

IOWA DISTRICT EAST

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL FOR THE CHURCH

Written for the Laity of our Congregations

VOL. 2, ISSUE 2

OCTOBER 2024

WHY I AM A LUTHERAN

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Editor's Introduction

Francis Pieper, the great Lutheran dogmatician, once wrote that there are essentially two religions: the religion of the Law, that is, the endeavor to reconcile God through man's own works, and the religion of the Gospel, that is, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, belief wrought through the Gospel by the Holy Ghost that we have a gracious God through the reconciliation already effected by Christ, and not because of our own works. This religion of the Gospel is what Lutherans believe, teach, and confess. This teaching is confessed in Article IV of the Augsburg Confession, the article on which the Church stands or falls.

The title for this volume of Iowa District East's *Theological Journal for the Church* is *Why I am a Lutheran*. The reason why many Lutherans are Lutheran is simple: many have received the Sacrament of Holy Baptism as infants and have never left the Lutheran Church. They have abided and remained in this confession and faith their entire lives. Yet, some came into the Lutheran Church later in life. They either grew up in other denominations and held to a different confession of faith or even spent most of their lives outside the saving ark of the Church. But no matter where any of us came from or how long we have been Lutheran, the same is true for all of us: we believe that we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called all of us by the Gospel, enlightened us with His gifts, sanctified, and keeps us in the true faith. God be praised.

In this issue, the reader will enjoy three articles written by Lutheran pastors of Iowa District East who did not grow up within the Lutheran confession. They share their joy they have experienced when it comes to Lutheran doctrine and practice with one unifying theme: Lutheranism teaches and confesses the assurance of salvation, which is ours in Jesus Christ, apart from works of the Law. The reader will also enjoy two relevant book reviews for our day and age. Finally, as the reader will note, the reflection on hymn "Lord Jesus Christ, You Have Prepared," explains the immense comfort that Lutherans receive when we eat and drink of our Lord's Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar.

Special thanks is due to President Rev. Dr. Brian Saunders as the General Editor of this project, Mr. Daniel Sanchez who serves as the layout editor, and to all my clergy brothers who have spent generous amounts of time writing and researching to make this project happen.

We hope you will enjoy this issue of IDE's *Theological Journal for the Church* and that you find it edifying.

Rev. Thomas C. Van Hemert
Managing Editor
The Festival of St. Luke, 2024

**Theological Journal for the Church is a publication of Iowa District East of The Lutheran Church—
Missouri Synod. The articles are written by pastors in the district for the edification and education of
our laity. The Executive Editor is Rev. Dr. Brian Saunders, President of Iowa District East.**

The Managing Editor is Rev. Thomas Van Hemert.

All correspondence may be directed to:

Theological Journal for the Church

c/o Iowa District East

1100 Blairs Ferry Rd

Marion, IA 52302



WHY I AM A LUTHERAN: FROM PENTECOSTALISM TO LUTHERANISM

Pastor Daniel Pool

Martin Luther once said, “But now that the apostles have preached the Word and have given their writings, and nothing more than what they have written remains to be revealed, no new and special revelation or miracle is necessary.”¹

I spent the first twenty-five years of my life in the Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal denomination in the revivalist and holiness tradition. I attended Bible college and served as a youth pastor for a couple of years within the denomination. Certain doctrines and practices unite most Pentecostals. With its impetus in the 1970s Charismatic Movement in which speaking in tongues penetrated many denominations, Pentecostalism has influenced American Christianity substantially. Gary McGee, professor at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, asserts, “In the last 60 years, a ‘Pentecostalization’ of Evangelicals has occurred with many now reporting the restoration of the ‘Charismatic gifts’ in their churches, and adopting charismatic modes of worship.”²

In this article, I explore the theological and experiential distinctives of Pentecostalism. I concentrate on two of my unique concerns: prophetic decrees and supernatural tongues. I have other concerns with Pentecostalism, such as the Pentecostal views of worship, salvation, sacraments, eschatology, and mission. I am suspicious of Pentecostalism for utilizing emotion as

the means to identify the work of the Spirit. However, misunderstandings regarding the way God speaks were pivotal to my departure from Pentecostalism.

Prophecy

Pentecostalism suggests God speaks words of knowledge directly to the human heart apart from Scripture. Pentecostals find this concept in 1 Cor. 12:8, “To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit.” For them, the experience of the disciples extend prophecy throughout the ages, even now. Jack Deere, a leading voice within Pentecostalism, suggests that God speaks through a number of different venues including experiences, supernatural words of knowledge, modern prophets, dreams and visions, saying, “The very same thing could happen to you if you gave God a chance to speak to you as he did to those in Acts.”³ Deere defines this type of revelation to include warning, encouragement, guidance, foretelling the future, or messages to unbelievers.⁴ These revelations include congregational prophecy, which may address an individual or the worshipping community, but is used publicly. Pentecostalism defines this congregational prophecy as a gift of the Holy Spirit through which a person speaks spontaneously in God’s name, reporting a vision, providing a revelation, or interpreting a tongues-based utterance. Pentecostals see these revelations as something normative in Scripture for the entire church age. These prophetic proclamations are the benchmark of vibrancy for the church, denoting the immediate activity of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Daniel Pool is Pastor at St. John Lutheran Church in Clinton, IA.

