

# Behold the Lamb of God! A Sermon on Sin and Freedom

Psalm 40:1-10

Isaiah 49:1-7

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-41



In our gospel reading this morning, John the Baptist announces: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29). John’s statement is a brief summary of the heart of the Christian faith. Christian faith is about Jesus. Who is Jesus? He is someone who has a special relationship to God. “He is the Lamb of God.” He is also, according to John’s gospel, “the Word of God,” “the Son of God,” “the Christ,” “the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” the “Bread of life,” “the Water of life,” and a number of other things.

What does Jesus do? He takes away the sin of the world. These are the two central affirmations of Christian faith. Lose either affirmation – who Jesus is and what Jesus does – and you no longer have Christian faith. Yet both of these affirmations have become increasingly problematic in contemporary Western culture, and, significantly enough, I think, the second more than the first.

Let me illustrate what I mean by mentioning two incidents that

happened in the last several weeks, one in secular culture and one in the church. The first is the notorious Duck Dynasty incident. Phil Robertson, the star of a reality television series about a family of self-styled backwoods Bible thumpers who became millionaires from making duck calls created a cultural firestorm when he answered a question addressed to him in a magazine interview: "What in your mind is sinful?" I am not going to repeat Robertson's answer here. You are no doubt familiar with the story.

The second event was the appearance of a new Church of England baptismal rite. Supposedly the rite had been rewritten to put it in the language of East Enders in London, who apparently could not make sense of the current rite of baptism in the Church of England's Common Worship liturgy. What is significant about the new rite is not that the language is simplified so that East Enders can understand it, but that the language changes the actual meaning of the rite. It removes all language of sin, and all references to Jesus as Savior from sin. The baptized no longer "die to sin," but to "all that destroys." The baptized do not renounce sin; they renounce evil. Throughout the new liturgy, in every case in which the word "sin" appears in the current rite, the word "evil" is substituted.

What both of these incidents have in common is that they reflect the discomfort our society currently has with the notion of sin. In some sermons, this would be the place where I would lament that we now live in a world in which there is no more difference between right and wrong, that we live in a culture where there are no absolutes, and all morality is now relative. But it is not true that contemporary society has no absolutes or does not believe in the difference between right and wrong. Contemporary culture certainly has absolutes. Phil Robertson was castigated because he had violated one of those absolutes in an egregious way. Contemporary culture definitely believes in right and wrong, and it definitely believes that

there is such a thing as evil. What it has trouble with is the notion of sin.

What is the essential difference between evil and sin? Evil is horizontal language. Sin is vertical language. Sin always has reference primarily to God. An atheist can reject evil, but an atheist cannot reject sin. By abandoning sin language, the new baptismal rite of the Church of England has abandoned that vertical dimension that makes Christianity Christian. The heated response to Duck Dynasty star Phil Robertson's comments made clear that the culture no longer understands the language of sin. By using the language of sin, Robertson was using vertical language. He was saying that there are certain kinds of behavior that God does not approve of. In all the critical responses to Robinson that I have read, he was interpreted as using horizontal language. Robinson was accused of bigotry because he was interpreted as saying that he personally disapproved of or hated particular kinds of individuals.

Why is it that contemporary culture cannot understand the vertical language of sin? I think the primary reason for this is that the prevailing worldview in contemporary Western culture is one that places individualism and freedom as its two primary values. Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart has called this worldview "normal nihilism." Hart has written: "We live in an age whose chief moral value has been determined, by overwhelming consensus, to be the absolute liberty of personal volition, the power of each of us to choose what he or she believes, wants, needs, or must possess." In a recent Supreme Court decision, Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." This absolute primacy of autonomy and individual freedom is shared by both the political left and right in today's so-called "culture wars." It is evident in the political discourse in which both conservatives and liberals share the common rhetoric of "freedom" and "rights."

If the one absolute value is autonomy and freedom from restraint, and, since people have not only the choice, but the responsibility to define their own existence or meaning, the one threat that must be resisted is anything that would restrict those choices, or any hint that there would be a transcendent source of meaning or value above those individual choices that would define these things for us instead of letting us define them for ourselves. This is the real reason, I think, for the heated reaction to the Duck Dynasty interview. It also explains why the Church of England baptismal rite uses only horizontal language, and does not talk about sin.

But at the same time that this autonomous individualism is assumed without argument to be self-evidently true, it also creates problems. First, it is a nonsensical view in that it ignores that we are all members of various communities – families, churches, workplaces, neighborhoods – and those communities exist before we are born and will exist after we die, and they largely form who we are. As the poet John Donne famously wrote, “No man is an island.”

Autonomous individualism also makes it difficult to form communities, or to get people to be loyal to any cause that demands personal sacrifice in order to benefit a community. People need something transcendent to their own individuality in order to motivate them to act in a way that benefits others. Since the need to create our own values does not allow us to find this transcendence by using the vertical language of God, we need to create horizontal substitutes for transcendence instead.

The recent Avengers movie provides an example of the way that popular culture demonstrates this need to create substitutes for divine transcendence as a corrective to unrestrained autonomy. In the movie, a bunch of individualist super-heroes are confronted by the threat of an evil invasion that could destroy the planet earth, but the very individualism that

makes them such great super-heroes is keeping them from working together. They need a common cause to unite them. It is only after the death of a minor character in the movie, agent Phil Coulson, that they are finally motivated to put aside their differences to work together as a team. The threatened destruction of the entire planet was not enough to bring them together, but the death of a single individual was.

There is another paradox here. Contemporary autonomous individualism leads to both a desire for community, and a distrust of community. Communities are desired because individualism leads to loneliness, and autonomy also makes it impossible to cooperate to get anything done. But community is feared because it is believed that those who have power in communities are simply trying to impose their own agenda on others, thus violating the individual's freedom, which is, again, the one absolute value. If you saw the Avengers movie, you'll remember that one of the concerns that the various super-heroes had was that they were not quite sure that they could trust Nick Fury, the head of the organization S.H.I.E.L.D, who had brought them together, because S.H.I.E.L.D was a secretive bureaucracy with its own agenda. How could they be sure they were not being lied to? And in fact they were. We found out after the movie was released that Agent Coulson had not really died after all because he had to appear in a new television series. Nick Fury had falsely led the Avengers to believe that Coulson had died so that he could give them a cause to believe in so that they would work together. And apparently that lie was okay because it produced the desired result. So paradoxically, the entire premise of the movie, that the Avengers needed a cause transcendent to their own individualism in order to get them to work together, and to overcome their fear of being lied to, was itself based on a lie.

So contemporary culture is stuck. We need and want community because individualism is incapable of transcending its own

self-interest. Yet we are distrustful of communities because we can never be sure that those with power in these communities are not simply trying to use their own freedom to restrict our freedom, and we can never be sure that they are not lying to us. As Jean Paul Sartre famously said, "Hell is other people."

