

# CHANGING CHURCHES

*An Orthodox, Catholic, and Lutheran  
Theological Conversation*

Mickey L. Mattox and A. G. Roeber

*with an afterword by*

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AFTERWORD

Staying Lutheran in the Changing Church(es):  
Why We All Need Lutheran Theology

*Paul R. Hinlicky*

In the preceding pages, Mattox and Roeber present us in effect with a certain triangulation between Lutheranism, Catholicism, and Orthodoxy. As I read it, it works like this: Lutheranism, a doctrine about justification, is a version of Western Augustinianism, the ecumenically binding teaching on sin and grace that goes back to the Pelagian controversy (to which Orthodoxy also subscribed in the Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus, 431, in Canon IV's condemnation of Pelagius's partner, Celestius). When the dispute over justification is sorted out, as in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999), Lutherans may return home to Catholicism. So Mattox argues. Or, Lutheranism is a doctrine about the God-man Christ who became human that humans might become divine. As this actually draws on the Eastern Orthodox christological tradition, it leads Lutherans away from the Augustinian anthropology with its debilitating teaching on human depravity in the loss of the image of God and its merely extrinsic restitution in forensic justification. So Roeber argues (recalling also that the Council of Nicaea, 325, recognized a Roman primacy of honor among the four patriarchates of Rome, Alexandria, Ephesus, and Antioch, but conceded no universal jurisdiction to it, a teaching further developed in Canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon, 451). Lutheranism is thus resolved into Catholicism or into Orthodoxy with the result that the real ecumenical action is the reunion of Rome and Constantinople. Protestants will in the interim continue to drift one by one to Catholicism or Orthodoxy, as their already thin ecclesial reality continues to dissolve in the acids of Euro-American modernity.

If that is roughly right, it was generous of the authors to give this per-

sisting Lutheran the opportunity to respond to their work, on the chance that something might be missing in this picture, which, when added, might modify its dynamics. Such indeed is my conviction. I will begin with words of appreciation for our authors' work, followed by differentiation of my own conception of the ecumenical task of Lutheran theology. With that clarified, I will then make a case for the critical claim of the Lutheran confession and show how it cuts in the argument dividing East and West — if and when Lutheran theology comes to terms with a fundamental and debilitating contradiction going back to its own origin. I will conclude with some comments on the emerging new vision for Lutheranism as theological catalyst in the turmoil of these days.

### Appreciation

Living, as we do, in the heyday of Euro-American capitalism, consumer choice has become the cultural, and also religious, imperative of our times. Our authors, Mattox and Roeber, note this from time to time and work hard to differentiate their ecclesial choices, and this very serious book of reflections about them, from today's smorgasbord religiosity. Theirs is a book for deliberate choosers, not drifters. It is a demanding work of critical reflection, which openly acknowledges the wound of Christian disunity, which is exposed, even amplified, by the painful choices to which they have been led. Our authors therefore aspire not only to examine honestly their own transitions, but also to make their self-examination into an exercise in "spiritual ecumenism." The poignancy of this aspiration mitigates the bitter deficiencies they have been forced to face and to report in today's Protestant "collapse" (Mattox). Indeed, among the merits of this volume is the impressive effort made in it to make Luther, and Lutheranism, intelligible to sympathetic Catholic and Orthodox readers. But without exempting either Catholicism or Orthodoxy from the erosive forces at work in our culture today, Roeber and Mattox nevertheless expose to painful sunlight a deeply wounded Lutheranism, telling how they came to see in their respective journeys a "crucial rift" in ecclesiology that makes the choices they have made, and the rationales they have found for them, illuminating if not also compelling for others.

Why would a Lutheran disagree? This Lutheran does not, so far as this analysis goes. As Carl Braaten likes to say, "Lutheranism is a theology, not a church"; that is, it is a movement of reform within the church catholic whose

existence as a separated church is ad hoc, at best.<sup>1</sup> Whenever we try to turn it into a church properly speaking, Lutheranism devours itself in short order, as each minister of Word and sacrament,<sup>2</sup> indeed each baptized and confirmed layman or laywoman, conscientiously contends for the truth of the gospel in a church otherwise inclined to stray from it. Paul's famous rebuke of Peter in Antioch (Gal. 2:11ff.) becomes the operative model of authority in the church (without, however, Paul's self-submission to the *Verbum externum*, Gal. 1:8, and eagerness for unity on that basis, Gal. 2:1-10). Consequently, a corrective applied to a corrective, as it were, becomes an imperative of reform for reform's sake, eating itself up in a chaos of conflicting critiques, as is currently happening in my denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), which is coming apart at the seams in a dispute over whether the gospel mandates the full inclusion of gays and lesbians on the theological basis of "simple, shared humanity"<sup>3</sup> (more on that shortly). The Lutheran dilemma, as I have argued elsewhere, is just this "unsolvable" problem of authority in the church between the times.<sup>4</sup>

Why then would one ever stay the course? If anything is true, real, existing, Lutheranism is not and never has been in a stable situation. Something is going to give!

There is, however, not only a flow from Lutheranism to Catholicism and Orthodoxy on account of Lutheranism's ecclesial deficit. There is also a flow from these latter churches, notably of disaffected women<sup>5</sup> (though Lutheranism is not typically where these women land),<sup>6</sup> on account, so to say, of an ecclesial "surplus." By this I mean what is called "realized eschatology," as if in the church we had already arrived in the kingdom of heaven. While this criticism does not deny a foretaste of the feast to come in that Eucharist

1. See Carl E. Braaten, *Mother Church: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism* (St. Paul: Augsburg Fortress, 1998).

2. As per Bruce Marshall's incisive analysis: "Review Essay: The Divided Church and Its Theology," *Modern Theology* 16, no. 3 (July 2000): 377-96.

3. So Professor Emeritus Phil Hefner of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago editorialized in *dialog* 49, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 89-90.

4. Paul R. Hinlicky, "The Lutheran Dilemma," *Pro Ecclesia* 8, no. 4 (Fall 1999): 391-422.

5. Debra Campbell, *Graceful Exits: Catholic Women and the Art of Departure* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003). I am grateful to my colleague Mary Henold for this reference; see her *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

6. See Daphne Hampson, *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 239-40.

which proclaims the Lord's death until he comes, it does point to an inflated ecclesiology that no longer knows the difference between the paradoxical presence of the crucified but risen Lord in and as his body in the still hostile world and the fullness of his coming at the consummation of all things. It thinks then of the ministry of the church as its necessary representation of an absent Lord who left a deposit of faith here below to its safekeeping rather than free service enlisted by the paradoxically present Lord to speak his promise from the Scriptures by his Word and sacraments to those called out and assembled by the gospel. This is the Lord who gives his Spirit in sovereign freedom, as he pleases, *ubi et quando Deo visum est* (AC IV), making him the Head of the church as his body, never the other way around. Absent this eschatological reserve, an enormous burden is assumed in ecclesiastical surplus: a reluctance, indeed a principled unwillingness, ever to concede that the church as church has erred, that the church as church too lives by the forgiveness of sins and the "hope of righteousness" (Gal. 5:5), that the guarantee of the Spirit to lead the church as church to all truth and to safeguard from lethal failure is and remains the Spirit's free work, not the church's secured possession, but gift to be received ever anew by repentance and faith; not assumed as an ontological given. The reason for this terrible burden and fallacy of infallibility is that one fails to think of the church as church as a fullness yet to be gained in the gospel's continuing history up to the consummation. One fails to realize, as the Pilgrim divine John Robinson famously said, that "the Lord has yet more truth to break out of His holy Word." One thinks already to have arrived.

Thinking women in particular feel that this enormous burden of ecclesiastical surplus falls on them and that the infallibility claimed by realized eschatology prevents their grievances even from being heard. It is notable in this light that the ranks of the current flow from Lutheranism that began with the celebrated case of my erstwhile fellow editor at the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, Richard John Neuhaus, are filled by prominent male intellectuals: Jaroslav Pelikan, Leonard Klein, Robert Wilken, Michael Plekon, David Gustafson, Reinhard Hütter, Bruce Marshall, Michael Root, to name only the most well known, along with our authors, Mattox and Roeber. Truth be told, sometime in the early 1990s I went to New York to discuss with Neuhaus the possibility of my own transition to Catholicism. Had that conversation gone better, my name might well have joined those above, and someone else would be writing this afterword! In any case, may I be pardoned for suggesting that there is something profoundly amiss with the gender polarization that I have just described? To be blunt: if out of this current

turmoil emerges a male-dominated Catholicism and/or Orthodoxy, reentrenched, and a female-dominated liberal Protestantism, emboldened, we will have together fallen short of Christ and simply reinforced the persisting division of the church with a new and even more inhumane twist.

Mattox and Roeber, to their credit, are aware of this danger and try to address it. But they also do not conceal the fact that their own inertia as Lutherans was overcome by the shock of rapid change in long-standing church teaching, discipline, and tradition, namely, the ordination of women in the ELCA and now of partnered gays and lesbians. The objection Mattox and Roeber register against church doctrine being subjected to majority vote at a Protestant denominational gathering is spot on. In a genuinely confessional church, a real bishop would have ruled out of order the very possibility of doctrinal pluralism on sex, marriage, and the family — the intellectually dishonest and cowardly ploy for "local option" weddings and ordinations taken by theological revisionists that manifested for all to see Lutheranism's ecclesial deficit. In one swift stroke, all in the ELCA were left to make their own policy on the point in contention, the eminently foreseeable consequence of which would be the slow, painful dismemberment of this ecclesiastical body. So I warned in anticipation<sup>7</sup> and then argued in detail at a large theological conference organized to seek new directions for Lutheranism after the ELCA's fateful decisions<sup>8</sup> (more on this in conclusion).