In a Pentecostal service, members speak words of knowledge or congregational prophecies in the prophetic formula, "Thus says the LORD." However, these messages present a distinct challenge. What are we to do if the prophecy does not align with the Scriptures or sound theology? What happens when the prediction does not come true? Deere's book is replete with stories that relate the accuracies of these words of knowledge (although, all impossible to verify). What happens when the prophet gets it wrong? Deere suggests that prophets are subject to prophetic pitfalls and a degree of uncertainty haunts the prophetic message. Only "the Holy Spirit can show us whether or not the predictions will come true."⁵

A Pentecostal friend of mine had a word of knowledge spoken over him years ago. At a revival service, the so-called prophet announced that my friend would marry within a year. He was in his mid-twenties and wanted to be married. Naturally, he was overjoyed with the Holy Spirit's word. However, decades later, he remains single. The word of knowledge never materialized, leaving him only to question his faith and the faithfulness of God.

Tongues

Linked to these words of knowledge, Pentecostals uphold and encourage the continued use of tongues, a supernatural ability to speak in an unknown language (Acts 2; 1 Cor. 12-14). Pentecostals define tongues as the initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This baptism is a second work of grace, separate from and subsequent to water baptism or conversion. The 7th Fundamental Truth of the Assemblies of God states "All believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, the baptism and the Holy Spirit and fire... This was the normal experience of all in the early church. With it comes the endowment of power for life and service, the bestowment of gifts and their uses in the work of the ministry." The 8th Fundamental Truth of the Assemblies of God affirms, "The baptism of believers in the Holy Spirit is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues."⁶ Pentecostals fervently argue for both private and public uses for tongues. The private use is based on 1 Cor. 14:18, as Paul says, "I thank God that I speak in tongues more

than all of you." This use of tongues requires no interpretation, viewed as an acceptable prayer form. Although Paul is speaking of a private gift, Pentecostals suggest tongues may be employed in corporate worship when others are praying aloud together. The services I attended were marked by a cacophony of unintelligible mumbling.

This use directly contradicts the directives for public worship in 1 Cor. 14:27-28, "If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God." Here the public use of a private tongue leads to confusion, as congregants wonder which use is being employed and whether they should wait for an interpretation.

For Pentecostals, the public use of tongues function very much like prophecy, in that they publicly address the congregation with a word of knowledge although the words are unknown and require interpretation, another a charismatic gift found in 1 Cor. 12:10, "to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues." However, frequently no interpretation materialized resulting in more confusion and uncertainty.

Response

Should we expect words of knowledge or tongues today? And, if we should expect them, should they look like the modern Pentecostal practices listed above? *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession* unmistakably states that God speaks to us. For example, in the Divine Service, absolution is "the very voice of the gospel."⁷ The question, however, is not if God speaks, but rather what He says to us and how He says it.

Like Lutherans, Pentecostals find that God speaks in His Word to us in the Holy Scriptures, however, not just in the Holy Scriptures alone. The most troubling of the Pentecostal distinctives is its emphasis on emotional human experience over the external Word. Renowned Pentecostal scholar Gordon Fee argues for the perpetuity of the Pentecostal gifts. He states the Pen-

tecostal “experience itself has been so empowering, so thoroughly life-changing, both in terms of personal obedience to God and readiness and empowerment for witness, that they instinctively know that it must be from God—and therefore must be biblical.”⁸ Thus, for Fee, the external outcomes point to biblical veracity. Koo Dong Yun, a professor at Bethany University of the Assemblies of God which I attended, notes that Christians in Lutheran churches were “attracted by emotional and experiential orientation of the Pentecostal movement and somewhat bored by dry-ritual-oriented mainline churches.”⁹

Yet, Pentecostals fail to evaluate the so-called “vibrancy” found in prophecies and tongues. Essential to the Pentecostal perspective is the centrality of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers. However, the Spirit’s activity is not, as Pentecostals assume, to answer personal questions about whom one should marry or what house to buy. Rather, as Scripture consistently indicates, the work of the Holy Spirit is to point to Christ (John 16:13-14). The Spirit makes it possible for us to know, recognize, and experience Christ. Jesus comments on the purpose of the Spirit in John 14:26, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” The Holy Spirit’s work is to glorify Christ.

Klemet Preus states that the proclamation of the Gospel marks the activity of the Holy Spirit, “If the Gospel of Christ is proclaimed, then the Holy Spirit is active. And if the Holy Spirit is active, then there must be the proclamation of the Christ. There can be no wordless Spirit and there can be no Spiritless Word.”¹⁰ Francis Pieper concurs and even specifically addresses these words of knowledge, “In general, all who divorce the operation of the Holy Ghost from the Word of Scripture make private or immediate revelations their principle in theology.”¹¹

The LCMS CTCR document, *The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement* states, “God has not promised to reveal His will to us directly and immediately (without means), as for example through visions and dreams.”¹² Scripture nowhere promises that God speaks to us immediately as He spoke to the Apostles

and Prophets. We must look to where God has promised to speak, in Word and Sacrament. Pentecostal words of knowledge have the propensity to make one doubt God, if the prophetic word of knowledge fails to materialize, or, as Deere even recommends, to blame oneself if one cannot hear His voice.

Luther elucidates in the *Smalcald Articles*, “Therefore we should and must insist that God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of his external Word and sacrament. Everything that boasts of being from the Spirit apart from such a Word and sacrament is of the devil.”¹³ The assumption that prophetic words of knowledge are the norm for today if we just “give God a chance” is simply erroneous.