The biblical writers lived in a world that could not have imagined the value that Western culture puts on autonomy and unrestrained freedom. Ancient Mediterranean culture was a culture of families, communities, and cultural groups, not of independent individuals. Some of the key themes in the New Testament have to do with how the gospel addresses divisions between such groups, for instance, Jews and Gentiles. Nonetheless, it is surprising just how well the New Testament addresses both the concerns and the inherent contradictions of contemporary autonomous individualism. Let's look at the gospel of John as an example.

First, John's gospel addresses the need for a transcendent source of meaning that points beyond the autonomy of the individualist self. Turning again to this morning's gospel passage, we read, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29). It is Jesus who provides that transcendent meaning, but he does not do so in a straightforward way that simply contrasts the vertical language of the divine with the horizontal language of humanity. Rather, Jesus is the one in whom both the vertical and horizontal come together in a single person. If we turn to the beginning of John's gospel, we discover that Jesus is the Word who was in the beginning with God, and who is God (John 1:1). Jesus is also the creator, both of the universe and of humanity: "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men." (vs. 3-4). John's gospel tells us that this divine Word became a human being. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory,

glory of the only Son from the father, full of grace and truth." (1:14) So Jesus can provide a genuine transcendence that can reach beyond the limits of our mere human individuality. He is the Word made flesh, the one through whom our world has been made. And yet Jesus is not foreign to us. The Word of God is not simply the divine omnipotence bearing down on hapless human beings in a way that would crush our freedom and dignity. He is the Word who has become one of us. He is the one who has made the unknown transcendent known by coming to us as a fellow human being. As John wrote, "No one has seen God at any time. The only Son who in the bosom of the Father, has made him known." (1:18).

Jesus also addresses our need for community, but in a way that overcomes the fear of distrust of others that is one of the inherent tensions of contemporary individualism. First, the kind of divine transcendence that Jesus represents is not that of an isolated monad, an all-powerful individual who comes down from the sky to impose his despotic will on us like one of the pagan gods. (He is not like Loki in the Avengers movie.) Nor is Jesus the impersonal Unmoved Mover of Aristotle or the Neoplatonic One of Plotinus. Rather, Jesus' divine transcendence is that of a love based in an eternal community of the Trinitarian persons. This is also a major theme in John's gospel. In the high priestly prayer of John 17, Jesus prays to the Father: "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." (17:5). In Jesus' last supper discourse, he promises his disciples: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you." (14:16). We encounter this triune community in today's gospel reading, when John the Baptist says at the event of Jesus' baptism, "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He

on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." (1:32-34).

It is this trinitarian love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit that provides the motivating factor in Jesus' mission throughout John's gospel. The most famous verse in the gospel reminds us that God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life (3:16). The Father's purpose in sending the Son into the world is not for our destruction, but for our salvation: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (v. 17). This love that motivated the Father to give his Son for the salvation of humanity is poured out for us on the cross, the place where the divine love demonstrates itself to its fullest. In another saying that we find in the last supper discourse, Jesus tells his disciples, clearly referring to his own death: "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (15:13).

John's gospel makes clear that it is this community of love between the Father, the Son and the Spirit, that provides the ground for a community of disciples that gathers around Jesus. Jesus says to his followers: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." (15: 9,10). There is no other way to become partners in this love between the Father and Son except that of discipleship, the way of following Jesus. Becoming disciples of Jesus is not a matter of becoming slaves to a domineering tyrant who wants to limit our choices, but of becoming friends with him and with his Father: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made



known to you." And this friendship plays itself out not only on the vertical level, but on the horizontal level as well. It is precisely through loving one another as Jesus has loved us that we demonstrate that we are his disciples: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34, 35).

We see the beginnings of this theme of discipleship appearing in this morning's gospel reading. John the Baptist speaks to two of his own disciples: "Behold, the Lamb of God," and they turn from following John to become followers of Jesus. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, then goes to Peter to tell him, "We have found the Messiah." (1:36,41). Jesus is the transcendent source of meaning who links the divine vertical and the human horizontal to make possible a new community in which those who become his disciples discover that they are his friends who have come to share in the divine love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Those who follow Jesus obey his commandments because those commandments flow out of God's love, and this vertical love expresses itself horizontally as well. As the writer of John's gospel also writes in 1 John, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world." (1 John 5:2-4).

It might seem that we have wandered quite a bit from the question with which we began this sermon: "What about sin?" But before we could talk about sin, it was necessary to lay out the trinitarian and communitarian context within which sin makes sense, and without which, it makes no sense. As I mentioned earlier, apart from some kind of genuine transcendent basis for our decisions, it is impossible to move beyond the contradictions of individualism and autonomy to do

such things as create community or find motivation for actions that demand sacrifice. And such a transcendent basis must be genuine. The substitutes that modern Western culture regularly tries to provide are simply not adequate to the task because they are all horizontal. You can't lift yourself by your own bootstraps.

But once admit such a genuine transcendent alternative to mere human autonomy, and the notion of sin makes sense. Sin is not simply something that interferes with an individual's ability fully to actualize his or her own individual potential or to create their own values. Sin is a violation of love. Specifically, sin is a violation of the love that created heaven and earth, and has come to us in Jesus to call us out of our individualism and autonomy in order that we might become his disciples. It is only in coming to share in the trinitarian love between Jesus, his Father and the Spirit of truth as we become his friends that we can also begin to love one another as he has loved us.

This leads, finally, to a brief discussion of freedom, which, along with autonomy, is the one self-evident value in contemporary secular culture. Much of what I have been trying to say in this sermon is that mere autonomy is an incoherent value. It is only through relations with others, and specifically through a relationship, first, with the triune God, made possible through Jesus Christ, and, second with Jesus's friends, that human beings can flourish. But I also want to say that the notion of freedom that is embraced by contemporary culture is an incoherent notion. In our culture, freedom simply means the ability to do whatever I want without restraints. In the modern Western world, freedom makes you free. Contemporary people find the notion of sin to be objectionable because labeling something as sin restrains that freedom. To the contrary, in John's gospel, Jesus defines freedom in a very different way, in terms of discipleship. Jesus says, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my

disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32). When Jesus’ opponents protest against this that they are not slaves because they are descendents of Abraham, Jesus replies: “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.” (v. 34). The statement that the truth will make you free is one that even modern secularists love to quote, but they ignore the first half of Jesus’ saying. According to Jesus, the kind of autonomous individualism that our culture embraces does not make you free. It makes you a slave of sin. It is following Jesus that makes you free. And Jesus can set you free because he is the way, the truth and the life who can deliver us from the sin of enslavement to the insistence on our own independence and unrestrained autonomy. But that actually means that talk about sin is not bad news, but good news because, if I am a slave to sin, it is good news that Jesus has come to set me free. Jesus came to set me free from the slavery of my self-imprisonment. If I am guilty of sin, it is good news to hear the word of Jesus in John’s gospel, “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (3:17).