But have ELCA Lutherans been wrong even to entertain such everpressing missiological questions of appropriate contextualization and modernization? I think not, although raising such questions does not entail answering them as proponents of change assume and expect. Indeed, I have supported the ordination of women but opposed the blessing of same-sex unions and ordination of such partnered gays and lesbians, drawing a line so fine that, admittedly, conservatives and progressives for once agree against me that if you grant the one, you must also grant the other. I gladly concede, moreover, that in point of autobiographical fact one factor in my own Lutheran inertia is a career-long ethical commitment: as an ordained servant of Word and sacrament, I will not go where sisters in the same ministry cannot also come. So, for good or for ill, I am stuck in Lutheranism, more precisely in the ELCA version of Lutheranism (or its derivatives), unless I would be

7. E.g., Paul R. Hinlicky, "Recognition Not Blessing," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics Online* 5, no. 8 (August 2005), and "Appreciation and Critique of the ELCA Draft Social Statement on Sexuality," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics Online* 8, no. 8 (August 2008).

8. See also Paul R. Hinlicky, "Authority in the Church: A Plea for Critical Dogmatics," in *Seeking New Directions for Lutheranism*, ed. Carl Braaten (Delhi, N.Y.: ALPB Books, 2010).

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led to laicize. In these ways, as much as I appreciate Mattox's and Roeber's sensitive and illuminating accounts of their transitions, I differ from them. I am going to contend, however, that this very fine line that I try to draw, aggravating as it is both to conservatives and to progressives, represents the urgent ecumenical necessity of Lutheran theology. I have then to differentiate my alternative ecumenism and give an account of it.

### Differentiation

While I am stuck for the time being, then, in a disintegrating denomination, it is out of theological principle, which might be reduced to a slogan: "Modernization, Yes! Revisionism, No!" That means: faithful change is required of us; stick-in-the-mud, stand-pat traditionalism can be as unfaithful to the crucified but living Lord of the church as can change for change's sake, which believes every and any new spirit but does not test to see whether it is of God (1 John 4:1-2). Since being a woman has never been considered sinful in orthodox Christian doctrine<sup>9</sup> (certainly there have been misogynist theologians, even influential ones!),<sup>10</sup> and since contemporary Euro-American women are as competent as traditional men have ever been to minister the Word and sacraments of Christ, the ordination of women to shepherd a community of faith in this way is simply a modernization that may be contextually appropriate.<sup>11</sup> It is a matter of Christian freedom and church discipline.<sup>12</sup> It does not entail purchase of some radical feminist narrative of a Christian past replete with wicked, devious, abusive patriarchy. On the other hand, there is a consensus in Christian doctrine, based on Romans 1:18-32, to regard homosexual acts as "intrinsically disordered," since they cannot be open to procreation, as in the key biblical text founding and blessing marriage, Genesis 1:26-28. No consensus exists that the Bible may be read other-

9. Aware of this, and uneasy as a result, modern Orthodox theologians have made a curious attempt to invent a better rationale against the ordination of women to the priesthood, as Sarah Hinlicky Wilson patiently exposes in "Tradition, Priesthood, and Personhood in the Trinitarian Theology of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel," *Pro Ecclesia* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 129-50.

10. See Paul R. Hinlicky, "Luther against the Contempt of Women," *Lutheran Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 515-30.

11. Paul R. Hinlicky, "Whose Church? Which Ministry?" *Lutheran Forum* 42, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 48-53.

12. See Martin Luther, *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, LW 40:90-91, on freedom and conscience in matters of church order and discipline.

wise, that its statements are wrong or have been wrongly understood. Moreover, granting that Scripture and tradition have been wrong or wrongly understood in this matter would entail something more than modernization or, what is the same, something more than a recognizable development in doctrine (as when a new facet of an old truth of the gospel becomes visible and explicitly formulated in the light of new challenges, and this new formulation, in turn, becomes indispensable to the continued preaching of the gospel). Teaching that God loves gay as gay, that God desires homoerotic desire, that God creates his creatures this way, and so on would require a revision of doctrine in rejection of that normative biblical text on theological anthropology, the *imago Dei* text of Genesis 1:26-28, to which our Lord appealed when he rebuked human tampering with the creative will and command of God from the beginning of creation (Mark 10:2-9). While it is conceivable that a more generous and accepting "recognition" of Christians who are in same-sex unions is possible *on the basis of this norm* (an argument from *analogy* that I offer and submit to the judgment of the *consensus fidelium*),<sup>13</sup> I have for many years now warned that any advocacy that jeopardizes the norm itself is church-dividing.<sup>14</sup> And this latter is simply a fact: the ecumenical progress of the twentieth century, and the progress toward a Lutheran world communion, have now been stopped in their tracks by the ELCA's dishonest, willful, and sectarian decision. This divisiveness, moreover, is now playing itself out within the splintering ELCA.

More broadly in any case, this is how I understand the theology of the Lutheran Reformation: it is a modernization of Catholic doctrine, a development of the Pauline theology from the Bible and Augustine. The theology of the Lutheran Reformation is that of the "conservative Reformation," as the nineteenth-century American theologian Charles Porterfield Krauth recalled. Indeed, the accusation made in the Augsburg Confession (which will resonate with the Orthodox) is that the papal party is the innovator, that the Reformation teachings revert to forgotten or obscured ecumenical tradition, hence that "there is nothing here that departs from the Scriptures or the catholic church, or from the Roman church, insofar as we can tell from its writers" (AC, "Conclusion of Part One," summing up the doctrinal articles).<sup>15</sup> The

13. See Paul R. Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 214-18.

14. See above, n. 5.

15. *BC*, p. 59. All quotations from the Lutheran Confessions emanate from the *BC*. See also Eric W. Gritsch and Robert W. Jenson, *Lutheranism: The Theological Movement and Its Confessional Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

fact that proponents of the ecclesiastical blessing of same-sex unions, and the full inclusion of such partnered clergy, regularly appeal to some “new thing” that the Spirit is doing is justification for classifying these theologians as self-professed “enthusiasts” (SA 8.3-6; BC, p. 322), who teach that new revelation comes apart from external Word of the gospel and as such may revise and supersede what is written in the Bible, as normatively understood in the doctrinal theology of the great tradition. Development of doctrine, based on the external Word of the gospel, Yes; so I understand the theology of the conservative Reformation. Revisionism, supplanting the external Word with new revelation, No; so I understand what the Lutheran reformers decisively rejected as enthusiasm.

All this then is quite pertinent to the response I wish to make to Mattox and Roeber’s book. Has the Lutheranism they left been understood in this precise way? Perhaps it is a purely academic point, but it is nonetheless a Lutheran complaint of long standing, going all the way back to the lengthy list of heretical teachings compiled by the papal polemicist Johannes Eck during the 1520s and attributed to Martin Luther. Here the specific teaching of the Lutheran reformers was lumped uncritically together with diverse others: Karlstadt and the iconoclasts, the Zwickau prophets and Thomas Müntzer, Menno Simons and the Anabaptists, Zwingli and the Swiss “sacramentarians,” when in fact these various “Protestant” teachings are in considerable tension, if not contradiction, to one another and especially to the teaching coming out of Wittenberg.<sup>16</sup> Protestant “collapse” notwithstanding, I ask readers to consider the following case for Lutheran theology in its specificity as an *ecumenical* “corrective” that *presupposes catholicity*, decoupled then from broader generalizations about Protestantism — the history of which is in large part the history of what the sixteenth-century Lutherans rejected as “enthusiasm”! It does not matter to the case I am making that real, existing Lutheranism today has degenerated into a hodgepodge of doctrinal confusion. Cannot the same be said of popular Catholicism or popular Orthodoxy, this only being more evident in the more “democratically” organized Lutheranism? In any case, I am not arguing that we should wish to stay Lutheran as church, except as an ad hoc arrangement in which we find ourselves placed by divine Providence, but rather that we stay (or become!) Lutheran theologians, wherever we may be located in today’s divided Christianity. In fact, as I will shortly show, Lutheran theology contradicts itself when it tries to be church rather than do theology. My point is “to stay

16. Hinlicky, *Beloved Community*, pp. 281-87.

Lutheran in changing church(es),” by which I mean to think theologically beyond our debased Christianity living out the sterile stereotypes that perpetuate division for the sake of those who intend to be at once evangelical, catholic, and orthodox.

Concretely, then, I have to differentiate what I am about to present from the accounts — each in its own way accurate, sympathetic, and well grounded in Protestant history — that our authors have given in the preceding pages. Each, consciously or not, reflects one of the two forms of American Lutheranism from which he comes. Roeber, who began his life’s journey as a Roman Catholic, sojourned in the self-consciously “orthodox” Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, which takes “the golden age” of late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century Lutheran orthodoxy<sup>17</sup> as representing the classic position of Lutheranism. This background is evident in Roeber’s repeated polemic against the Western doctrine of original sin as the loss of original righteousness (as articulated by Augustine and Anselm, especially), corresponding to Lutheran orthodoxy’s teaching of forensic justification as the imputation of Christ’s extrinsic and alien righteousness (a doctrine, as we shall see, settled on only fifty-some years after the Augsburg Confession). Coming from the less doctrinal and more pietistic ELCA (not to mention his Baptist background!), Mattox in turn takes Luther’s own religious experience and spiritual-theological discoveries as the tacit source and norm of Lutheran identity. Rightly, in my view, Mattox uncovers the catholicity of Luther’s religious experience; but his ecumenical argument then works as pleading for a new Catholic recognition, given the tragic circumstances of the sixteenth century, of his historically reconstructed “catholic Luther.”