Miraculous gifts in Scripture were sign gifts intended to point us to Christ and to apostolic teaching. Gregory Lockwood clarifies, “With the passing of the apostolic age and the decreasing need for this foundational gift (Eph. 2:20), [prophecy] gradually faded from the scene... The chief reason for the decline of prophecy is that it was replaced by the written word of God.”¹⁴ In 1 Cor. 4:6, Paul instructs us to look to the external Word, rather than expecting that which Christ has not promised, in order “that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.” The Scriptures tie these revelatory gifts to the Apostles, and to the laying on of hands by the Apostles (Acts 8:18, Rom. 1:11). These miraculous gifts of prophecies and tongues ceased simply because they served as signs (1 Cor. 14:22) of the Apostolic office now completed (Eph. 2:20; Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor. 15:8).

D.G. Hart states that pietism, which Pentecostalism exemplifies, “tapped sentiments of discontent with the formalities of correct theology and liturgy that defined Lutheran orthodoxy.”¹⁵ Pentecostalism has influenced our thinking about the voice of God. Looking for God’s Word in immediate prophecies and tongues leave us only with subjective enthusiasm. However, for Lutherans the Spirit and the voice of God come to us in the means of grace: the external Word and the Sacraments. In Word and Sacrament, we have all the blessings of the Spirit that are ours in Christ. Hebrews 1:1-2 states, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in

these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”

The Formula of Concord says it well, “We believe teach and confess that the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments alone.”¹⁶ Lockwood concurs, affirming God’s Word in the Scriptures:

If prophesy, like apostleship, was intended as a gift for the church’s foundational period (Eph 2:20; 3:5), to encourage her and provide direction during her infancy, then that need has been met, and the church no longer needs that charismatic gift; she has all she needs for her welfare and instruction in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures. The Gospel and full council of God are proclaimed through preaching and teaching forth the Scriptures.¹⁷

Finally, I commend a fine book on Pentecostal distinctives from a confessional Lutheran perspective by Douglas Judisch, *An Evaluation of Claims to the Charismatic Gifts*. The book is out-of-print, but a very affordable reprint is available at the Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne’s online bookstore. I mention this work especially for the judicious handling of a key text in 1 Cor.13: 8-10, “As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.” God intended tongues and prophecies as temporary sign gifts. These gifts served the church until the apostolic witness was complete. And now, speaking of Scripture, Peter says in 2 Peter 1:19, “We have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”



¹AE, 24, 367

²Gary B. McGee, “More Than Evangelical: The Challenge of the Evolving Theological Identity of the Assemblies of God,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 296-7.

³Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Voice of God: How God Speaks Today Through Prophecies, Dreams, and Visions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 63.

⁴Deere, *Surprised*, 220.

⁵Deere, *Surprised*, 198.

⁶“The Statement of Fundamental Truths,” *The General Council of the Assemblies of God*, last modified Aug. 21, 2024, www.ag.org. AP, 11, 2.

⁷Gordon D. Fee, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit: The Issue of Separability and Subsequence,” *Pneuma*:

⁸*The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 7, No. 2 (Fall 1985): 88.

⁹Koo Dong Yun, “Water Baptism and Spirit Baptism: Pentecostal and Lutherans in Dialogue,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 43, No. 4 (Winter 2004): 346.

¹⁰Klemet I. Preus, *The Fire and the Staff: Lutheran Theology in Practice*. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2004), 82.

¹¹Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951) Vol. 1, 208.

¹²Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. *The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement*. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), 6.

¹³SA, 3, 8:10.

¹⁴Gregory J. Lockwood, *Concordia Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, ed. Dean O. Wenthe (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 431.

¹⁵D.G. Hart, *The Lost Soul of American Protestantism*, (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 43.

¹⁶FC, SD, Rule and Norm, 1.

¹⁷Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 438.

WHY I AM A LUTHERAN: FROM ROMAN CATHOLICISM TO LUTHERANISM

Pastor Jeffery Pautz

Introduction

My father was raised and confirmed in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. He lapsed from the faith before marrying my mother, a practicing Roman Catholic. I was raised in the Roman Catholic Church.

I grew up attending Sunday Mass and days of obligation with my mom and younger brother. Saturday mornings were dedicated to the Roman equivalent of Sunday School beginning in first grade. I received First Communion at the end of second grade. I was confirmed at the end of my Junior year in High School.

I loved everything about church during my grade school years. The beauty of the sanctuary, singing hymns, smelling the incense, and the occasional splash of holy water from the priest. This is not to exclude prayers to Mary and the saints, table and bedtime prayers, and even the confessional booth. I dare say it was beautiful, orderly and if a feeling might be associated with this childhood experience, it felt holy.

Shame and Despair

As time passed, my childhood experience was supplanted with a burdened conscience. I was beginning to experience what is written, “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20)

My thoughts, words, and deeds were anything but beautiful. I talked to my mom about it. I talked to a

few Sunday School teachers about it. I went to private confession with my priest numerous times. No one was able to help. I tried harder. Yet, my anger at this helplessness and the increasing burden eventually cooled to sadness and hopelessness. I gave up the faith before my sophomore year in college. Yet, by the grace of God, this lasted less than a few years.

Roman Teaching

In hindsight, I was chaffing under a few Roman teachings. Those teachings are the unwritten traditions, the Mass, and the Penitential System. The Biblical teaching of the means of grace was instrumental in helping me live in the Gospel rather than being stuck under the burden of the Law. For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on:

1. Unwritten Traditions added to Holy Scripture
2. Sacrifice of the Mass added to the Divine Service
3. Acts of Penance added to Justification through faith alone

Unwritten Traditions and Holy Scripture

Rome: Unwritten Traditions added to Holy Scripture

Rome claims that unwritten traditions need to be added to the Holy Scriptures for salvation. Let me quote from one of their teaching documents:

Pastor Jeff Pautz is Pastor at Our Savior
Lutheran Church in Muscatine, IA.