The contemporary gospel of autonomy and individualism will not make us free because freedom does not make us free. What David Bentley Hart has called “normal nihilism” is not enough to provide for even a secular morality. The forms of artificial transcendence that the culture creates in the absence of genuine transcendence can never be enough to pull us out of the isolated individualism of ourselves. We delude ourselves if we think that we can pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. However, we can rejoice that the love that has come to us in Jesus Christ has made us friends with God and with one another, and the truth of discipleship to Jesus really does make us free. We can therefore join in with John the Baptist’s proclamation: “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

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# The New Church of England Baptismal Liturgy

My brief (for me) comments on the new Church of England baptismal liturgy.

Evil is horizontal language. Sin is vertical language. An atheist can reject evil. Sin always has reference primarily to God. Dropping the language of sin is carried through to soteriology. The baptized no longer turn to Christ as "Saviour," but simply "turn to Christ." They no longer "submit to Christ as Lord" and Christ is no longer identified as "the way, the truth, and the life." The extent of Christology is that the baptized "trusts" in Christ and promises to "follow him for ever."

It is interesting that the baptismal prayer omits all language of sin. The apostles' creed is dropped in preference to vague promises to trust God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The prayers again omit any reference to sin or forgiveness of sin.

This strikes me as a Nestorian (or adoptionist) Christology an Abelardian soteriology, a Pelagian anthropology and an ethics that has only the second table of the law.

The formula itself does at least contain the traditional trinitarian names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but if we take seriously the principle of *lex orandi lex credendi*, it is questionable whether this is even a Christian rite of baptism because the content of the faith in to which the person is baptized is not Christian faith.

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# On “Lutheran” Anglicanism



Last summer, my friend David Koyzis started a conversation about [why there are so many Baptists who call themselves “Calvinists,” but no “Lutheran” Baptists.](#)

David might be surprised to know that there are Anglicans who call themselves “Lutherans.” They have historical connection with Trinity School for Ministry in connection with a former Dean/President, and every year I discover at least one or two new students in my classes who identify with this “Lutheran” Anglicanism. The recent publication of [this book](#) reminded me that “Lutheran” Anglicanism is alive and well, and has prompted me to post my own assessment of “Lutheran” Anglicanism.

Before I give my own assessment of Lutheran Anglicanism, I should perhaps say a little about my own acquaintance with Luther and Lutheranism before I encountered the “Lutheran” Anglicans. During my years at graduate school, I came across Luther as part of my studies, and knew several Lutherans who were fellow students. I studied Luther primarily in courses on Christology and liturgy, and included a chapter on Luther in my dissertation. My assessment of Luther was mixed. I

appreciated most Luther's Christology and his sacramental theology, although I found his theology of the ubiquity of Christ's ascended human nature problematic. I was less happy with Luther's *Bondage of the Will*, where I thought he could have learned a thing or two from Thomas Aquinas or Augustine. Luther's failure to distinguish adequately between natural and moral freedom combined with a failure to distinguish adequately between foreknowledge and predestination led to a determinist doctrine of human will and divine predetermination that made God responsible for sin. Luther's way of stating the distinction between the "hidden" and "revealed God" was rightly repudiated by Karl Barth as undermining the fundamental theological thesis that God is in himself who he is in his revelation. I was also less than happy with Luther's "law/gospel" hermeneutic, which, while it had some validity for interpreting certain passages in Paul's letters to the Galatians and the Romans was largely a case of eisegesis if imposed on the Bible as a whole. As a Reformation Christian, I embraced Luther's doctrines of *sola scriptura*, and justification by grace alone through faith alone, not because they were Luther's but because I believe them correct – although I tended to understand the Reformation *sola's* through Anglican eyes.

As part of my doctoral research, I read quite a bit in modern secondary literature on Luther. I read not only Luther, but became familiar with some of the key hallmarks of Lutheran theology – the Augsburg Confession, and much of the material in the Book of Concord. I also became familiar with a few modern Lutheran theologians: Soren Kierkegaard, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Gustaf Aulen, Helmut Thielicke, and contemporary Lutherans such as Wolfhart Pannenberg, Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, Gilbert Meilaender and David Yeago. Overall, my assessment of Luther and Lutheranism was mostly positive.

I discovered a very different "Luther" and approach to "Lutheranism" among the "Lutheran" Anglicans, a kind of

Lutheranism I had never encountered before. This “Lutheran” Anglicanism was a variant on a way of reading Luther that Lutheran theologian Gilbert Meilaender calls “dialectical Lutheranism”<sup>1</sup>

Dialectical Lutheranism is distinguished by the following key characteristics:

### **Justification and Sanctification**

It is arguable that one of the most significant theological advancements of the Protestant Reformation was to distinguish clearly between justification as a forensic declaration of righteousness, what Luther called “alien righteousness,” and sanctification, a real intrinsic change by which the sanctified actually do become holy. If the error of Tridentine Roman Catholicism was to equate justification with sanctification, making justification an “infused righteousness,” dialectical Lutheranism tends to err in the opposite direction, reducing sanctification to just another way to talk about justification, and thus to confirm the critique of Trent, that Protestants reduce justification to a “legal fiction.”

A classic example can be found in Lutheran theologian Gerhard Forde, who begins an essay on “Lutheran Spirituality” by writing: “Sanctification, if it is to be spoken of as something other than justification, is perhaps best defined as the art of getting used to the unconditional justification wrought by the grace of God for Jesus’ sake.”<sup>2</sup> Forde continues: “Sanctification . . . is not something added to justification.”

Moreover, Forde denies that sanctification is about moral transformation: “[L]iving morally . . . should not be equated with sanctification, being made holy.” (14) Indeed, Forde is suspicious of language of sanctification: “Talk about sanctification is dangerous. It is too seductive for the old

being.” Forde suggests that the tradition was mistaken when it “sharply distinguished” sanctification from justification: “God alone does the justifying,” But sanctification “enters the picture to rescue the good ship Salvation from shipwreck on the rocks of Grace Alone. Sanctification, it seems is *our* part of the bargain.” (15)

Consequently, “dialectical Lutheranism” tends to understand sanctification using the language of returning “again and again” to the moment of justification. There is no sense of progress, no sense in which righteousness can grow, no sense in which grace can be understood as a power that transforms and “makes possible the Christian’s journey toward holiness,” a “growth in grace” in which one becomes “more and more” holy, in which we are “gradually transformed and perfected along the way.”<sup>3</sup> Forde is a good example of the approach that Meilaender criticizes as a “returning again and again” to justification. In Forde’s words: “The description of sanctification as a process leads to the temptation to make the process itself into the basic theological scheme.” (119) Such schemes inevitably become a “a kind of ‘practical Pelagianism,’ where original sin does not exist and sanctification is gained by our exercise of free will.” (120) Rather, suggests Forde, sanctification just is returning again and again to justification: “[W]e find ourselves always starting afresh. . . . One is always at a new beginning.” Accordingly, sanctification is then “not a continuous or steady progress,” but simply a return, over and over, to justification: “Our sanctification consists merely in being shaped by, or getting used to, justification.” (28-29)<sup>4</sup>