The personal histories reflected in these interpretations of Lutheranism are incorrigible; they form the platform from which our authors see what they see, as do we all. For Roeber, the oppressiveness and sterility of a theology that repeatedly restates only that “you have no choice but to be sinful, but Jesus took the rap for you” drove him to the profounder desire of the human heart for reunion with God, which he found in the Orthodox teaching of *theosis*. For Mattox, the abuse by historians of the Luther image to justify Protestant separatism drove him to uncover the catholicity of that very Luther and invited him, as it were, to defy not only with his scholarship, but also with his life, such ideological and abusive argumentation.<sup>18</sup> Both of our

17. Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 1:45.

18. I have made a similar protest in Paul R. Hinlicky, “Luther and Liberalism,” in *A Re-*

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authors have acted courageously and honorably. But for all that they have seen, I have to argue and now show, they have not seen deeply enough.

For they have not penetrated to the subtle *contradiction* at the font of “Lutheranism,” a contradiction that is debilitating in the aforementioned ways of ecclesial deficit when it is unconsciously at work, but a contradiction that can become creative as theology, when acknowledged and owned, and indeed imperative for the church between the times that has to test the spirits on the way to the unity our Lord wills. Otherwise we fail to regard Lutheranism as an interesting set of Christian theological problems in its own right, misunderstood as much by its zealous apologists as by its uncomprehending critics. Thankfully, Roeber and Mattox provide a way for us now to focus on this hidden contradiction, bring it to light, and put it to work, thus yielding an account of Lutheran confessional theology as a critical and ecumenical task urgently needed here and now. What I mean is this: Roeber’s criticisms of the doctrine of original sin and Mattox’s reconciliation with the modern Marian dogmas dovetail into this manageable thesis: while the doctrine of sin is underdeveloped in Orthodoxy (leaving it at the mercy of the ethnocentric phyletism that Roeber laments), the modern Marian dogmas serve — magically, I have to say — to exempt Rome from its own profounder understanding of sin. Lutheran theology helps here, as indeed a “corrective” theology ought, in both directions. It helps to disentangle original sin from its Augustinian association with sexuality and helps the church as church to see that it too lives by the holiness of Christ in its midst, as in a company of sinners and tax collectors, who only in being so made holy by his gracious and free presence become themselves mediators of holiness for others. Insofar as Lutheran theology remains captive to Lutheran identity, that is, to Lutheranism as an incoherent, separated church, however, it cannot offer this urgently needed help. Such theological help comes only when Lutherans come clean on the *contradiction* at the fonts of their own theology — a *contradiction* that was first forced upon them when they tried to turn Lutheranism into a church, over against doing Lutheranism as theology for the sake of the one and only church.

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port from the *Front Lines: Conversations on Public Theology; A Festschrift in Honor of Robert Benne*, ed. Michael Shahan (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 89-104. A Lenten reading of James M. Stayer, *Martin Luther: German Saviour; German Evangelical Theological Factions and the Interpretation of Luther, 1917-1933* (Montreal and Ithaca, N.Y.: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000), should be penitential discipline for all such Protestant ideologues posing as critical historians.

## Lutheran Theology for the Ecumenical Church

I wish then to make a simple and focused argument, taking the “Lutheran” in “Lutheran theology,” not as anything the historical Martin Luther might have opined theologically, nor as the polemical, anti-Catholic theology that emerged later on in Lutheran orthodoxy, but as the public confession to which Luther adhered at Augsburg, together with the body of subsidiary literature interpreting it. These writings were eventually collected as the *Book of Concord* (1580), so named because it meant to consolidate Lutheran identity as a church unto itself by settling the inner theological conflicts that threatened its continued existence. I wish with this focus on the ever-problematic doctrine of original sin and the corresponding righteousness of faith to renew an argument that I made some years ago, that Lutheranism offers an Eastern answer to the Western question,<sup>19</sup> that is, it offers the righteousness of the incarnate Son of God for all who as helpless and perishing sinners entrust themselves to him in the face of God’s judgment. This is an Eastern answer, as we shall see, because the present and active agent of righteousness is not a human Christ, who did something once upon a time, nor a divine Christ who does the same unchanging divine thing everywhere and always. Rather, the active and present agent of salvation is the one Person of human and divine natures in his life of love for his Father as for us, crucified but now risen and glorified and reigning in such a way as to be really present in faith as this undivided Person who he is, doing what he does.<sup>20</sup> Yet we have here the Western question, because this Christ is offered, not in the context of any autonomous human search for ultimate meaning or human wholeness or union with deity or whatever else we might think to desire in Platonist fashion in order to become God-like, but rather in the apocalyptic context of the Creator’s judgment breaking in on sin as upon the ruin of his creation, with just this holy judgment (Rom. 3:5-6) the necessary prelude of the redemption and new creation of all things, already present in and as the righteousness of faith. One virtue of this argument that Lutheranism theologically gives an Eastern answer to the Western question, moreover, is that it permits the *contradiction* at the fonts of Lutheranism to be exposed.

19. An earlier form of this argument may be found in an article that both Mattox and Roeber reference: Paul R. Hinlicky, “Theological Anthropology: Towards Integrating Theosis and Justification by Faith,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 34, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 38-73.

20. Further on this, see Oswald Bayer and Benjamin Gleede, eds., *Creator est creatura: Luthers Christologie als Lehre von der Idiomenkommunikation* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

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How so?<sup>21</sup> The central teaching of the Augsburg Confession and its Apology is that the faith that justifies is the one that believes that one is received into mercy on account of Christ (AC IV.2).<sup>22</sup> The formulation here is very precise, weaving together the objective *propter Christum* and the subjective *pro me* in the event of justification. Faith is not a meritorious work in itself but rather believes that Christ the friend of sinners lives and his work of solidarity is valid for me before God. Christ fulfills the double commandment of love, loving his Father by loving us who are not so lovely or lovable all the way to the ignominious death on the cross; as just this One vindicated on Easter morn, he comes through the gospel as the righteousness that comes from outside the self, as help to the helpless and thus as truly good news. Consequently, however, faith also now believes something about its own, empirical self, namely, that I too am reached by Christ and in his presence received into mercy. This is what distinguishes justifying *fiducia* from that *fides historica* that even the devils have. Hence, Melancthon in the Apology argues *both* that righteousness is imputed to faith on account of Christ's coming into the midst of believing sinners *and* that faith that receives just this Christ regenerates to new life and holiness. "And because faith receives the forgiveness of sins and reconciles us to God, we are first regarded as righteous by this faith on account of Christ before we love and keep the law, although love necessarily follows. And this faith is no idle knowledge, nor can it coexist with mortal sin; but it is a work of the Holy Spirit that frees us from death and raises and makes alive terrified minds . . . on account of Christ and by faith alone we are justified, that is, out of unrighteous people we are made righteous or regenerated" (Ap IV.114-15, 117; BC, p. 139).<sup>23</sup> The Augsburg Confession had already said as much in article XVIII on free will: "But this righteousness is worked in the heart when the Holy Spirit is received through the Word" (AC XVIII.3; BC, p. 51). Thus, the

faith to receive the gift of Christ's righteousness is itself gift, the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit's *ubi et quando Deo visum est* (AC V.3; BC, p. 41).

As we shall see, however, to sustain this unity of objective and subjective poles in justification not only requires such precise parsing of Trinitarian personalism in the respective works of Christ and the Spirit. It also inevitably raises the daunting problem of divine election, that is, why the sovereign Spirit bestows faith here but, evidently, withholds it there. As we shall see, the *right* answer to this neuralgic question — that the object of divine predestination is the beloved community gathered in Christ — transcends without simply annulling the individual's need of assured faith in the face of her own continued experience of struggle, failure, and unworthiness.

Yet the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article III.19, contradicted the Augsburg Confession and the Apology. This is the suppressed *contradiction* that lies at the founts of Lutheranism as a separated church. This suppression of Lutheranism's earliest formulation of the righteousness of faith launched the career of Lutheran orthodoxy, circling the theological wagons around the Lutheran *propter Christum* as the mark of the true, visible church of God on earth by expressly rejecting any notion of justifying faith as regeneration. This move canceled the plain meaning of the earlier formulations, as just cited, and more importantly, profoundly obscured the theological reason why faith alone in Christ alone justifies the sinner (namely, that it alone *rightly* or *justly* brings anyone *already now* — hence, still a member of the sinful and perishing old aeon — into the beloved community that *is to come*). Justification by *faith* was subtly transformed in this way into justification by *grace*. This move then required of Lutheranism the polemical caricature and pan-Protestant simplification: Catholics teach "justification by works," on account of religious experience and effort, but Protestants teach "justification by grace" on account of the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ (but, incoherently, only on the condition that you believe the orthodox Protestant doctrine about the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ). This caricature of Catholicism at the ironical cost of an intellectual works-righteousness in Protestantism was made in deliberate disregard of the express teaching of the first three chapters of Trent on justification.<sup>24</sup> In reality, after 1530 justification by grace was *never* in dispute, only whether grace took hold of the human persons by faith alone in Christ alone or whether in faith formed by charity.

