doctrine of creation caused him to exult in the Father’s providence. Far beyond what we sometimes recognize, he emphasized how important the Holy Spirit’s work is in sanctifying the church through the active use of the Word (understood as “means of grace,” the instrument of God’s re-creating sinners into his children) and by guiding Christians into new obedience. But finally at the center of his catechism are those five words in his explanation of the second article, “Jesus Christ is our Lord.” Luther believed that one cannot be a faithful hearer of God’s Word without centering life on the confession that “Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from all eternity, and also truly human, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature . . . so that I might be God’s own child and serve him forever.”¹⁰

Second, the spirit of Luther’s way of practicing the faith, as reflected in the Augsburg Confession, commits us to recognizing the eschatological urgency of our proclamation. Luther did expect the world to end in the sixteenth century, but he also had a continual sense of standing immediately in the presence of God. He knew that the last moment could dawn in any of our lives on any day. But beyond this, he knew that

10. Small Catechism, Apostles’ Creed, explanation to the second article, *Book of Concord*, 355; *BSLK*, 511.

the work Jesus Christ had begun was already coming to fulfillment in our experience of the killing and resurrecting power of God's Word. He wanted as many people as possible to enjoy what life in Christ brings as soon as possible, and so he regarded it as the most urgent of tasks to proclaim the gospel. By the same token, the eschatological focus did not lead Luther to abandon earthly responsibilities or callings. According to an oft-repeated apocryphal account,¹¹ Luther said that if he had known that Christ would return for the last day tomorrow, he would plant an apple tree today; the story illustrates his attitude toward the goodness of each day and the callings God gives us to serve in his world.

Third, the logic of Melanchthon's call to confession compels believers in the twenty-first century toward evangelistic witness. It is true that there were relatively few people outside the Christian faith in Melanchthon's society and that few of his contemporary believers ever met an unbaptized person. Nonetheless, Lutherans were most concerned about bringing the gospel of their Lord to fellow Christians who did not truly trust in him, because we believe that it is a matter of eternal life or death for us to bring people to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Having experienced the dynamic of God's Word in our own life, we cannot help but tell those things that we have heard and seen from the biblical witness and our experience of the Holy Spirit working in the church. Preaching in Wittenberg on 1 Peter 2:9 in 1523, Luther told the congregation that God "permits us to live here on earth in order that we may bring others to faith, just as he has brought us." He instructed his fellow citizens of Wittenberg: "You must, says Peter, exercise the chief function of a priest, that is, to proclaim the wonderful deed God has performed for you to bring you out of darkness into the light. Your preaching should be done in such a way that one brother proclaims the mighty deed of God to the other; how you have been delivered through him from sin, hell, death, and all misfortune, and have been called to eternal life. . . . Let it be your chief work to proclaim this publicly and to call everyone into the light into which you have been called."¹²

Fourth, Melanchthon spoke for Luther and his other colleagues when he endeavored to explain the Wittenberg concern for reform in the church's teaching and life. The spirit of the Augsburg Confession embodies Luther and Melanchthon's commitment to ecumenical witness within the household of faith. Melanchthon went, his contemporaries said, like Daniel going into the lions' den, carrying the witness of the gospel to the leaders of the Roman Catholic party in Augsburg. He

11. See Martin Schloemann, *Luthers Apfelbäumchen? Ein Kapitel deutscher Mentalitätsgeschichte seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994).

12. LW 30:11; WA 12:267.3-7.

made strenuous efforts to convince them of the truth of what Luther, he, and their colleagues had been teaching in Wittenberg. Such a bold and fearless testimony was aimed at restoring the unity of the church in its confession of the saving gospel. What Timothy Wengert has written about Melanchthon's continuing engagement with other Christians in his Apology of the Augsburg Confession is also true of Lutheran witness as it is voiced as an echo of the Augsburg Confession, which understood itself as an echo of Scripture: "Melanchthon wanted to do nothing other than remain true to his confession of faith. This brand of honest confession and encounters with other Christians may not stand him in good stead with some ecumenically minded Christians today. However, it accurately portrays the unwavering behavior of the author of the chief confession of the Lutheran church, for whom compromise never meant capitulation and conversation about faith always entailed confession of the same."¹³ He and Luther alike understood that God had called them and all other members of his church to clear and faithful witness to the biblical revelation of God's saving goodness and power in Christ Jesus.



We have written this book for our students and for people around the world who wish to explore the basic elements of Luther's teaching, though not in detail, topic by topic. Instead, we explore the genius of his way of thinking, the matrix within which he explored the text of Scripture and applied its truths to the everyday lives of people. The goal is to aid readers in constructing their own matrix for reading and proclaiming Scripture out of the material left by these Wittenberg thinkers. We are setting out to do that, conscious of the twenty-first-century world in which we are listening to these students of the Word of God who lived a half millennium ago.