“The most holy ecumenical and general Synod of Trent...perceiving that this truth and instruction is contained in *the written book¹ and the unwritten traditions*,...receives and venerates with equal devotion and reverence all the books of the Old and New Testament (since one God is the author of both) *and also said traditions*, both those pertaining to faith and those pertaining to morals as dictated whether orally by Christ or by the Holy Spirit and preserved by continuous succession in the Catholic Church (emphasis mine).”²

It is good that Rome claims God is the author of Holy Scripture. However, they teach that Holy Scripture is not sufficient for salvation. The unwritten traditions of the papacy must be added. Rome quotes Jesus in support of both the Holy Scripture and the unwritten traditions, “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you.” (John 14:25)

This is referring to Holy Scripture. But they claim Jesus is talking about an unwritten tradition that will be given by the Father to Peter and the papacy that follows Him. Jesus says, “But the Helper, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” (John 14:26)

As a young man, I believed in Jesus. However, I was taught that more was required of me than trust in Jesus. At first, I was eager to do those additional things the priest told me to do, which he claimed the Pope received by direct revelation over the centuries. What things? Unwritten things such as prayer to Mary, veneration of the saints, days of obligation, and more. These things did help me become more sensitive to my sin. On the other hand, the awareness of my sin was growing faster than my weak attempts to address it with good works of any kind, whether written or unwritten. My conscience was increasingly burdened. I was overwhelmed.

Lutheran: Holy Scripture without the unwritten traditions

I am a Lutheran because of God’s Holy Scripture. The Holy Bible had been a closed book to me. A faithful Lutheran pastor pointed me back to the Bible, specifi-

cally this verse, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

“That the man of God may be complete.” I cannot express how encouraging this was to me. Rome argued that Holy Scripture was not sufficient for the man of God to be complete. Lutheranism held up Holy Scripture alone, giving me a real hope and a real foundation. God has supplied me with all that is needed. That pastor opened the Bible for me and I have been receiving from God ever since.

The Sacrifice of the Mass and the Divine Service

Rome: The Sacrifice of the Mass added to the Divine Service

Rome taught me that worship is a sacrifice made to appease God’s wrath toward me. They taught me that the direction of worship is from me to God. A quote from one of their teaching documents:

“If anyone says that the Mass is merely a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, or a bare commemoration of the sacrifice performed on the cross, not however a propitiatory sacrifice, or that it benefits him only who eats and that it not be offered for the living and the dead for sins, punishments, satisfactions, and other necessities, let him be anathema.”³

There is a lot to disagree with here but most especially the term “propitiatory sacrifice.” A propitiatory sacrifice is a blood sacrifice that appeases God’s wrath. However, Jesus Christ is the only one who can give such a sacrifice to God. Yet, the Romans require such a sacrifice from sinners to God. Therefore, they teach and practice an un-bloody sacrifice to appease God. This is a spiritualized re-sacrifice of Christ. Christ shed His blood once on the cross but His blood is re-shed at every Roman sacrifice of the Mass.

This, too, became a burden to my conscience. I went to church expecting to receive nothing from God but hoping that my worship of Him would appease His wrath against me. It took some patient teaching through the Bible for me to see that God's intention for the Mass was not my sacrifice to Him but His service to me through His sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Lutheran: The Divine Service without the Sacrifice of the Mass

I am a Lutheran because God serves His people. I learned that the direction of worship is from God to His people.

Why did God bring His people out of Egypt to Mount Sinai? He did it to serve them. He meets with Moses and the elders on the mountain, shares a meal with them, and gives His word to Moses to teach the people. It is written, "So they saw God, and they ate and drank...and I [the LORD] will give you [Moses] tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them." (Exodus 24:11-12)

Then God invites them to attend the first Divine Service (see Leviticus 9). The pattern of that Divine Service recorded in Leviticus 9 remained throughout the Old Testament. Christ continues the pattern in the New Testament (see 1 Corinthians 11:23). That pattern is found in each of the Divine Service settings found in our hymnals.⁴ God continues to serve His people by clearly holding up the offer of His Gospel.

An analogy of an engagement ring may help illustrate the beauty of the Divine Service. The gold band of an engagement ring is the setting for the diamond. The focus is the diamond. No one seeks to see a young woman's engagement ring and compliments the gold band. Rather, people admire the beauty of the diamond. They view the diamond from multiple angles to see all its facets and the beauty of its reflected light. Likewise, the Divine Service is Holy Scripture stitched together in a way that holds the Gospel up as the central focus. God's Law is like the gold band. His Law is Holy Scripture and is the setting for the God's Gospel. His Gospel is like the diamond. It is clearly lifted up as the most important part of the Divine Service.

I cannot express how much comfort and consolation this is to me. At each celebration of the Divine Service, God comes to us, teaches us, and gives us His body and blood to eat and drink. What does God ask in return? He asks that we say "thank you" for what He has done. (Luke 17:17-19)

Acts of Penance and Justification

Rome: Acts of Penance added to Justification

Rome taught me to not trust Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins. Quoting from another one of Rome's teaching documents, "If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than trust in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this trust alone by which we are justified, let him be anathema."⁵

Rome taught me that faith is not trust. Rather, faith is knowledge. Therefore, with the correct knowledge about Jesus, I could then begin to do good works for my salvation. I was taught that I needed to do acts of penance to purge myself from my sin.

The Roman penitential system is designed to purge the sinner of sin using God's Law. Maybe that sounds like a good idea. However, those acts of penance become more important than faith in Jesus. Those acts of penance also become more important than the Gospel of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection for sinners. I began to view our heavenly Father as constantly disappointed in me, if not increasingly angry at me. This led to a sense of hopelessness.