## **Law and Gospel**

“Dialectical Lutheranism” tends to make “law and gospel” the hermeneutical key for interpreting both Scripture and life. Lutheran David Yeago has written about the way that Lutheran theology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century made “the assumption that a



radical antagonism of law and gospel is the ultimate structuring horizon of Christian belief.”<sup>5</sup> For those who hold this view, says Yeago, law and gospel are “irreducibly opposed” and “incompatible”: “The law is sheer oppression, the gospel sheer liberation, and this total opposition can only be ended by the negation of the law.” (40). Forde again provides an example in his book *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, which contains numerous passages such as the following: “The law is not a remedy for sin. It does not cure sin but rather makes it worse. . . [T]he law multiplies sin precisely through our morality, our misuse of the law and our success at it.” William Hordern equates “law” with “works-righteousness,” and “demands that come to us with threats of punishment and promises or rewards” (137). Law is about “extrinsic” rewards and punishments (146). “Lutheran” Anglican Paul Zahl states: “[T]he law is always heard as an attack.” “[T]he law . . . accuses, and it accuses always.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Third Use of the Law**

Correlative to this understanding of law as entirely negative is a rejection of what the Lutheran Confessions and Reformed theology call the “third use” of the law – law understood not as condemnation of sin or as a restraint of wrong-doing through threat of punishment, but rather as guide for living for the Christian who lives under grace. Forde writes that “talk of a ‘third use’ mistakes the relation of the Christian in this present age to the law. . . What the Christian knows is not a different *use* of the law, but just the difference between law and gospel, and thus what law is for.” (81) Similarly, Hordern suggests that the “third use of the law” is a “logical impossibility.” Echoing the “dialectical” understanding of justification, Hordern suggests that the only point of a “third use” would be subsumed under the “first use,” to “turn again to the good news of forgiveness.” (120)

### **Spontaneity**

Given its reluctance to speak of “progress” in the Christian life, “dialectical Lutheranism” uses a very different kind of language to talk about the effects of grace – the language of “spontaneity”: Forde suggests that a “truly good work” is one “that is free, uncalculating, genuine, spontaneous.”<sup>8</sup> Again, he writes: “The insistence that only those works are truly good that are done spontaneously and joyously out of faith, hope and love belongs to the very heart and soul of Luther’s Reformation.”<sup>9</sup> Grace cannot be prepared for in any way. It is not correlated to any human activity whatsoever. If sanctification exists, it is something that “just happens,” spontaneously.

## **Practices**

Reluctance to speak of Christian sanctification in terms of “progress,” or “journey,” combined with an insistence that grace is always spontaneous naturally leads to a dilemma when it comes to Christian practices such as prayer, worship, or sharing in the sacraments. Specifically, dialectical Lutheranism seems not to know what to do with Christian practices. The temptation is to interpret them as “works righteousness” rather than “means of grace.” Forde does not mention the sacraments in his discussion of either sanctification or Luther’s “Theology of the cross”; he does refer to Aristotle, where he picks up Aristotle’s claim that we become just by doing good deeds, as we acquire skills by practicing. To the contrary, it is only the one who is already righteous who does good works. Works performed on the premise of “becoming righteous” are “not good works to begin with.”<sup>10</sup> Hordern has a chapter on “Justification and the Practice of the Church.” He notes that “The doctrine of justification puts more emphasis upon serving the neighbor than upon religious actions such as attending worship services.”<sup>11</sup> He is willing to say that worship centered in Word and Sacraments “has proven in the experience of Christians to be a means of grace whereby

believers have found new strength for the living of the Christian life.” (170) But the bulk of the chapter is concerned to assert that “The doctrine of justification means that Christian life is not guided by a set of rules and regulations.” (177) Much of what Hordern writes about the manner in which Christians should be patient with and forgive one another, recognizing that we are all forgiven sinners is valuable. Having granted that, it is significant that Hordern says little about the sacramental and liturgical practices of the church except to insist that “A church that patterns its actions after justification will not pursue its members and harangue them into attending worship services.”(171) He does say that a church “committed to justification will . . . search for ways to make the worship experience, meaningful, joyous and relevant to the Christian life.” (172) But this is a minimal discussion of the sacramental and liturgical dimensions of the church’s life. It is perhaps significance that in in Paul Zahl’s book entitled *Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life*, the words “baptism,” “eucharist,” “Lord’s Supper,” “liturgy,” do not appear. Zahl does state that “A theologian of grace has no ecclesiology. The ecclesiology of a theologian of grace is a negation of ecclesiology. . . . grace trumps church every time.”<sup>12</sup>

## **Critique**

I would suggest that “dialectical” Lutheranism is, first, a poor reading of Luther. It ignores the kinds of things that Luther says in his sermon on “Two Kinds of Righteousness,” in which he does not reduce sanctification to simply returning to justification, “again and again.” Luther is willing to speak of moral progress – using the language of “more and more” even in respect to justification: “Christ daily drives out the old Adam *more and more* in accordance with the extent to which faith and knowledge of Christ grow. For alien righteousness is not instilled all at once, but it begins, *makes progress*, and is finally perfected at the end through death.”[my emphasis]<sup>13</sup>

Luther is willing to speak of the “second kind of righteousness” (sanctification) using language such as “that manner of life spent profitably in good works, in the first place, in slaying the flesh and crucifying the desires with respect to the self,” as “crucify[ing] the flesh,” “work[ing] love,” “living soberly with self, justly with neighbor, devoutly toward God,” “his righteousness follows the example of Christ in this respect and is transformed into his likeness.”

Similarly, in “The Councils and the Church,”<sup>14</sup> Luther speaks of “sanctification” and “virtue” in a way that would make Methodist “virtue” ethicist Stanley Hauerwas proud, and would no doubt sound like “works righteousness” to a “dialectical Lutheran”:

*For they, rejecting and not understanding the Ten Commandments, preach much about the grace of Christ instead. They strengthen and comfort those who remain in sins, telling them that they shall not fear sins or be terrified at them, since through Christ, these are all done away; and yet they see people going on, and let them go on, in open sins, without any renewal or improvement of their lives. From this one observes that they really do not understand the faith and Christ aright, and abolish Him even as they preach Him. For how can a man preach rightly about the works of the Holy Ghost in the First Table and speak about comfort, grace, forgiveness of sins, if he neither heeds nor practices the works of the Holy Ghost in the Second Table, which he can understand and experience, while he has never attempted or experienced those of the First Table? Therefore it is certain that they neither have nor understand either Christ or the Holy Ghost, and their talk is mere foam on their tongues, and they are, as has been said, good Nestorians and Eutychians, who confess or teach Christ in the premise and deny Him in the conclusion, or idiomata; that is, they teach Christ and destroy Him by teaching Him.*