24. Rev. H. J. Schroeder, O.P., trans., *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (St. Louis and London: Herder, 1960), pp. 29-31.

21. The following paragraphs are in part paraphrased from Paul R. Hinlicky, "A Leibnizian Transformation? Reclaiming the Theodicy of Faith," in *Transformations in Luther's Reformation Theology: Historical and Contemporary Reflections*, *Arbeiten zur Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte*, vol. 32, ed. C. Helmer and B. K. Holm (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2011).

22. *Cum credunt se in gratiam recipe et peccata remitti propter Christum* (AC IV). For the full case, see "Luther Tamed: How the Holy Spirit Disappeared in Lutheranism and Never Reappeared in Barth," in Paul R. Hinlicky, *Paths Not Taken: Fates of Theology from Luther through Leibniz* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), chapter 4, pp. 127-76.

23. The emphasis on Spirit-given faith as regeneration is not marginal in Apology IV: see IV.12, 48, 45-47, 62-68, 72, 110, 114-18.



The reasons Lutheranism made this move are complex,<sup>25</sup> but fear of Catholic reform and accommodation of early Lutheranism's critique surely played a role in a process of polemical polarization (as may be seen already in AC XX.6-7; BC, p. 53). What had been a matter of bringing to light something obscured (AC XX.8; BC, pp. 53-54) so that, missiologically, the gospel might be better proclaimed became a matter of fixed polemical antithesis (as in the apocalyptic invective of Luther's later Smalcald Articles).<sup>26</sup> What all this amounts to is a decision to obscure Lutheranism as theology in order to secure Lutheranism as a separated church. The stage was thus unwittingly set for the eventual Pietist reaction, which with evident justice tried to retrieve Luther's *pro me* in the form of the religious experience of the new birth<sup>27</sup> over against the formalistic and disputatious proclivities of Lutheran orthodoxy. In time, the interminable quarrel between orthodox and Pietist gave birth to the third Lutheranism of liberal Protestantism, which as much said, "A pox on both your houses, preoccupied with the redemption of *individuals!* We need a *social* gospel!" Liberalism was certainly right about that, for theologically, going back to the foundational text of Genesis 1:26-28, we flourish as individuals only in the context of true community. Also in redemption, our individual salvation is bound up with others (as Lutheranism remembers wherever and whenever its sacramental doctrine and practice are preserved). Indeed, the good reason that faith alone in Christ alone justifies the sinner is that it is Christ alone in his historical particularity who gathers sinners together in his company, already now, not a time for fasting but for feasting in the company of the Bridegroom, just as it is Christ alone in his historical particularity who already, once and for all, has paid the price for this act of solidarity at the cross and won for it the eternal victory of his resurrection. All this of the beloved community can be received already now, however, only in faith, as the paradoxical presence of God's promised future not yet fully arrived in a world that opposes it. Where Protestant liberalism erred was not in recovering the "social intention of all the basic Christian

25. Olli-Pekka Vainio, *Justification and Participation in Christ: The Development of the Lutheran Doctrine of Justification from Luther to the Formula of Concord (1580)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008).

26. But see the careful nuancing provided by William R. Russell, *The Schmalkald Articles: Luther's Theological Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), pp. 94-95, 115-16. See also the appendix, "The Problem of Demonization in Luther's Apocalyptic Theology," in *Beloved Community*, pp. 379-85.

27. See Paul R. Hinlicky, "The Doctrine of the New Birth: From Bullinger to Edwards," *Missio Apostolica* 7, no. 2 (November 1999): 102-99.

concepts" (Bonhoeffer),<sup>28</sup> but in giving up on the eschatological fulfillment that comes from above in exchange for the "immanent optimism of progress" (Elert)<sup>29</sup> on the plane of history. But that is another story.

To get back behind this convoluted development, we can here strictly focus on the initial six articles of the Augsburg Confession — on the Trinity, original sin, the incarnation, justification by faith, the ministry, and the new obedience — since the first three articles from the ecumenical heritage are elaborated to lay the groundwork for the development in Catholic doctrine articulated in the fourth and following. I will make correlations in passing with the other literature in the *Book of Concord* to show how the doctrine of the Trinity, and especially Trinitarian personalism, undergirds the claims about Christ as the Agent of salvation from the guilt and power of sin. This procedure allows us to own, and to use creatively, the contradiction at the founts of Lutheran theology, that is, to see in what true sense justifying faith is regeneration, the Spirit's gift to receive the gift that Christ is in his divine-human righteousness for us. That true sense of regeneration as faith, as hinted above, is a social transaction, what Luther, interpreting the *admirabile commercium* of the Fathers, called the "joyful exchange" that places me together with all the other sinners claimed by Christ into his beloved community. This understanding of regeneration, as new birth into the beloved community by faith, is the suppressed and obscured but nonetheless real ecumenical promise of Lutheran theology, as may be seen in the same Formula of Concord's articles on sin, free will, and especially predestination. These lead us to think of the beloved community as the eternal object of divine self-determination, the resolve of the Holy Trinity, the primordial Beloved Community, to bring lost humanity into the eternal joy of its own life, manifesting the creative love of God that "does not seek a good to enjoy but to confer good on those lacking and undeserving."<sup>30</sup>

In accord with Catholic tradition, the one divine essence is identified both negatively and positively in Augsburg Confession I. As "eternal, incorporeal and indivisible," God is identified as the One who transcends space and time in the simplicity of being that attends the Creator of all that is other than himself. As "Creator and preserver" of all these other things, however, God is positively characterized as of infinite "power, wisdom and good-

28. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), p. 21.

29. Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. W. A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962), p. 475.

30. Martin Luther, "The Heidelberg Disputation," in *LW* 31:35-70.

ness," a trinity of attributes that immediately leads to the "three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." Not incidentally, the term "person" is said to be used here to signify not some part or quality of a substance but "that which properly subsists" as agent of its own actions (and, we might add if we follow the Fifth Ecumenical Council and Martin Luther, patient of its own sufferings).<sup>31</sup> This explicit accent on Trinitarian personalism becomes crucially important (over against a dominant Western tendency toward modalism, that is, where "person" is taken as a "part or quality" of an essence, a facet giving a partial glimpse of what substantively remains hidden as a whole). Thus, in the *Large Catechism* Luther concluded his theological interpretation of the Apostles' Creed:<sup>32</sup> "in all three articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart and his pure, unutterable love. For this very purpose he created us, so that he might redeem us and make us holy, and, moreover, having granted and bestowed upon us everything in heaven and earth, he has also given us his Son and his Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself" (*LC* 2.64; *BC*, p. 439). Christ, mirror of the Father's heart, makes him known, just as the Holy Spirit reveals the man Christ as that true Son of the Father (*LC* 2.65; *BC*, pp. 439-40). Here and throughout, the doctrine of the Trinity is not an obscure, ancient dogma to which theological lip service is paid; it is at work, doing the heavy lifting in the teaching of the Christian faith. Moreover, Luther's purpose clause, "he created us in order to redeem us," points to the eternal Trinity's self-determination to create, redeem, and fulfill the world through the missions of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Predestination in that light is not some inscrutable and absolute decree of those foreordained to be saved and damned (i.e., *FC* *SD* XI.5, 28, 34-36, 79, 81; *BC*, pp. 641-42, 645, 646, 653). On the contrary, it is the counsel of the triune God. The "eternal election of God should be considered in Christ and not apart from or outside of Christ" in that, as Ephesians 1:6 states, it is the self-determination of the God who "loved us in the Beloved" (*SD* XI.65; *BC*, pp. 650-51). The object of divine election is the beloved community gathered in and through Je-

31. See "One of the Trinity Suffered": Luther's Neo-Chalcedonian Christology," in *Beloved Community*, chapter 2, pp. 31-65.

32. Interestingly, Luther recovered the Trinitarian structure of the Apostles' Creed from a long-standing pious legend that divided it into twelve sentences, each supposedly contributed by one of the apostles before they went their separate ways, as their consensus on doctrine. This pious legend illustrates the tendency of ecclesiological surplus to establish authority as such (dogmatism), rather than to submit to the specific authority of the crucified but risen Lord (as in *Matt.* 28:16-20) — critical dogmatics!

sus Christ by that primordial Beloved Community that is the Holy Trinity. "Thus, the entire Trinity, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, directs all people to Christ as the Book of life, in whom they should seek the Father's eternal election" (*SD* XI.66; *BC*, p. 651). For "the Holy Spirit wills to be present with his power in the Word and to work through it. This is the drawing of the Father" (*SD* XI.77; *BC*, p. 653).