Lutheran: Justification without Acts of Penance

I am Lutheran because faith in Jesus receives the forgiveness of sins. God Himself has written, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9) Could it be that straight forward? Could God give me salvation as a gift for the sake of Christ?

I was directed to the account of Abraham, "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; and James 2:23) Therefore, God counts faith as righteousness. No acts of penance are required.

But what about purging my sin? St. Paul writes to the church in Rome, “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes.” (Romans 1:16) The Gospel is the power of God for salvation, not God’s Law. Again, no acts of penance are required. But how can I get this faith? Again, St. Paul writes, “So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17) And again, no acts of penance are required.

Finally, how then shall I live? It is written, “For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17) The Lutherans summarize this teaching in the Augsburg Confession:

“Also, they [The Lutherans] teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight.” (Romans 3:1-26; 4:5)⁶

Conclusion

Holy Scripture is complete. God has written all that is needed for sinners to be received by Him. Second, the Divine Service is God coming to His people with the gift of His Gospel. The entire Divine Service is Holy Scripture stitched together with the Gospel lifted up and given to all who will receive it. Finally, the Doctrine of Justification teaches the Faith that receives the forgiveness of sins as a gift for the sake of Jesus. The Holy Triune God is more beautiful than any ornate sanctuary. This is rest for my soul and certainty of my salvation.



¹*The Holy Scriptures; The Holy Bible*

²Martin Chemnitz, “First Decree of the Fourth Session of April 5, 1546,” in *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 1. Tr. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 37.

³The true Roman Catholic teaching that in the mass, a true sacrifice and atonement is offered to God. Cf. Martin Chemnitz, “Section I, Chapter II, Canon III,” in *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 2. Tr. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 440.

⁴John W. Kleinig, *Leviticus* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 185

⁵Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 1, 460.

⁶AC, IV, 1-3.

WHY I AM A LUTHERAN: FROM CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE TO LUTHERANISM

Pastor Kent Peck

I grew up in the Church of the Nazarene. My dad was a Nazarene pastor and my mom was always the pianist/organist for the congregations that he served. My whole childhood revolved around church, which was a good thing. It instilled in me a curiosity and hunger for the Scriptures. I remember sitting around the table, often well into the night, discussing theology with my dad or sitting and listening as he and parishioners and friends would do the same. Even today, there is nothing I desire more than to talk about Holy Scripture and theology. And even though I would later begin to question the doctrine and practice of the Nazarene Church, I am still thankful for the good and godly example my parents set. They always encouraged me to study the Scriptures and live a godly life. That is the good. Now for the bad.

The Church of the Nazarene was founded in 1908 as a blend of Pentecostal and Wesleyan confessions. Their main theological emphasis is on “entire sanctification”.¹ In short, salvation is a two-step process. First the individual must *get saved*. Which means that he must make a decision to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior, often praying ‘the sinner’s prayer.’ This is usually done during altar calls at the conclusion of every service, at the end of Sunday School classes, the last day of VBS, or even in one-on-one conversations.

The second step then is to *get sanctified*. This is when a

Pastor Kent Peck is Pastor at St. Peter
Lutheran Church in Westgate, IA and Grace
Lutheran Church in Fayette, IA.

“saved” person makes a further decision to surrender his life and his will completely to God. And as soon as that decision is made, according to the Nazarene teaching, the individual will immediately be so filled with the Holy Spirit, that perfection and sinlessness are achieved in an instant. One can live sinlessly here and now in this life, and this perfection can be maintained throughout. And some of the ways that holiness can be obtained is by avoiding such sinful activities as drinking alcohol, smoking, dancing (even school dances), watching TV or movies, wearing makeup, playing cards, and gambling. As I was taught, “You don’t drink, smoke, or chew or go out with girls that do.”

This of course causes Lutherans to roll their eyes or laughingly ask, “How’s that going for you?” Such a reaction makes sense when you begin your theological approach with Justification by grace through faith. But in the Nazarene Church they begin with sanctification and work their way backwards to justification. So that we can follow the mental gymnastics, we will do the same. This is their official statement on “Christian Holiness and Entire Sanctification”:

“We believe that sanctification is the work of God which transforms believers into the likeness of Christ. It is wrought by God’s grace through the Holy Spirit in initial sanctification, or regeneration (simultaneous with justification), entire sanctification, and the continued perfecting work of the Holy Spirit culminating in glorification. In glorification, we are fully conformed

to the image of the Son.”²

As you can see, there is an initial sanctification that coincides with regeneration, but then entire sanctification leading to glorification is to be achieved. And the following is how this is done:

“We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God, subsequent to regeneration, by which believers are made free from original sin, or depravity, and brought into a state of entire devotion to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect. It is wrought by the baptism with or infilling of the Holy Spirit, and comprehends in one experience the cleansing of the heart from sin and the abiding, indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, empowering the believer for life and service. Entire sanctification is provided by the blood of Jesus, is wrought instantaneously by grace through faith, preceded by entire consecration; and to this work and state of grace the Holy Spirit bears witness.”³

Water baptism accomplishes nothing other than to serve a testimony that you are a believer. Where it is really at, is being baptized in the Holy Spirit. This baptism of the Spirit so fills you that all vestiges of sinfulness are “washed away.” Your original sinful nature is gone and you can live sinlessly and the Holy Spirit will tell you personally as much. Certainly not according to the Word. For the Spirit that is bound to the Scriptures would remind us exactly what goes on in Baptism in Romans 6 and the continuous battle between the old sinful nature and our new nature given in Baptism in Romans 7. This battle lasts until we die. Nevertheless, the Nazarenes reject such a confession and claim the death of the old nature now:

“This experience is also known by various terms representing its different phases, such as ‘Christian perfection,’ ‘perfect love,’ ‘heart purity,’ ‘the baptism with or infilling of the Holy Spirit,’ ‘the fullness of the blessing,’ and ‘Christian holiness.’ We believe that

there is a marked distinction between a pure heart and a mature character. The former is obtained in an instant, the result of entire sanctification; the latter is the result of growth in grace.”⁴

They did have to make an allowance for ignorance of sins, which does not condemn you. You can thereby have your perfection preserved. This is contrary to Romans 7:7-12, especially verse 9, “I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.” The Nazarenes reject this and teach that as you mature in the faith you will not be convicted or dead, but you will, by the Spirit’s leading and your own maturity, make adjustments to your life accordingly. Thus, the following statement:

“We believe that the grace of entire sanctification includes the divine impulse to grow in grace as a Christlike disciple. However, this impulse must be consciously nurtured, and careful attention given to the requisites and processes of spiritual development and improvement in Christlikeness of character and personality. Without such purposeful endeavor, one’s witness may be impaired and the grace itself frustrated and ultimately lost.”⁵

If you do not develop yourself properly you will be a bad witness and lead other people to hell and your own salvation will be lost.

“Participating in the means of grace, especially the fellowship, disciplines, and sacraments of the Church, believers grow in grace and in wholehearted love to God and neighbor.”⁶

What they mean by “means of grace” and “sacraments” would be the topic of another paper, but at least note that their “means of grace,” in order of importance, are fellowship and discipline followed by sacraments. Fellowship creates accountability to others which in turn may lead to you being disciplined by them or you following the prescribed disciplines as listed in the Church’s confessional document, *The Manual*.⁷

Again, this confession of entire sanctification is

the primary focus of the Church of the Nazarene. It is their beginning point and their entire theology flows from it. So as Lutherans who begin with justification, we ask, "What about original sin and total depravity? What about lustful and angry thoughts that we have toward others as Jesus mentions in Matthew 5:21-28? Can a person control and eliminate such thoughts? Do they not count as sin?" All good questions. Briefly, here is what they have to say:

"We believe that original sin, or depravity, is that corruption of the nature of all the offspring of Adam by reason of which everyone is very far gone from original righteousness or the pure state of our first parents at the time of their creation, is averse to God, is without spiritual life, and inclined to evil, and that continually. We further believe that original sin continues to exist with the new life of the regenerate, until the heart is fully cleansed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit."⁸

According to the Church of the Nazarene, humanity is very far gone, but not gone completely. There is still some small bit of goodness in us. They call this prevenient grace. Grace either being a substance or a grace that exists in mankind apart from God. And also note that being regenerated means you still have original sin, but even that can be done away with by being baptized with the Holy Spirit.

"We believe that original sin differs from actual sin in that it constitutes an inherited propensity to actual sin for which no one is accountable until its divinely provided remedy is neglected or rejected."⁹

No one is held accountable for their sinfulness until they are confronted with the Word of God. Why do evangelism then? Wouldn't they remain innocent in their ignorance?

"We believe that actual or personal sin is a voluntary violation of a known law of God by a morally responsible per-

son. It is therefore not to be confused with involuntary and inescapable shortcomings, infirmities, faults, mistakes, failures, or other deviations from a standard of perfect conduct that are the residual effects of the Fall. However, such innocent effects do not include attitudes or responses contrary to the spirit of Christ, which may properly be called sins of the spirit. We believe that personal sin is primarily and essentially a violation of the law of love; and that in relation to Christ sin may be defined as unbelief."¹⁰

A morally irresponsible person is off the hook in regard to having sin counted against them, such as infants, young children, and the mentally handicapped. Those lustful and angry thoughts are just involuntary mistakes, not sins. As I learned growing up, thoughts were not sins. Only if you dwelt on them or acted on them were they sinful. It certainly helps a person to be perfect and holy if sins can be considered faults and mistakes and not worthy of judgment or condemnation.

I know there are many more questions and concerns that the teachings of the Church of the Nazarene raise in just reviewing these two articles of doctrine, but these were the key things I struggled with as a member of that confession. I was brought up to interpret the Scriptures through this lens of entire sanctification. When the Lord told His people "You shall be holy, for I am holy" in Leviticus 20:7 and 1 Peter 1:16, I was trained to hear that as a challenge or as an achievable goal. Yes, the Holy Spirit dwelled in me, but I was the one who let Him in and I was the one who had to maintain the holiness and perfection. And if I sinned, the Holy Spirit left me completely and I was outside of salvation and had to go back to square one and *get saved* again and begin working my way back to perfection.

I went through this cycle many, many times throughout my life until I was about 22 or 23 years old. And then I gave up. I thought something was wrong with me because I kept sinning and I was getting so tired of trying to be perfect. I grew to resent those who seemed to have no problem living sinless lives or at

least saying that they do, So, I went the way of despair. I left the church and had nothing to do with Christianity for about six years.

It was during my adult catechesis, led by an Elder of the congregation, that the light of the Gospel began to dawn on me. The Elder gave me Walther's *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* to read. I devoured it. While reading it, I could feel the burden of the Law lifted from my shoulders. I had been given the lens to properly read and understand the Scriptures. What great joy and comfort it gave me and continues to give me!