At the 2013 Trinity School for Ministry Ancient Evangelical Future Conference, Lutheran theologian David Yeago gave a marvelous talk on Luther's shorter catechism,<sup>15</sup> in which he pointed out that Luther's Small Catechism has often been misread because of the Law/Gospel hermeneutic. Luther's beginning exposition of the Ten Commandments has been understood to lead the sinner to despair; the third section of the catechism on the Lord's Prayer is meant to lead the sinner to prayer for forgiveness. To the contrary, claims Yeago, the structure of the Catechism follows the structure of the Creed. The first section (on the Ten Commandments) corresponds to the first article and points to God as Creator and the moral law as reflecting God's intentions for his creation. The second section on the Creed corresponds to the second article and the work of Christ. The third section on the Lord's Prayer corresponds to the article on the Holy Spirit, and is meant to direct the catechumen to holiness. Luther does not even mention justification in the Small Catechism.

## **Psychologism**

Concerning the "law/gospel" hermeneutic, the key question is whether what the apostle Paul means by law and gospel is what "dialectical Lutheranism" means. What does Paul mean by the expression *ergon nomou* ("works of the law")? The "New Perspective" on Paul argues that "works of the law" refers specifically to those "boundary markers" that separate Jew from Gentile, namely circumcision and kosher diet. As I have written elsewhere, I think this too narrow a reading. "[T]he logical flow of Paul's argument is to move from circumcision as one element of 'works of the law' (the New Perspective's emphasis) to the greater moral demands of the law as expressed in the Ten Commandments, and, on that basis, goes on to claim that unless one keeps fully the moral requirements of the law as well, that circumcision and kosher will do one no good. Since both Jews and Gentiles are guilty of idolatry, theft, lying, and adultery, all stand condemned before the moral

requirements of the law, and can only be justified by God's free gracious gift in Christ. As I read it, Paul consistently uses 'law' language to push beyond mere boundary markers to focus on the violation of the moral dimension of the law."<sup>16</sup>

As I read it, "works of the law" has a very specific focus for Paul. It refers to violations of the objective moral law contained in both Tables of the Ten Commandments. That is, when Paul talks about justification apart from "works of the law," he is dealing with the question of "objective moral guilt." If that is the case, then the New Perspective has Paul wrong here. But then, so does "dialectical Lutheranism" to the extent that "dialectical Lutheranism" tends to interpret "law" and "justification" psychologically. For "dialectical Lutheranism," "Law" is any command that one perceives as restricting and demanding, and against which one tends to rebel. A nice illustration is found in Paul Zahl's *Grace in Practice*, where he talks about "law" in terms of driving his car and not wanting to obey the 45 mph speed limit sign, or wanting to smoke because everyone tells him not to do it. Dialectical Lutheranism also understands "law" to mean any performance standards that are imposed on one by someone else, leading to a sense of unworthiness. But this is not what the apostle Paul means by law. Paul is not concerned about my psychological disposition to break speed limits or feelings of inadequacy I might have because of overly demanding parents or my temptations to resist the unreasonable demands of authority figures. For Paul, justification "apart from works of the law" has to do with only one thing, concrete objective guilt for real violations of the moral principles expressed in the Ten Commandments.

In addition, for Paul, the threat of the law is not the permanent situation of the Christian, but, rather, the situation of those who live before the coming of Christ and the fulfillment of the law. Because we have been redeemed by Christ, and the Holy Spirit dwells in us, we can rejoice in

God's law as a reflection of his love, and, although we continue to be sinners, there is nonetheless real growth and progress in holiness.

If "dialectical Lutheranism" tends to interpret "law" psychologically, it tends to do the same with "grace." If my problem is either one of "guilt feelings" generated by my own failure to live up to my own or others' standards, or resistance against the arbitrary demands of others, then the solution to such "guilt feelings" is also interpreted psychologically. When I perceive that Christ loves me apart from my "performance," then I am grateful, and I can respond in gratitude to Christ's love.

While such gratitude is certainly a wonderful thing, it is not what Paul is talking about when he talks about justification, and it is certainly not what Paul is talking about when he talks about sanctification. When Paul writes about justification, he is concerned with genuine pardon for genuine objective wrong-doing. When Paul writes about sanctification, he does not use the language of gratitude but of "union with Christ," of deliverance from slavery to sin. As Richard Hays states in *Moral Vision of the New Testament*: "There is, interestingly, no emphasis in Paul on gratitude as a motivation for obedience."<sup>17</sup>

The problem with such a psychological interpretation of law and gospel is that it confuses the seriousness of objective guilt with psychological "guilt feelings" or resistance to the unrealistic expectations of parents or others, and it presumes way too much about the power of psychological feelings of gratitude to produce real change. I sometimes am grateful for what Christ has done for me, and I find myself having compassion on others in return, but sometimes I find myself feeling nothing – neither gratitude nor awe – and I resent that some inconsiderate jerk is making demands on me, and so I respond with resentment. And I do this even knowing that

Christ has died for me.

What is missing from the psychological account is Augustine's notion of the *habitus*. My problem as a sinner is that I have done objective wrong, and have not loved God and my neighbor; but I am also trapped in the continuing dispositions and habits of previous sinful behaviors. The only escape from such enslaving habits is the origination of a new *habitus*, which will replace my previous propensity toward self-aggrandizement with a genuine love for God and others. For this, the only solution is a real ontological transformation that takes place as, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, I am united to the risen Christ and share in his resurrection life. This union resulting in a genuine ontological transformation takes place not through "spontaneous" psychological awareness, but through the objective means by which I come to share in Christ's risen life: the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, the practices of prayer, reading Scripture, living in Christian community. Such transformation is slow and gradual, and there are frequent setbacks, but it is genuine. The language that Christian tradition uses to describe this transformation is sanctification, deification, *theosis*.

Why is it that contemporary "dialectical Lutheranism" tends to interpret law and gospel psychologically rather than in the objective language of forgiveness from genuine guilt, and the objective ontological transformation following from union with Christ? I suspect that the source may lie in the dependence of contemporary interpreters on the readings of Paul found in mid-twentieth century Lutheran biblical scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann and Ernst Kasemann. Bultmann, in particular, was a liberal Protestant, who, because he rejected the miraculous, interpreted the New Testament in terms of Martin Heidegger's existentialist philosophy. Because Bultmann did not believe in the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus, he interpreted justification existentially – in terms of "self-understanding." Because he did not believe in a second coming



of Christ, Bultmann re-interpreted eschatology in terms of an existential "moment of decision." Bultmann's re-interpretation of justification was, consequently psychological and a-temporal. Such an interpretation was a far remove from either Paul or Luther's understanding of justification as an appropriation of Christ's objective work "outside of myself" and my own "self-understanding" ("alien" righteousness).