In this light the Trinity may be said to foresee the fall of Adam, but not to predestine it (*SD* XI.4; *BC*, p. 641), that is, it does not will Adam's fall properly speaking, but merely permits it. Properly speaking, "God created us in order to redeem us," and just so to bring creation to its fulfillment. Yet of this there is need. In Augsburg Confession II, the progeny of Adam are said to be born with sin, which is immediately defined theologically as lack of fear and trust in God, which spiritual vacuum is filled with concupiscence. This disordered desire of human nature corrupted by its loss of God is said to be "truly sin," which "damns" unless one is "regenerated" by the Holy Spirit and baptism. Note well, once again, how in early Lutheranism *regeneration* is invoked as the saving solution to disordered desire with its lack of true fear and love of God (see further *AC* XX.23-40; *BC*, p. 57). The ambiguous metaphor of "new birth" is regularly parsed, however, by the gospel narrative's story of Jesus' death and resurrection: regeneration is not the breakthrough to articulate consciousness of some repressed but innocent desire, as the metaphor of new birth might otherwise suggest. The solution to sinful concupiscence is to be crucified with Christ, by the daily drowning of the old Adam on the strength of holy baptism, in order thereby to be raised to faith as a new and eccentric existence. That is needed, because this disorder of human desire that corrupts human nature on account of its loss of God also renders this corrupted human nature blind to its true plight. As Luther put it in the Smalcald Articles, "inherited sin has caused such a deep, evil corruption of nature that reason does not comprehend it; rather, it must be believed on the basis of the revelation in the Scriptures" (*SA* 3.1.3; *BC*, p. 311, explicitly reaffirmed by *FC* *SD* I.8; *BC*, p. 533). The point, as the Solid Declaration insists, is that Christians need not only recognize sin in the actual violations of God's commandments by visible deeds — the crimes that even natural reason comprehends — but also to "perceive and recognize that the horrible, dreadful, inherited disease corrupting their entire nature is above all actual sin and indeed is the 'chief sin.' It is the root and fountain-head of all actual sin" (*SD* I.5; *BC*, p. 533). This predicament is what only theology learns and knows: the radical problem requiring a solution no less radical than the cross and resurrection of the incarnate Son.

No doubt, this radical teaching of sin as a pervasive, inescapable power corrupting human nature and blinding its reason is offensive to contemporary sensibilities. In truth, it always has been offensive, though this is truer than ever today, given contemporary Euro-American Christianity's captivity to the "healthy-minded" thinking of the affluent classes (James).<sup>33</sup> The radicalness of Christianity, however, turns on this point about the capture of human desire by ungodly greed and envy on account of our loss of God, and hence of our true need of pardon with the gift of a new heart with new desires. The gospel is thus not an answer to anyone else's questions but to God's own searching question about his wayward creation — as Saint Athanasius famously taught.<sup>34</sup>

In this light, Roeber's criticism may be seen to target the Augustinian *accidents* of the doctrine of the sin of origin but to miss the *substance*. It is surely right to agree with Roeber on the correct reading of Romans 5:12 and thus to reject with Roeber, if I can put it this way, any venereal theory of sin's transmission, like some genetic defect, and thus as Augustine pictured things, to imagine a corrupt material inherited from a historical first human being out of which humanity would subsequently be formed (which picture also, as Roeber rightly notes, stands behind the modern Marian doctrine of the immaculate conception). But rejecting this speculative inference based upon a historically literal reading of the Primeval History,<sup>35</sup> even coupled with Irenaeus's rightful stress on the immaturity of Adam and Eve whose "perfection" was not an achieved state in Paradise but a calling and task (Gen. 1:26-28!), Roeber exaggerates (note the reference to Saint Athanasius above) when he claims that for Orthodoxy death and the devil's tyranny, rather than human sinfulness and God's judgment against it (the curse of Gen. 3!), form the question to which the gospel is an answer. In fact, all three of the atonement motifs — satisfaction, liberation from demonic powers, and new life — have a basis in the New Testament. The task of ecumenical theology should be to integrate them, not play one off against another.<sup>36</sup>

Just as the gospel forbids speculation about God apart from Christ, it also forbids speculation about the human predicament apart from Christ.

33. See *Beloved Community*, pp. 17-30.

34. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 4-8. See the splendid discussion of T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), pp. 154-90, which brings out both the continuity of Athanasius's theology of the "redemptive exchange" with Western "forensic" accounts and the difference.

35. See Augustine, e.g., *City of God* 13.14.

36. See *Beloved Community*, pp. 66-104.

We know Adam rightly in the light of Christ, as Karl Barth, recalling the Reformation's teaching that original sin was incomprehensible to natural reason, famously explained Romans 5.<sup>37</sup> Reading the opening chapters of Genesis from the perspective of our redemption in Christ, we come to see that we all have been born in exile from Paradise; that we children of Adam have no access to innocent or uncorrupted desire by which autonomously to find our way to God as the true object of our desire.<sup>38</sup> Rather, we always awaken to desire already captured by the idols and demons of greed and envy, of pride and despair. Only then the free and incalculable coming of the Spirit's prevenient grace, troubling and afflicting us by the demands of God's holy Law, brings us to the knowledge of our true need and plight. The doctrine of *theosis*, that God and his kingdom are the true object of our desire — which is also, by the way, Augustine's famous teaching on the *cor inquietum* from the opening page of *The Confessions*! — denotes a theological understanding of the human vocation that is restored to us in and by our redemption; apart from desire's purification by dying and rising with Christ, we cannot distinguish true God from our idols nor escape — perhaps even *want* to escape — from our demons.

As influential, and indeed damaging, as Augustine's speculation about sin's sexual transmission has been, the deeper point, based on well-founded christological exegesis of the opening chapters of Genesis, is that all of us children of Adam are now born into a world in which the original possibility for the obedience of faith has been lost. It is this loss that the Formula of Concord designates as "a complete absence or 'lack of the original righteousness acquired in Paradise' or the image of God" (FC SD I.10; *BC*, pp. 533). To be sure, such teaching of our collective failure in and as Adam relativizes individual responsibility and individual sanctity, just as surely as it points us to the new holiness of Christian, not Platonic, *theosis* as essentially communal and relational in Christ (as Roeber rightly emphasizes, p. 75). Moreover, precisely by denying that unaided human reason can recognize its true plight before God, the doctrine of original sin distances Christian teaching on the human predicament from the Platonic or Stoic anthropological dualism of mind and matter to insist instead, apocalyptically, that "the way of thinking from Adam . . . in its highest powers and in light of rea-

37. Karl Barth, *Christ and Adam: Man and Humanity in Romans 5*, trans. T. A. Small with an introduction by W. Pauck (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

38. See here Luther's incisive indictment of Occam, Scotus, and Biel in the "Disputation against Scholastic Theology," *LW* 31:3-16.

son . . . is by nature diametrically opposed to God and his highest commandments” (SD I.11; BC, p. 534). Quoting Luther, the Solid Declaration concludes: “Whether we call original sin a quality or a disease, it remains true that the greatest evil is this: to be a victim of eternal wrath and death and not even to realize one’s terrible lot” (SD I.62; BC, p. 542).

Exposing this blindness to our true and common plight is the crucial point of the doctrine of original sin. With it, we have articulated the apocalyptic conflict of the ages, which is the matrix, indeed the “mother of Christian theology” (Käsemann), enlightening us to the *right* way to parse liberation from death and the devil, namely, by the *right* of Christ’s *righteousness rightfully* redeeming *sinners* from the “curse of the Law” (Gal. 3:15) and *reconciling* them to his Father in the Spirit, just so, only so, also liberating them *from* the tyranny of the Evil One, liberating them *for* the new obedience. Theological knowledge of the human predicament is knowledge illuminated by the Spirit to see all things now in the light of Christ — even the past of one’s life, before the coming of Christ through the gospel — *as Adam*.

The conceptual difficulty here is, of course, how at one and the same time to affirm the good creation of God that is also the object of God’s redemption and its corruption by sin as a totality. The Orthodox distinction between the image as mirror and as likeness to God could actually serve very well to make this distinction: while humanity’s chosen status as image of God in the sense of mirror is indelible (Gen. 1:26-28) and thus the basis for human dignity without respect to any human being’s moral worthiness (Gen. 9:6!), postlapsarian human beings inevitably fill that image up with the false objects of their disordered desire. This ruins God’s creation, and so is sin in the proper sense of the word, an objective, so to speak, enmity with God (Rom. 5:10), even if subjectively we are and remain unaware of it. We have each in this condition of fallenness the appearance of free will in our own particular choices (for things that prove in fact to be idols and demons). But this apparent, natural freedom is an exercise in unfreedom, as these varying choices of children born in exile from Paradise are bound in and to Adam’s loss of the original possibility for faithful obedience to God. So we are born fallen before we as individuals ever awaken to any of our particular choices.

The critical import of this teaching for the life of the church is to recall that all our *religious* choices (Rom. 2!) are *also* entangled in the web woven by disordered desire, just as the young Augustinian monk Martin Luther sallied forth against the *securitas* of the *amor concupiscentiae*, by which as religious we love God and do good for our own sakes, not God’s, his kingdom and

righteousness.<sup>39</sup> Even in our natural religious choices, we are enemies of God, that is, unless and until Another breaks into the strong man’s house and binds him up to plunder his goods (Mark 3:27) for new life in the service of God’s reign. As Vladimir Lossky put it, therefore, “the image, which is inalienable, can become similar or dissimilar, to the extreme limit: that of union with God . . . [or] the gloomy abyss of Hades.”<sup>40</sup> That capacity to become like God or unlike God is what human “free choice” as an actual power other than God decides, as it resists or surrenders to the Liberator, otherwise being so bound by the Strong Man as to be blinded to its plight. Just such passive capacity of the mirror to resemble its proper object, like the capacity of a prisoner to be freed, is conceptually, if not semantically or rhetorically, the same as Luther’s “bound choice,” as the Formula of Concord emphatically notes, citing Luther himself: “When the Fathers defend free will, they mean that it is capable of being free in the sense that it can be converted by grace to the good and become truly free in the way it was created to be originally” (FC SD 2.23; BC, p. 548). Neither the Fathers nor the Lutherans then meant anything like the autonomous agency of modernity’s “sovereign self.”<sup>41</sup>

More importantly, just as the doctrine of original sin implicates us one and all, both pious and impious, in the web of Adam’s default and guilt, it allows the Christian message, as we saw above in the Formula of Concord’s teaching on predestination, to be one of potential universalism, thus qualifying any claim of the church visible and militant to exhaust the realm of Christ or to limit the reign of Christ. As Lossky puts it: “These are the two extremes between which the personal destiny of man may veer in the working out of his salvation, which is already realized in hope for everyone in the incarnate Image of the God who willed to create man in His own image.”<sup>42</sup> This potential universalism, based upon the incarnation, gives no solution to the conundrum that Augustine classically expressed: “For the evil of the soul, its own will takes the initiative; but for its good, the will of its Creator makes the first move, whether to make the soul which did not yet exist, or to recreate it when it had perished through the fall.”<sup>43</sup> We are not free in our

39. See the introduction in *Luther: Lectures on Romans*, trans. Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961).

40. Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, ed. J. H. Erickson and T. E. Bird (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), p. 139.

41. Talal Asad, “Thinking about Agency and Pain,” in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), chapter 2, pp. 67-99.

42. Lossky, *In the Image*, p. 139.

43. Augustine, *City of God* 13.15.

election, since this is and acts on us as God's self-determination to redeem his own creation, although we are free — alas, all too free — in our resistance to it. This is and remains forever a conundrum. But owning this conundrum prevents us from limiting the victory of God for his fallen creation in Christ to our own experience of it. Moreover, with our election in Christ for the beloved community, it also frees us to cooperate with the God just named and identified in this gospel way by adhering to the Word and sacraments and to one another so gathered in and for the beloved community. Such potential universalism passes “beyond the framework of soteriological individualism, without simply abandoning the existential and pastoral question of the individual's assurance of salvation.”<sup>44</sup>

Early Lutheranism almost self-destructed over this matter, but in fact it emphatically came to reject the Flacian reading of the doctrine of original sin, as if “the corrupted human nature is itself original sin” (SD I.1; BC, p. 531), and it vindicated, with qualification, Philip Melancthon's affirmation that even now, after the Fall, human nature remains “God's creation and creature in us” (SD I.2, BC, p. 532; see also Ap II.18, BC, p. 114). It cannot be said, however, that Formula of Concord I is conceptually successful, trying, as it does, to say at one and the same time that God's creature is good and that God's creature is corrupted. In general, it is thinking strictly of this inherited evil of the sin of origin as “corruption,” as a privation of the good, which will be acceptable to the Orthodox and the Catholic so far as it goes. But it must be acknowledged that this article also draws on Augustine's speculative explanation that “the *massa* [lump] from which God forms and makes the human being is corrupted and perverted in Adam and bequeathed to us” (SD I.38; BC, p. 538). As a result of this strange picture of God forming corrupted matter to make fresh fallen human beings, Formula of Concord I cannot account for the contradiction between its two denials. First it denies, against Flacius, that “the human being after the fall is no longer a rational creature, or that human beings can be converted to God without hearing and thinking about the divine Word” (SD II.19; BC, p. 547). So what is affirmed is that fallen human beings with their natural powers remain capable of conversion in and by the exercise of just those powers. Second, however, it also denies, against Melancthon, that it is correct “to teach that human beings have sufficient powers to desire to accept the gospel and take comfort in it, and, therefore, that the human will cooperates to a certain extent in conversion” (SD II.45; BC, p. 552). So what is affirmed is that disor-

44. Hinlicky, *Paths Not Taken*, pp. 284-85.

dered desire cannot desire the gospel but is rather offended by it, also in its use of natural human powers. But how then, one has to ask, is attentive hearing of the gospel and consideration of it possible except as an action of disordered human desire, the very corrupted material out of which any postlapsarian human being supposedly is formed, and which as such must rather be repelled at the gospel, which it finds repugnant? This is a muddle, not a mystery. Lutheranism has ever since been tortured by this inner contradiction in its teaching as codified in Formula of Concord I.

If attentive hearing is not possible for disordered desire, and if the denial of human merit in justification is to be sustained, then any human desire to attend with its natural powers to the gospel is itself something new, a re-formation of the old self *incurvatus in se*, the Spirit-given faith of a new, ek-centric existence. Justification then comes as regeneration to faith. Justifying faith is *already* sanctification, the gift and work of the Spirit. The Word and the Spirit cannot be segregated into the wooden sequence, imputative justification first, effective sanctification second. To be sure, any and all progress in sanctification or *theosis* remains continually dependent from baptism day to the day of the resurrection of the Christ who first comes and ever befriends sinners. The priority of justification to sanctification for which Lutheranism stood, in other words, is not to be understood temporally or psychologically but logically. Just as in the Trinitarian revelation of the baptism of our Lord, believers united with Christ are first of all objects of the Father's favor and then as such also subjects in the Spirit of the new obedience. It is as those claimed by Christ and won by Christ and united with Christ that believers now live new lives in the power of the Spirit to the glory of the Father; but that living of new life is what being claimed and won by Christ is. “The just will *live* by their faith” (Rom. 1:17, not incidentally citing Habakkuk's theodicy of faith).

Does the unveiling of this contradiction imply a reversion to Catholicism?<sup>45</sup> Yes and no. Yes, in the sense of the earlier Luther's Augustinian doctrine of faith in Christ's mercy as giving God his due, of faith as the fulfillment of the law, of faith as already sanctification, divine faith, work and gift of the Spirit.<sup>46</sup> No, in the sense of the *later* teaching of the Council of Trent that baptism removes sinfulness, that is, in the sense of actually and already

45. An earlier version of the following argument appeared as Paul R. Hinlicky, “A Response to the Vatican's Response: I. The Persistence of Sin in the Life of the Redeemed,” *Lutheran Forum* 32, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 5-7.

46. For the full argument, see Hinlicky, *Paths Not Taken*, pp. 145-76.

replacing sinful lust as a totality with holy desires infused in sacramental rebirth.<sup>47</sup> Consequently the “concupiscence” that remains in the baptized in the understanding of Trent must not be regarded as real sin, but as innocent, natural desire.<sup>48</sup> Although always potentially the “tinder” of sin’s renewal in our frail nature, natural desire, cleansed and supplemented by supernatural grace, is in turn to be sanctified and perfected by the believer’s cooperating, grace-fulfilling, not destroying, nature. Here the believer, properly speaking, is simply and totally just and as such cooperates with the Spirit in deeds of love that finally make him or her worthy of eternal life. If by postbaptismal sin this righteousness is lost, the fallen believer regains it again through sacramental penance.

For Luther, however, sin as disordered desire is removed by baptism in the sense of its guilt being forgiven, in this way breaking its power to dominate but not its reality to afflict, so that it is henceforth contested by Spirit-given faith through all the Christian life. This remaining concupiscence (N.B., not here “innocent, natural desire,” that is, the lower, bodily passions, but the total desire of the egocentric creature, beginning with the higher, spiritual powers of the soul) is and remains real sin. Here the believer is simultaneously sinful and righteous in the sense of being the personal scene of

47. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, pp. 33-34.

48. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, p. 23. Ironically, the humane doctrine of Aristotle originally directed against Pythagorean, Cynic, early Stoic ascetical fanaticism is in the background here. Aristotle taught that “feelings” or “passions” or “desires” are integral aspects of the pleasure and pain that attend embodied existence, which therefore may not be denied or even, as some suggested, extirpated, but must rather be trained to virtue so that one becomes averse to what is evil and takes pleasure in what is good (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1.13). When Anselm of Canterbury defined original sin, like original justice, as a property of the rational will that is supposed to govern the passions (as Aristotle understood this), he had to draw the inference that “even the very appetites which the Apostle calls the flesh which lusteth against the spirit, and the law of sin . . . are not just or unjust, considered by themselves. For they do not make a person just or unjust simply because he experiences them, but they make him unjust only if he consents to them voluntarily, when he should not” (*Why God Became Man and The Virginal Conception and Original Sin*, trans. Joseph M. Colleran [Albany, N.Y.: Magi Books, 1969], p. 174). When Luther, however, took aim at this theologized Aristotelianism, saying by contrast in the Heidelberg Disputation that the solution to concupiscence is not to satisfy it but to extirpate it, he was surely not countering good, nature-affirming Aristotelianism with bad, body-negating Platonism! Luther is working with an entirely different, i.e., Pauline-apocalyptic, conceptual scheme, in which the warfare of the Spirit against the flesh is total. In Paul “Spirit” means participating in God’s own life, personally, in the eternal love of the Father and the Son. And “flesh” means the old Adamic existence of human autonomy, of reliance on human powers rather than God.

battle in the Pauline-apocalyptic conflict between the powers of the Spirit and the flesh. This embattled believer’s entire life is one of repentance, who must ever anew avail herself of the gospel Word of God’s victory in Christ on behalf of sinners, if she is to be sustained in the lifelong battle and so attain the final victory. Clearly here the formula “at the same time sinful and righteous” is taken dynamically, not statically, as a description of the believer enlisted into the ranks of Christ’s reign by the Spirit to struggle against sin, beginning in one’s own self. The formula “at the same time righteous and sinful” is in this way preserved from its characteristic deformation into what Bonhoeffer would later call the Lutheran heresy of “cheap grace, grace without repentance.”<sup>49</sup> At the same time, it retains its genuine and indispensable pastoral function to assure precisely those who have in the Spirit taken up the cross to follow Jesus by faith that the Jesus whom they follow is and remains at every step of the way the One who is uniquely and unconditionally “for” them — even when they fail as disciples, as inevitably they do by virtue of their inextricable continuing membership in the body with the dying age of Adam.