Why am I a Lutheran? Because the Lutheran confession of the Gospel is the truest and purest on the planet. Our confession is drawn from and is in complete agreement with the Holy Scriptures. Hopefully as you can see, right doctrine and practice matter. The reason we Lutherans are such sticklers for pure doctrine is not because we want to trumpet that we are right and everyone else is wrong; or because we claim that we are going to heaven and they are going to hell. No, teaching the Scriptures correctly is part of fulfilling the command to love your neighbor as yourself. For those Christians that are unnecessarily burdened by the Law, we want them to know and enjoy the freedom of the Gospel that we enjoy. So I encourage you all to cling to our wonderful confession and rejoice in the comfort and solace it gives!



¹"Founding | Church of the Nazarene." n.d. Nazarene.org. <https://nazarene.org/founding>.

²The Church of the Nazarene Constitution, Article 10.

³The Church of the Nazarene Constitution, Article 10

⁴The Church of the Nazarene Constitution, Article 10, Section 10-10.1.

⁵The Church of the Nazarene Constitution, Article 10, Section 10.1.

⁶The Church of the Nazarene Constitution, Article 10, Section 10.1.

⁷The Church of the Nazarene, "The Manual," <https://resources.nazarene.org/index.php/s/KGjJra8WZQjjZwb>.

⁸The Church of the Nazarene Constitution, Article 5, Section 5.1.

⁹The Church of the Nazarene Constitution, Article 5, Section 5.2.

¹⁰The Church of the Nazarene Constitution, Article 5, Section 5.3.

BOOK REVIEW - WHY I AM A LUTHERAN: JESUS AT THE CENTER

Pastor W. Max Mons

In this brief book, Daniel Preus sets out to answer the question, "Why am I a Lutheran?" He does so by addressing central doctrines of Christianity such as sin and grace, Law and Gospel, the person and work of Jesus Christ, worship, the Sacraments, and the Office of the Ministry. The answer he gives is "Jesus," who is at the center of all that is Christian. Preus writes, "I am a Lutheran for the same reason I am a Christian. It is not by choice but by grace. The teachings of the Lutheran Church place Jesus at the center because the teachings of the Scriptures place Jesus at the center. No other confession demonstrates such fidelity to the truths of God's Word. No other confession so glorifies Christ by placing Him at the center of all it confesses and teaches. Being a Lutheran is truly all about Jesus." (p. 195)

Indeed, this book is all about Jesus, who He is and what He has done for us. Take the chapter entitled, "A Matter of Mountains." In this chapter, Preus discusses the significance and meaning of Mount Sinai (where God gave the Law), Mount Calvary (where Christ died for us), and Mount Zion (represents our future hope in Christ). In lucid fashion, Preus shows how Christ fulfilled the law for us (Sinai), took the punishment for our sins against the Law (Calvary), and is leading us to the fulfillment of the hope we have in Him (Zion). Without Jesus, none of this is possible. As Preus says, "If we never come to Mount Calvary, we can never live on Mount Zion" (p. 61).

The book beautifully defines and explains God's grace and how it is that Jesus has done everything for our

salvation. The book also exposes the heresies and false doctrines, that are so prevalent in American Christianity. These heresies and doctrines encourage people to take credit for their own part in faith, repentance, and Baptism. This is foreign to the Bible and to Lutherans, who often define "faith" as "trust." That trust is created through the actions of He who is trusted (that He is Jesus) and not our actions. God's love alone gives us the Christian life through Jesus. This is what makes Christianity different from all other religions, but when people are taught that they have done something towards their salvation, Christianity becomes like every other religion. In a winsome and straightforward way, Preus makes this point. As a campus pastor who deals with parachurch groups that lead people to "give their life to Jesus," Preus' treatment of these heresies and false doctrines has been extremely helpful when talking to students who have been taken in by these groups.

The book is easy to read. The author employs real life stories and examples to which the readers can relate. I recommend it for your own edification. If your church has a book club, this would be an excellent choice. I also recommend that it be given to friends and family members who are curious about Christianity and Lutheran doctrine.



Why I Am a Lutheran: Jesus at the Center. Daniel Preus, Concordia Publishing House, 2004

Pastor W. Max Mons is Pastor at St. Paul's Lutheran Chapel in Iowa City, IA and also serves as IDE 1st Vice-President.

BOOK REVIEW -

HAS AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY FAILED?

Pastor Stephen Preus

Peter was walking on water. Jesus had commanded him to come out to Him on the sea. And as Peter gazed at Jesus, he stood firmly on the water. But what happened as soon as Peter took his eyes off of our Lord? He began to sink (Matthew 14:30). And sinking is exactly what is happening to much of American Christianity right now. Why? For the same reason that Peter began to sink. Because the preaching of American Christianity is teaching Christians not to focus on *Christ* but on *themselves*. In his book, Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller addresses what causes this error in American Christianity and offers the Scriptural correction that is desperately needed for every Christian: Christ and His saving Word.

Wolfmueller begins his book by writing in Chapter One of four characteristics that make up “the theological landscape of American Christianity.” Each of these characteristics contributes toward Christians focusing on *themselves* instead of *Jesus*.

Revivalism focuses the Christian life on a personal decision to accept Jesus instead of the Holy Spirit calling us to faith by the Gospel.

Pietism says the Christian life is chiefly about growing in good works instead of chiefly about Christ’s work for us sinners.

Mysticism makes the Christian life about some unmediated encounter with God instead of God encountering us through His means of grace.

Pastor Stephen Preus is Pastor at Trinity
Lutheran Church in Vinton, IA.

Enthusiasm tells us that our spiritual life is centered *inside* of us instead of *outside* of us in the Word and Sacraments.

Each of these four characteristics of American Christianity turns the eyes of the heart *inward* toward our sinful selves instead of *outward* to the Savior of sinners. So, in the end, “American Christianity fails because its yoke is wearisome and its burden is heavy” (p. 10).