One of the more helpful insights in Aquinas and Hooker is the distinction between various kinds of law, particularly the distinctions between eternal, moral, and positive law.

Any command, whether written or oral, is an example of positive law. But the only positive laws that are *morally* binding are those that are in accord with the moral law to love God with all of our heart and our neighbors as ourselves. (There can be positive laws that bind even if they are not moral in themselves. So, the existence of speed limits on highways is an example of positive law that is not arbitrary, but prevents automobile accidents in which genuine harm could occur.) The gospel frees us from all kinds of positive laws, not only the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, but also the arbitrary positive laws of others' expectations for us or our own perfectionism or scrupulosity or mere demands for social conformity. At the same time, it is important not to confuse such social expectations with those positive laws that echo genuine moral law.

There are real dangers in not clearly distinguishing between positive law and moral law. The law that Paul addresses in Romans is not the law of either our own or others' expectations of us, but the real moral law (expressed in the Ten Commandments), and this is the law that we are guilty of violating. Thus, in Romans 7, Paul is not discussing a struggle with "law" as social disapproval, but with genuine violation of the divine moral law: coveting is a sin because it violates the command to love my neighbor as myself, and it demonstrates a lack of trust in God's providence and care in

my life.

### **Is Justification by faith therapy?**

I would suggest that any adequate theology of justification and grace must contain at least the following: a) divine initiative: the human role is always one of response to grace, not its condition; b) genuine forgiveness of real sins: the human role is not a condition of, but a response to forgiveness; c) real transformation and participation in holiness: grace is effective; it produces real change, and this happens through union with the crucified and risen Christ.

These are all objective realities that, while they affect the self, take place outside the self. This, I think, is the primary insight of Luther's notion of *alien* righteousness. Even "c) real transformation," takes place through a union with the risen Christ who is outside my consciousness.

While justification may have consequences in terms of my self-understanding, as well as emotional and psychological consequences, justification is primarily about the forgiveness of sins, not about the psychological or emotional consequences of forgiveness of sin. Does the repeated use of personal anecdotes in "Lutheran" Anglicanism lead to the impression that justification is primarily about a change in my "self-understanding" rather than about an objective act that has taken place outside myself? Is this focus on transformation of self-understanding (how I "see" myself and others) the legacy of Schleiermacher and Bultmann more than Luther?

Paul's standard paradigm for Christian behavior is indicative followed by imperative. (Because . . . therefore . . . ) Karl Barth is consistent with Paul here in his insistence that theologically we need to begin with gospel, not law. It is only in the light of the good news of our redemption in Jesus Christ that we can appreciate our own sinfulness. But that

does not mean agreement with the standard “dialectical Lutheran” trope that the “law always condemns.” It is very clear that, for Paul, the law condemns “prior to Christ,” whether chronologically or experientially. However, after Christ, the law has a positive function. Romans 7 is not a description of the “normal Christian life.” As Paul makes clear in Romans 8:2, “The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” (Cf. Gal. 6:2) Brevard Childs suggests (following Paul W. Meyer) that the radical Lutheran understanding of ‘law’ in Romans 7, crucial to the Law/Gospel hermeneutic, is mistaken: “Paul is not concerned in Romans 7 with the malevolent power of the law, but rather with that of sin. . . . [C]hapter 7 concerns the demonic force of sin in perverting the law that was intended by God to procure life, but has actually brought forth the exactly opposite result. . . . By isolating works from law, Paul is able to contrast God’s righteousness, not with righteousness from the law, but with Israel’s own righteousness. The just requirements of the law have been fulfilled in Christ, and are now made available to all who walk in the Spirit (8:4).”<sup>18</sup>

Paul never suggests that sanctification rests on a forensic declaration. To the contrary, Paul uses two different words to discuss two different aspects of grace: *dikaiosune* (justification) is a forensic declaration, and Paul uses this when discussing the objective problem of guilt. When discussing the Christian life, however, Paul uses *hagiosmos*, translated “sanctification” or “holiness,” and Paul associates *hagiosmos* with metaphors of being set free from captivity, union with Christ, and the indwelling Spirit, not with courtroom language. Paul’s common language for both justification and sanctification is that of “union with Christ,” which has two aspects, dealing with the two characteristics of sin: objective guilt (justification) and indwelling sinfulness (sanctification). So I am not holy because I believe that Jesus died for my sins. I am *forgiven*

(and accounted righteous) because I believe that Christ Jesus died for my sins, but I actually become holy because, through faith, I am united to the crucified and risen Christ, who shares his resurrection life with me. Sanctification, which is a real intrinsic transformational change *in me* is not to be confused with justification which is forensic and concerns Christ's *alien* righteousness *outside me*.

### **Practices as "means of grace"**

It is not enough then simply to return to justification "over and over again." Sanctification involves a real progress and a real growth in grace. Far from Christian practices being "works righteousness," they are the necessary "means of grace" through which God makes the church holy.

As mentioned above, dialectical Lutheranism does not seem to know what to do with Christian practices, interpreting them as "works righteousness" rather than "means of grace." My own limited reading of Forde confirms that he rejects a notion of sanctification as "progress" as an example of a "theology of glory." In *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, Forde seems to equate such notions of "progress" as Aristotelian, as becoming righteous "by practice."

However, there are a number of "practices" connected with the Christian faith: the reading of Scripture, the practice of prayer, corporate worship, the celebration of the sacraments. It is surely no coincidence that numerous spiritual writers – Medieval mystics, Anglican George Herbert, contemporary writer Kathleen Norris – speak of the practical necessity of continuing the mundane tasks of praying the Daily Office, of reading and meditating on Scripture, of receiving the sacraments, of worshiping in community, when one is beset by doubts.

Dialectical Lutheranism tends to repudiate all of this as a form of "works righteousness." But that rather misses the

point. Traditional definitions of the sacraments speak of them as “means of grace” – grace, not works! Biblical language about prayer and meditating on God’s word uses the language of “refreshment,” of “quenching one’s thirst,” of “satisfying hunger”: “Taste and see that the LORD is good!” (Ps. 34:8). Hebrews 6:5 speaks of those “who have tasted the goodness of the word of God.” In John 6:53, Jesus says, “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” Engaging in Christian practices of prayer and meditating on Scripture, receiving the sacraments, reciting the daily office, and worshiping with fellow Christians is not “works righteousness,” trying to “earn our salvation.” Rather, these are the means by which the risen Christ shares his life with us. When we are starving, we do not think of eating as a “good work,” but as a way of keeping ourselves alive. Similarly, when beset by doubt, when we are suffering from spiritual sickness, the last thing we need is to starve from lack of spiritual nourishment. In times of spiritual aridity, when prayer and worship and Bible reading might seem meaningless, one of the best things we can do is to just keep on doing it anyway. Pray, read the Bible and meditate on Scripture, receive the sacraments. These are means by which God feeds the starving soul.