So we have to ask the Council of Trent, who is the “interior man” created anew by grace and where is he to be found? Does not this “interior man” remain in this life always one being with the “exterior man,” the old Adam who is wasting away? Precisely when man’s “interior transformation” is clearly seen, does not his “exterior” bondage to sin become all the more painfully visible, as Romans 7 teaches? Such that the new life in the Spirit consists in the sigh and groaning for the new creation, the “redemption of our bodies,” which in the suffering believer has but inchoately begun, as Romans 8 teaches? If the paradox *simul iustus et peccator* is a cause of perplexity to Tridentine Catholics, how much more “perplexing” are Trent’s ill-chosen words “eternal life is, at one and the same time, grace and reward given by God for good works and merits”?<sup>50</sup> Of course, one could tolerate even that statement if it is taken in Augustine’s sense that “when God rewards our merits, he crowns his own gifts.” Tolerate, but not celebrate. The whole rhetoric of merit is a sad, distant chapter in theology, something to be learned in order to be overcome in that it perpetuates a moralistic individualism and misguided asceticism that miss salvation as the gift of beloved community. The point of ecumenical theology is critically to overcome ill-

49. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Simon and Schuster, Touchstone Edition, 1995), p. 43.

50. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, p. 41.

chosen formulations of the past that offend against the truth of the gospel on which the unity of the church depends, as per the Pauline “canon”: “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation” (Gal. 6:15). The way forward therefore is rather signified by the Joint Declaration’s claim of a *christological consensus* on the doctrine of justification.<sup>51</sup>

John Paul II once expressed the gravamen of the Catholic position in this respect: because of Christ, he wrote in *Veritatis Splendor*, “man can understand fully and live perfectly, through his good actions, his vocation to freedom in obedience to the divine law summarized in the commandment of love to God and neighbor” (#83). In the following passage, the pope refutes a supposedly “realistic” view that “the Church’s teaching is essentially only an ‘ideal’ which must then be adapted, proportioned, graduated to the so-called concrete possibilities of man.”

Of which man are we speaking? Of man *dominated* by lust or of man *redeemed by Christ*? This is what is at stake: the *reality* of Christ’s redemption. *Christ has redeemed us!* This means that he has given us the possibility of realizing *the entire* truth of our being; he has set our freedom free from the *domination* of concupiscence. And if redeemed man still sins, this is not due to an imperfection of Christ’s redemptive act, but to man’s will not to avail himself of the grace which flows from that act. (#103)

We may discern here a strain of “perfectionism” at the very heart of things (not unlike Orthodox *hesychasm*, as Roeber discusses on pp. 99-101). The real point of it, however, is not merit. Merit is not even in view. Nor is any illusory denial entertained of the ugly facticity of the persistence of sin in the life of the redeemed. The possibility of perfection is rather affirmed in order

51. Recall the U.S. Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue’s conclusion: “our entire hope of justification and salvation rests on Christ Jesus and the gospel whereby the good news of God’s merciful action in Christ is made known; we do not place our ultimate trust in anything other than God’s promise and saving work in Christ” (*Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII: Justification by Faith*, ed. H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985], p. 157). The next dialogue tried to build on this christological consensus: “We now further assert together that Jesus Christ is the sole mediator in God’s plan of salvation (1 Tim. 2:5)” (*Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII: The One Mediator, The Saints, and Mary*, ed. H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford, and Joseph A. Burgess [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992], p. 60). It defined the problem as “how to affirm the unique mediatorship of Christ so that all the ‘mediations’ in the church not only do not detract from, but communicate and extol, his sole mediatorship” (p. 49).

to hold up the deliverance of the believer from not only the guilt of sin, but also the power of sin, and thus to lift up the prospect of growth to human maturity in Christ. The point is christological: “*Christ has redeemed us!*”

Should not Lutherans agree with the pope’s christological passion in this? Surely they should. That means they should try to state their disagreement with “perfectionism” in equally christological terms. The believer who is redeemed by Christ is certainly no longer dominated by lust, since, as Melancthon wrote in the Apology, justifying faith, as the work of the regenerating Spirit, “does not coexist with mortal sin” (Ap IV.64; BC, p. 131). The believer is led by the Spirit — precisely into lifelong struggle with the old Adam, who mysteriously revives every new day in defiance of Christ’s victory, in alliance with the continuing reality of the unbelieving world, to which believers are necessarily linked by virtue of their bodily existence (as Augustine taught) until the end of days. The believer, if not dominated by lust, surely then remains afflicted by lust, daily falls prey anew to lust in ways conscious and unconscious, and thus must daily join the community to pray, “Forgive us our trespasses!” knowing that “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” This confession, originally addressed to a beloved community of disciples in the Lord (1 John 1:8), is not some hyper-Pauline or Gnesio-Lutheran polemical exaggeration. It is simply — *Scripture*.

Is it really correct then to speak already of Christ’s perfected redemption? Have Christians nothing further to expect of their Redeemer, who comes to judge the living and the dead? Is not the redemption of “our bodies” still future in the resurrection of the dead? Are we not, even as Christians, yet subject to that last enemy? And if subject to death, then still as sinners, though not dead to God in our sins so far as by faith we welcome Jesus into our company? Must not Christ thus reign until he subdues all enemies under his feet — including the enmity even at work in us, his very own, his beloved, his redeemed? In perfectionism does not a realized eschatology falsely collapse the tension between the ages of Adam and Christ, which must still paradoxically coexist, preeminently in believers themselves, until history is finally judged by the One who is alone competent finally to judge? This sober *Augustinian* view of the justified as sinner *in re*, righteous *in spe*, lifts up Christ as the Redeemer to whom we must still entrust ourselves for a future saving work that he alone can and must do when he comes in glory to make all things new.

What may believers expect of Christ the Redeemer here and now? In Augsburg Confession III, the coming to us now of the aforementioned (AC I,

hence Trinitarian person) Son of God is described as the assumption of human nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, so that two natures might be “inseparably conjoined in the *unity* of the *one* person, *one* Christ” (emphasis added to bring out the redundancy of the formulation). The accent falls on the unity of person, to whom, as personal subject, as agent-patient, is ascribed all that Christ suffered and accomplished, so that as this one-and-same-Person he may indeed still be active to “sanctify all those who believe in him by sending into their hearts the Holy Spirit.” Luther can call such Christology “the first and chief article” as readily as he can call the article on justification by faith first and chief, “because it must be believed and may not be obtained or grasped with any work, law or merit” (SA 2.1.4; BC, p. 301). Indeed, Luther teaches ecumenically that wherever this faith in Jesus Christ, true God, true man, our saving Lord, has prevailed, there the church has been preserved in its truth and purity, that is, even if they do not yet know the Reformation’s development of doctrine in teaching the righteousness of faith alone.<sup>52</sup> The reason for this equivalence between justification by faith and true Christology is that Jesus Christ in his divine-human life for us is the righteousness that comes from God and avails before God. The Son of God’s personal decision and act of obedience bring righteousness and life to all, provided only that they freely include themselves in him by faith, as those very ones for whom he lived and died and reigns, this judgment about oneself being the signature of true repentance in justifying faith.

Thus the Solid Declaration later affirmed, “He also promised that he would be present — he, the human being who had spoken with them, who had experienced every tribulation in the assumed human nature, who for this reason can have sympathy with us fellow human beings.” This does not mean that the “humanity of Christ is spatially extended into every place in heaven and on earth . . . [but rather] through his divine omnipotence Christ can be present in his body . . . wherever he wishes” (SD VIII.92; BC, pp. 633-34). This “wherever he wishes” (*ubivolipraesens*) of Trinitarian personalism underscores the personal nature of the union and protects Christology from any confusion of natures (SD VIII.62, 63; BC, pp. 627-28) or metamorphosis (SD VIII.71; BC, pp. 629-30); it preserves his freedom to manifest himself as he wills as Head of the body and Lord over all other would-be lords. So it is one and the same Person who suffers “that he might reconcile the Father to us and be a sacrifice not only for original guilt but also for all actual sins of

52. Martin Luther, “The Three Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Faith” (1538), in *LW* 41:13. See the discussion in Hinlicky, *Beloved Community*, pp. 37-39.

human beings” (AC III.3; BC, p. 39). This same one Person “will reign forever and have dominion of all creatures” by sending the Spirit to wage war for the redeemed “against the devil and the power of sin” (AC III.4-6; BC, p. 39). So the Redeemer of human nature by right of his incarnate life and work comes as the present Liberator of that nature from its demonic usurpers to restore the redeemed to the leadership of the Spirit of God.

The point of Augsburg Confession IV on justification by faith as “applied Christology” (Käsemann) and as a development of Catholic doctrine then is that this Jesus Christ reigns now as One embattled, in those whom already he calls and justifies ahead of the eschatological finale. Justified by faith, now, it is as though already these have passed muster on the Last Day, since, as the apostle affirmed, being “justified by faith we have peace with God” (Rom. 5:1). This final future is already theirs now, even though in the body believers remain linked with the sighing and groaning world of the present time. As anticipation of the Last Day, their justification by faith now is paradoxically the certain basis, not the uncertain goal, of their new lives in Christ.<sup>53</sup> In just this way, however, they are said to be made into analogues of Christ, “little Christs” as Luther put it, ready for new obedience (AC VI), their own cooperation with and as the New Adam in the world. In just what way?