Our essays betray the differing approaches of the systematic theologian and the historian. Since the authors believe that the Wittenberg theology can serve our contemporary church well when properly translated across the centuries and cultural barriers, the historical assessment is not, strictly speaking, an academic analysis but rather a use of Luther's thought to offer a pattern for contemporary use of God's Word. The systematic treatments are squarely anchored in historical research and demonstrate how the historic tradition of the Lutheran confession comes alive in this new millennium. We hope that readers will therefore learn

13. Timothy J. Wengert, "Philip Melanchthon's Last Word to Cardinal Lorenzo Campeggio, Papal Legate at the 1530 Diet of Augsburg," in *Dona Melanchthoniana: Festgabe für Heinz Scheible zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Johanna Loehr (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2001), 483.

something about the practice of Lutheran theology from the differing styles of conveying these summaries and applications for proclaiming the Lutheran tradition. In these discourses, readers will find suggestions out of the Wittenberg tradition for the way the message of new life in Christ is to be proclaimed, taught, and lived.

This volume, therefore, is not a textbook on Christian doctrine but a conversation about the genius of Luther and Melanchthon's way of thinking. It is an exploration of decisive elements in the matrix or conceptual framework, the nervous system, of Wittenberg theology. It aims to prepare Lutherans and non-Lutherans alike for viewing God's world through biblical lenses, lenses ground by the Wittenberg reformation. For amid the crises that the people of God face in various parts of the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we believe that Luther's approach to the questions of the meaning of our humanity and God's way of communicating with us can guide the formulation of our thought in decisive ways. We believe that these essays will demonstrate that Martin Luther is indeed a man for this season in the history of Christ's church.

PART ONE



“OUR THEOLOGY”

Luther’s Definition of the Human Creature through “Two Kinds of Righteousness”

We set forth two worlds, as it were, one of them heavenly and the other earthly. Into these we place these two kinds of righteousness, which are distinct and separated from each other. The righteousness of the law is earthly and deals with earthly things; by it we perform good works. . . . But this righteousness [of the gospel] is heavenly and passive. We do not have it of ourselves; we receive it from heaven. We do not perform it; we accept it by faith, through which we ascend beyond all laws and works.

Luther, “Lectures on Galatians, 1531–1535”

This is our theology, by which we teach a precise distinction between these two kinds of righteousness, the active and the passive, so that morality and faith, works and grace, secular society and religion may not be confused. Both are necessary, but both must be kept within their limits.

Luther, “Lectures on Galatians, 1531–1535”

For nearly five hundred years Lutheran identity has been indelibly linked to the teaching that sinners are justified by God's favor because of Christ, a justification that is received through faith alone. This is the teaching by which the church stands and falls, Lutherans confess. Not surprisingly then, the question of how a sinner is justified occupied center stage in Lutheran thought and life. Over the years, Lutheran systematic theologians have tried to show how all theology centers on and revolves around this single question.¹ They have explored how the answer to that question is expressed in a wide variety of biblical images, including reconciliation, new creation, and forgiveness of sins.²

While Lutheran biblical theologians have often focused on Paul's letter to the Romans or Galatians, they have also shown how the Scriptures as a whole are anchored in the teaching of justification. Lutheran pastoral theologians have shown how justification, brought about by maintaining the proper distinction between law and gospel, expresses itself in pastoral care.³ Here in part 1 we explore the Lutheran anthropological presupposition that God shaped human life according to two dimensions, with two kinds of righteousness.

What is not readily recognized or sufficiently appreciated is how the entire discussion on justification is not limited to the question regarding one's salvation, or to the issue of whether or not a person is on God's good side. In large part, the doctrine of justification, like the closely related doctrine of original sin, is a question of anthropology: How do we define a human being? Although the early church focused on the mystery of the Trinitarian relations along with the unity of the natures in Christ, the Reformation focused on issues related to human existence. These included such topics as the image of God, original sin, whether the human will is free or bound, justification, sanctification, and the final beatification of the human being. From different perspectives, these issues address questions of the origin and purpose of human life. Their answers shape how we see ourselves, define our identity, and provide a framework within which we make sense of our lives.

1. This is especially true in works on the distinction of law and gospel, such as C. F. W. Walther, *Law and Gospel*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (St. Louis: Concordia, 1981); or Werner Elert, *Law and Gospel*, trans. Edward H. Schroeder (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967); among many others.

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

3. William Hulme's pioneering study of pastoral counseling, *Counseling and Theology* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1956), is one example. In a quite different genre, the short stories of pastoral care by Swedish bishop Bo Giertz (*The Hammer of God*, 2nd ed. [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005]) illustrate how the doctrine of justification works in practice.