Luther was more than willing to criticize external rituals, and people who put faith in pilgrimages or indulgences. However, he never suggests that the external practices of the church – reading Scripture, liturgical worship, or administration of the sacraments – are examples of “works righteousness.” To the contrary, they are the means by which God communicates *holiness* to the church. They are “means of grace.” About Scripture, Luther says:

*This is the main point. It is the high, chief, holy possession from which the Christian people take the name “holy,” for God’s Word is holy and sanctifies everything it touches; nay, it is the very holiness of God. Romans 1:16*

says, "It is God's power, which saves all who believe thereon," and 2 Timothy 4:3, "It is all made holy by the Word of God and prayer"; for the Holy Ghost Himself administers it, and anoints and sanctifies the Church, that is, the Christian, holy people, with it and not with the pope's chrism, with which he anoints, or sanctifies fingers, garb, cloaks, cups, and stones. . . .

### On preaching:

We speak, however, of the external Word orally preached by men like you and me. For Christ left this behind Him as an outward sign whereby His Church, His Christian, holy people in the world, was to be recognized. . . . Wherever, therefore, you hear or see this Word preached, believed, confessed, and acted on, there do not doubt that there must be a true ecclesia sancta catholica, a Christian, holy people, even though it be small in numbers; for God's Word does not go away empty ( Isaiah 55:11), but must have at least a fourth part, or a piece of the field. If there were no other mark than this one alone, it would still be enough to show that there must be a Christian church there; for God's Word cannot be present without God's people, and God's people cannot be without God's Word.

### On baptism:

God's people, or the Christian holy people, is known by the holy Sacrament of Baptism, when it is rightly taught and believed and used according to Christ's ordinance. That, too, is a public sign and precious, holy possession whereby God's people is made holy, for it is a holy bath of regeneration through the Holy Ghost, in which we bathe and are washed by the Holy Ghost from sin and death, as in the innocent, holy blood of the Lamb of God. Where you see this mark, know that the holy Christian people must be there, even though the pope does not baptize you or even if you know nothing about his

*holiness and power. . . .*

On the eucharist:

*God's people, or a Christian, holy Church is known by the holy Sacrament of the Altar, when it is rightly administered according to Christ's institution and is believed and received. That, too, is a public mark and precious, holy possession, bequeathed by Christ, whereby His people is made holy [my emphasis]. By means of this sacrament it exercises itself in faith, and openly confesses that it is a Christian people, as it does also by means of the Word of God and baptism.*<sup>19</sup>

## **Mediation**

Medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas and Anglican Richard Hooker (but also Martin Luther and Karl Barth) insist that God always works through created intermediaries. The "dialectical Lutheran" focus on "spontaneity" seems closer to Ulrich Zwingli here; for Zwingli, God always works directly, not through created intermediaries. Rather, for Aquinas and Hooker, conversion is a supernatural act, but an act of grace restoring and perfecting an original creation. It is not a miracle. That which provides for continuity between the fallen creature and the regenerate creature is the *image of God*, which is not lost in the fall, and cannot be. This means that, for Hooker (reading Aquinas through Reformation eyes), while Christ's alien righteousness is the ground (formal cause) of my justification, justification is effective and produces a real change in the creature. Sanctification is real, and produces a real change from potency to act in the justified human being, as the transformed creature becomes more and more Christ-like. As such, language of "participation," "deification," or *theosis*, is not a problem. "Deification" does not mean that creatures cease to be creatures, but that,

through union with the humanity of the crucified and risen Christ, who is, in his personal identity, God the Son of God, justified sinners are transformed as they participate in the life of the risen Christ.

To the contrary, for dialectical Lutheranism, justification seems to be a direct creative act, a miracle, in which God does not restore an original creation, but creates something entirely new. There is no continuity whatsoever between the fallen creature and the new creation, except God's word of proclamation, which destroys the sinner before justifying through the word.

This leads to the question of *continuity*. Aquinas and Hooker retain both teleology and the potency/act distinction as a way of explaining continuity and identity through change in time. Does "dialectical Lutheranism" embrace an ontology of immediate creationism, in which, at each moment God simply creates a new world? Is there a way to account for continuity of identity, especially in creation, fall, restoration, and regeneration if one rejects the Aristotelian distinction between potency and act?

One of the unclarities in "dialectical Lutheranism" is that it simultaneously seems to affirm and deny a real change in the justified sinner. On the one hand, there seems to be a suspicion of any genuine transformation; yet, on the other hand, the very affirmation of justification by faith presupposes that there must be such a transformation, insofar as faith, which is indeed, an act of looking away from the self to the alien righteousness of Christ, is indeed, a human act. It is not God who believes instead of the sinner, but the sinner, who, certainly through grace, exercises a genuine act of faith. Given, however, that the will of the sinner is bound, is turned in on itself, such an act of faith demands a genuine transformation, a change. Even if I am not in charge, even if my faith is a gift from God, even if my faith looks away from me, "I" am the one in whom God gives the gift of



faith, and the faith I exercise is indeed, *my* act. If, however, grace is effective in producing an act of faith, how can we consistently claim that grace is able only to effect faith, but not to produce other genuinely transformative acts in the justified sinner? How can we claim that the sinner, through grace, exercises genuine faith, and, yet that the same grace that enables faith, cannot enable “deification”? Does this not point to a limit, not in the sinner’s ability, but the divine efficacy? Are we not tying God’s hands in the name of a certain understanding of creatureliness and total depravity? Does God need to denigrate the creature in order to uphold his infinity and omnipotence?

Insofar as Aquinas and Hooker believe that God works through created realities, they also affirm that “grace perfects nature; it does not destroy it.” God and the creature are not two competitive realities operating on the same plane. In grace, God moves in creatures in such a way that human freedom is enhanced rather than destroyed. “Dialectical Lutheranism” seems to presuppose that where God acts, the creature must give way – thus a repeated insistence by “Anglican” Lutherans that there is “no such thing” as free will. Does this not presume that God and the creature are two competing actors in the same field of being? Does this denial of free will mean that it is necessary to deny the existence of human freedom in order to enhance divine freedom?

Why not embrace instead the scholastic dictum that grace presupposes and does not destroy nature? If one recognizes that evil is privation and not a positive reality, one does not need to deny the existence of “free will” to speak of grace. Rather, since all creation is already God’s good work, regeneration restores the creature to its proper *telos*; it returns the will to proper desires and proper use of created goods. One does not then speak of “free will,” but of “freed will.”

Is regeneration, strictly speaking, a miracle, or is it a

mediated act? In Luther's essay "Two Kinds of Righteousness," he distinguishes between "alien righteousness . . . from without," through which we are justified by faith, and a "proper righteousness," by which we "work with the first," "follow the example of Christ," and are "transformed into this righteousness." Does not such language of transformation demand the Aristotelian language of potency and act in terms of sanctification? Is not sanctification a real progress in righteousness, where we, by following Christ, become "conformed to his image"? Is not sanctification the place to talk about "pilgrimage," "virtue," and "transformation", as those who have been "declared righteous" in justification, actually "become righteous" through inner moral transformation?