Here at last we come to the apparent division of the house. Article V teaches that faith comes by hearing, through the external Word, which as a promise is brought home by the Spirit in God’s love being shed abroad in human hearts (Rom. 5:5), eliciting the faith that receives the promise and thus lives newly and obediently in it. Or, even more precisely, “through the Word and the sacraments as through instruments the Holy Spirit is given, who effects faith *ubi et quando Deo visum est*, where and when it pleases God,” that is, where and when human beings come to “believe that they are received into grace on account of Christ.” We do not get to the heart of the matter here when we merely contrast verbal communication with sacramental infusion, for Luther does not think the natural man can attend to the gospel’s word of promise unless and until the Spirit sheds abroad in his heart the love of God through the communication of its message. Rather, the point in this formulation is to preserve the freedom of the Spirit as Lord and Giver of life to anticipate the Last Day now, and as such the Lordship of the Spirit over the believer and believing community, which otherwise would collapse back into the

53. Heiko A. Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), p. 124.



darkness of this unbelieving world, one religion alongside all the other religious attempts to bribe and manipulate the deity. While not in any way denying that the Spirit can and does incarnate Christ in the real faith of real people down on the earth in Christian community, this formulation makes the divisive ecclesiological issue about "Mother Church" (so also Luther in *LC* 2.3.42; *BC*, p. 436) precise: Is Mary *Theotokos* because she is the first of all such believers, upon whom the Spirit freely comes, whose faith in the gracious promise makes her fit to receive and bear Christ into the world? Or is Mary *Theotokos* because without her autonomous assent, Christ cannot be born into the world? The latter would make her not merely an instrument, freely chosen, of the Holy Spirit, but an agent in her own right over against the Spirit, as it is sometimes said, a "coredemptrix."

As one wit has put the matter: papal infallibility *ex cathedra* has only been invoked twice, and both times it erred. The stumbling block of the modern Marian dogmas is not the *Theotokos* as such (not for a Cyrillian in Christology like Luther!), nor is it love of the church as our mother, nor is it the development of doctrine as such (although the lack of clear basis in the primitive Christian witness for the papal and Marian dogmas remains a significant objection to them), nor is it the veneration but not worship of the mother of our Lord, nor is it the Christian's freedom to hold pious opinions (like Luther himself, according to Mattox), nor is it the right and duty of the church to require conscientious adherence to Christian dogma, even on pain of salvation, especially of its ordained ministers. The stumbling block of the modern Roman dogmas is both jurisdictional and substantive. The declaration of this dogma by one party in the state of divided Christianity as a belief to be held by all on pain of salvation is offensive jurisdictionally; its doctrinal and symbolic function supernaturally to guarantee the sanctity of the church (apart, that is, from the universal Spirit-wrought struggle against sin until the Lord comes) as figured in the Mary of the immaculate conception, is a stumbling block substantively.

So my argument for Lutheran theology as ecumenical corrective concludes, even if it only manages at this point in the ecumenical journey to achieve disagreement. Remembering that I reject Lutheranism as church for the sake of Lutheranism as theology, I conclude theologically that Orthodoxy does not take sin seriously enough as bondage to death and devil *on account of* ineluctable guilt in Adam, and so falls captive repeatedly to ethnocentric nationalisms, even racism, as Roeber prophetically rebukes but fails theologically to connect to the sad story of Byzantine triumphalism stretching back to Eusebius of Caesarea. Roeber, to be sure, makes an important point about

monastic protest against the captivation of Christianity for imperial purposes, a factor in Orthodoxy going back to Athanasius's own relation to the Coptic monks during his exiles. But Eusebius's influential idea that the age of the martyrs is fulfilled and surpassed in Constantine henceforth exempted Christianity as a state religion from the pervasive web of sinful abuse of God for human purposes, indeed identified Christianity with the fortunes of Byzantium. Eusebius's semi-Arian triumphalism is the functional equivalent, in my reading, of Rome's immaculate conception. Thus Catholicism inherits from Augustine an arguably more profound sense of the universal web of sinful abuse of God, also in religion that uses God for human purposes rather than surrendering us to God's purposes. But, I conclude, it has invented and invoked that arbitrary miracle of Mary's immaculate conception by which to exempt the real, existing Catholic Church from its historical guilt, depriving it in turn of the reform of church as church that truly comes by repentance and forgiveness. Homeless as Lutheran theology today appears, for the sake of this twofold ecumenical witness in our changing church(es) it is as urgent as necessary to persist, even "after Lutheranism."

### A Glimmer of New Hope: Realignment

If God is active, who gives life to the dead and calls into being worlds that do not yet exist, the situation cannot be so bleak as this conclusion appears to be. But the situation is dark. I will not discuss the more profound meaning of events for Orthodoxy, like the assassination of Alexander Men, or for Catholicism, like the clergy sex abuse scandal. As I compose these words, a news release from the ELCA reports that since its inception in a merger of three predecessor bodies in 1988, the real value of giving to this denomination has declined by 50 percent. In just the last three years of the brouhaha over same-sex unions, annual income has fallen from \$65 million to \$48 million, requiring massive budget cuts and personnel layoffs. In 1988, the ELCA had 5.4 million members; today it has about 4.5 million, and is steadily losing those who remain to demoralization, inactivity, and the kind of ecclesial transition that Roeber and Mattox represent. As traditional Lutherans drop out or become inactive, of course, nothing stands in the way of the liberal Protestant radicalization of the ELCA along the lines pioneered by the United Church of Christ (UCC) and the Episcopal Church in the USA. The alienation is profound. Can it be said of this real, existing Lutheran community today what Wilhelm Mauer wrote of Luther's theology?

Luther's Trinitarian confession is the basis for his theology, including its reforming elements. The Trinitarian character of his theology in no way eliminated or set aside its reforming character. The confession of the triune God and the incarnation of the Son presupposes all Reformation principles, including the justification of the sinner. Those who assume the opposite turn the whole thing upside down and allow it to collapse, since one cannot think coherently while standing on one's head. The foundation and cornerstone of Reformation theology is that every internal and external action of the Trinity is directed toward the salvation of the world.<sup>54</sup>

Evidently not. At a Eucharist including a "Rite of Reception" for partnered gay and lesbian pastors presided over by an ELCA bishop, the following prayers were publicly offered as alternatives alongside the Lord's Prayer:

Our Mother who is within us  
we celebrate your many names.  
Your wisdom come,  
your will be done,  
unfolding from the depths  
within us.  
Each day you give us all that we need.  
You remind us of our limits  
and we let go.  
You support us in our power  
and we act in courage.  
For you are the dwelling place within us,  
the empowerment around us,  
and the celebration among us,  
now and forever. Amen

Eternal Spirit,  
Earth-maker, Pain bearer, Life-giver,  
Source of all that is and that shall be,  
Father and Mother of us all,  
Loving God, in whom is heaven.  
The hallowing of your name

54. Wilhelm Mauer, *Historical Commentary on the Augsburg Confession*, trans. H. George Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), p. 240.

echo through the universe!  
The way of your justice be followed  
by the peoples of the world!  
Your heavenly will be done  
by all created beings!  
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom  
sustain our hope and come on earth!  
With the bread we need for today, feed us.  
In the hurts we absorb from one another,  
forgive us.  
In times of temptation and test,  
strengthen us.  
From trials too great to endure, spare us.  
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.  
For you reign in the glory of the power  
that is love, now and forever. Amen<sup>55</sup>

Anyone with her head not in the sand can see in this evidence for exactly where the ELCA is headed.

Hence, a federation of congregations that have left the ELCA, the Lutheran Churches in Mission for Christ, numbers five hundred-plus today and continues to rise. The nascent North American Lutheran Church anticipates hundreds of affiliations in the near-term future. Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Renewal), to which I belong, is not a church but a movement connecting confessional Lutherans with each other and with other Christians who intend to be evangelical, catholic, and orthodox. This work of connection is being called "realignment." The vision is to use the kind of Lutheran theology displayed on the preceding pages to forge a new trajectory for uniting faithful Protestants in the direction of a meeting of minds and hearts with Catholics and Orthodox. When we recall the ecumenical potential of the Lutheran-Catholic joint declaration on justification to which Methodists have subscribed, and bear in mind the scope of organizations parallel to Lutheran CORE in the UCC and among the Presbyterians, the orthodox Anglicans, and the movement in evangelicalism toward recovering of its lost catholicity,<sup>56</sup> it is not inconceivable that out of the ruins of the present Protestant

55. Celebration of Holy Communion with the Rite of Reception, St. Mark's Lutheran Church, San Francisco, Calif., Sunday, July 25, 2010.

56. Gerald McDermott, "The Emerging Divide in Evangelical Theology," in *The Future of Evangelicalism*, ed. Edith Blumhofer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

“collapse”<sup>57</sup> the real new thing the Spirit may be doing is leading its diaspora Protestants to a genuinely new unity, neither Protestant, nor Catholic, nor Orthodox, but Paul, and Peter, and John singing together in the Spirit, with the Son, to the Father, to whom is all glory, now and forever.

57. Uwe Siemon-Netto, “Poll Shows Protestant Collapse,” by United Press International, June 28, 2001, accessed at [www.vny.com/cf/News/upidetail.cfm?QID=198421](http://www.vny.com/cf/News/upidetail.cfm?QID=198421).