“The alternative that Jesus has for us is light and easy” (p. 10). The alternative is, as Hebrews puts it, “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). The alternative is forgiveness in Christ, His mercy and kindness, His comfort and the joy of His certain promises, which overflow from the pages of Scripture. Instead of focusing the hearts of Christians on *Christians*, the true Gospel focuses us on *Christ*. This has us walking with Jesus all the way and not sinking into self-focused ideas of Christianity.

Wolfmueller spends most of his book showing this biblical alternative to American Christianity, which we find in the Lutheran Church. He addresses:

How God speaks to you through Scripture alone and how this does not need to be spiced up. Nothing is more exciting than God’s pure Word (Chapter Two).

How bad you truly are by nature and how your view of your sin influences your view of your Savior on the cross (Chapter Three).

How Christ’s cross, the teaching of Jesus dying for sinners, is the central teaching of Christianity (Chapter Four).

How God counts you righteous for Christ's sake and not based on your works, showing the comforting truth that a good conscience is a forgiven conscience, not one without sin (Chapter Five).

How your spiritual life is nourished not from inside of you but from outside through the objective means of grace, defending a biblical view of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Chapter Six).

How good works truly fit into the Christian life. How they are done in faith, in obedience to God's actual commandments, for His glory, and for the benefit of our neighbor (Chapter Seven).

How you live out the baptized life in your various vocations and begin to love your neighbor in this life with the comfort that your salvation is already finished in Christ (Chapter Eight).

How prayer is suffering, wrestling with God which alone can undo our worry and anxiety (Chapter Nine).

How the end of the world will really come about, how to read the book of Revelation faithfully, and how hopeful Christ's return in glory is for the Christian (Chapter Ten).

How surprising the pure Gospel is in contrast to a self-focused American Christianity that leads so many to sink into despair or pridefully trust in themselves (Chapter Eleven).

Written by a man who knows from experience how American Christianity has failed him, Wolfmueller presents, throughout the book, the biblical, comforting alternative that brings certainty in Christ to the Christian conscience.

I recommend this book to high schoolers through adults. I especially recommend it for parents who might be tempted into thinking that "just being a Christian" is good enough instead of encouraging their children toward the purity of teaching in the Lutheran Church. It really is the difference between walking on water and sinking.



Has American Christianity Failed?, Bryan Wolfmueller, Concordia Publishing House, 2016

SPEAKING OF HYMN...

Reflections on LSB 622

“Lord Jesus Christ, You Have Prepared”

Pastor Nathan Wille

Article X of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession rightly confesses what we believe takes place in the Lord's Supper, as well as those doctrines which we condemn. The hymn, “Lord Jesus Christ, You Have Prepared” (*Lutheran Service Book*, 620) does this as well. The first stanza confesses that which we believe and what we receive in the Lord's Supper: “It is Your body and Your blood,” and that those who receive it rightly are weary souls harangued by sin, in dire need of rest, comfort, and pardon from sin and death.

The condemnation of those who teach falsely begins in the second stanza. It is an argument against those who deny the Real Presence in the Lord's Supper. Some rightly point out that Jesus has ascended into Heaven. However, they wrongly surmise that our Lord cannot be physically and bodily present in the Lord's Supper. Stanza two ends, not with a period, but with a comma. It begins the argument, and rightly confesses that we cannot see His glory and majesty until the day of Judgment. A plea for organists and pastors alike: please do not separate stanzas two and three.

Stanza three turns the argument into a bold statement: yes, these things in stanza two are correct! But despite all of these things, our Lord “is not confined to any habitation.” In fact, He is present, even now during the distribution of the Supper. This is true, the hymn states, despite any mental gymnastics or hermeneutical dishonesty. Stanza four sums up the second and third stanzas, plainly describing what the faithful are doing when they partake of the Supper: eating, drinking, believing, and receiving, all because the Word of the Lord says so.

Stanza five sums up the Lutheran understanding: reason cannot understand the mystery, but it is embraced by faith. The highlight of this hymn is the last three lines of the fifth stanza, “I leave to You how this can be; Your Word alone suffices me; I trust its truth un fading” The Word of God does not fit within the tiny box of man's greatest understanding. It cannot, for salvation lies outside of us, and therefore, outside of our understanding. Reason must bend the knee to the King of Kings, rather than tinker with what His Word is and says. Lutheranism holds to the word “is” as in, *this is My body*.

The last three stanzas of this underrated hymn are a prayer. Stanza six rightly confesses that we as sinful men experience doubt, but it confesses so in a plea to Almighty God to help us in our unbelief. Stanza seven pleads with God to let us receive this Supper as those who will not receive it to our judgment (1 Corinthians 11), that is, as repentant souls, discerning the Lord's body and blood. Stanza eight is a fitting prayer for all souls who approach our Lord's table. It thanks God for the grace in tangible forms that we receive in the Supper. It also asks God to preserve this sacrament in the world that despises it. We pray the prayer of the faithful in John 6:34, “give us this bread always.” The stanza ends with a final plea: “grant that this sacrament may be a blessed comfort unto me when living and when dying,” that is, take not this Supper out of our midst.

Why are we Lutheran? Because we believe what God says in His Word. No lies of the devil, no sophistry in tinkering with the clear Word of Scripture can take this from us. This faith is the biblical faith, that which the apostles received and handed down to us. And so it is that we pray: “Preserve it, for in every place the world against it rages.”

Pastor Nathan Wille is Pastor at Trinity
Lutheran Church in Clinton, IA.