What about practices and habit? Is it not the case that practices such as prayer, Scripture reading, and worship form character, and result in real spiritual growth, even if they do not justify? It is, of course, a major thesis of the law/gospel dialectic that "law" does not enable performance. An exhortation "Do this!" does not enable me to do it. But does "gospel" understood as mere proclamation of pardon or forgiveness do any more to enable performance? If the problem is the "bondage of the will" (addiction to destructive habits of sin), then the proclamation that I am forgiven for the way I have lived out those destructive habits is indeed good news. It is wonderful to hear that I will not be condemned for offenses that I seem to have no power to stop doing. But that does not change the problem of the "bondage of the will" itself. The alternative to "bad habits" is "good habits." In order to produce good actions, I must become good. There must be a real change within me. But justification is not something *in* me. It is, "alien righteousness." It is "forensic." It is "imputation." Such an "alien righteousness" can not help me if what I need is to change, because change must come from within. As Paul says: I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives *in* me. And the life

I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Gal. 2:20). Or, in the language of John’s gospel: “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I *in* him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5). The “in Christ” language of Scripture is not associated with “imputation,” with declarations of forgiveness, but specifically with the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, and with mutual indwelling between the risen Christ and the church that is his body.

I would suggest that the ecclesial practices of the church (worship, sacraments, scripture-reading, prayer) provide the connection between the priority of grace as an *alien* righteousness, (the ascended Christ outside me) and sanctification as a change from within (Christ within me). The practices as practices do not make me righteous; nor do they encourage me to look within myself for righteousness. However, they do produce a change within me as they direct my attention outside myself to hear the proclaimed word of Scripture, to address the God who is outside me in prayer, to participate in union with the crucified and risen Christ who stands at the right hand of the Father, as through worship and the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, the indwelling Holy Spirit uses these practices as *mediated* channels of grace to unite me to the risen Christ and transform me from within.

### **Some Final Advice for my “Lutheran” Anglican friends**

The above critique is not meant to turn my “Lutheran” Anglican friends away from Luther. Please read Luther, but read all of Luther, not only what he says about justification by faith and “law and gospel.” Particularly read material on his Christology, and his theology of the sacraments, his views on worship, his catechisms, his exposition of the Sermon of the Mount. Read the Lutheran Confessions as found in the Book of Concord. These are indispensable for understanding Lutheran theology, and I notice what seems a complete neglect of this

material among "Lutheran" Anglicans.

Continue to read Lutheran theologians, but read other Lutherans besides Bultmann, Kasemann, and Forde. David Yeago is very helpful:

"Introduction: A Catholic and Evangelical Theology?" and "The Bible" in *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, James Buckley and David Yeago, eds. (Eerdmans, 2001).

"Crucified Also For Us Under Pontius Pilate: Six Propositions on the Preaching of the Cross," *Nicene Christianity*, Christopher Seitz, ed. (Brazos, 2001).

"The Catholic Luther," *The Catholicity of the Reformation*, Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, eds. (Eerdmans, 1996).

"The Office of the Keys," *Marks of the Body of Christ*, Braaten and Jenson, eds. (Eerdmans, 1999).

Explore other relevant theological texts on questions of "law," "gospel," "justification," the sacraments, and Christian ethics.

Lutheran Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*, *Living Together*, and *Ethics*.

Karl Barth. *Evangelical Theology* (Eerdmans, 1992).

Karl Barth. "Gospel and Law," *Community, State, and Church* (Peter Smith, 1968).

Stanley Hauerwas. *The Peacable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, 2003).

Eric L. Mascall. *Via Media: An Essay in Theological Synthesis* (Longmans, Green, 1956).

Thomas F. Torrance, "Justification: Its Radical Nature and Place in Reformed Doctrine and Life," *Theology in*

*Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965).

Thomas F. Torrance. *Theology in Reconciliation. Essays Toward Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (Wipf & Stock, 1996).

Investigate some other interpretations of Paul besides those of "dialectical Lutheranism":

Brevard Childs. "Law and Gospel," *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Fortress, 1992).

Brevard Childs. *The Church's Guide for Reading Paul*. (Eerdmans, 2008).

Do not neglect your own Anglican tradition, and other classic texts on Christian spirituality, both contemporary and classical. There is much wisdom here. If I found myself stranded on a desert island, and could only take a handful of texts with me, I confess that I would prefer George Herbert's poems or Thomas Traherne's *The Centuries* or a volume of John Donne's sermons to Luther's *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* or his *Commentary on Galatians*:

Simon Tugwell. *Prayer: Living With God* (Templegate, 1975), *Prayer in Practice* (Templegate, 1974), *Ways of Imperfection: An Exploration of Christian Spirituality* (Templegate, 1985).

Kathleen Norris. *Acedia & me: A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life* (Riverhead, 2008).

George Herbert. *The Temple* (numerous editions)

Thomas Traherne. *Centuries of Meditations* (numerous editions).

John Donne. *Sermons and Poetry* (numerous editions)

Richard Hooker, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (numerous editions)

Julian of Norwich. *Showings* (also called *Revelations of Divine*

Love)

Walter Hilton. *The Ladder (or Scale) of Perfection*

Finally, do not neglect the practices of the church. Both Anglicanism and traditional Lutheranism have in common a spirituality that is ordered by liturgical worship. Develop a regular *practice* of reading Scripture, and of prayer. Do not neglect the Daily Office. Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer are two of Cranmer's great gifts to the church. And, finally, immerse yourself in the worship of the church. Do not neglect the liturgy or preaching of the Word or the sacraments. Christian "practices" really are "means of grace." They are not "works righteousness."

Further reflections from my blog:

["I Love Your Law: A Sermon about law and grace"](#)

["Anglican Reflections on Justification by Faith"](#)

["What is Anglican Theology?"](#)

[1](#) Gilbert Meilaender "Hearts Set to Obey," in Carl Braaten & Christopher Seitz, eds. *I Am the Lord Your God: Reflections on the Ten Commandments* (Eerdmans, 2005) 253-275. (This essay is required reading for every student in my introductory Christian Ethics course.)

[2](#) Gerhard Forde, "The Lutheran View," in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, ed. Donald L. Alexander (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 13.)

[3](#) Meilaender, , 259, 261

[4](#) A similar approach is found in William Hordern, *Living by Grace* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975). Hordern begins his discussion with two chapters on "Justification and Religious Paternalism" and "The Forgiveness of God," both of which are about the Lutheran understanding of justification.

There then follow two chapters on "Liberation from Sin" and "New Life in Christ." The reader might approach these chapters expecting to find a discussion of sanctification, but discovers instead that they are further discussion of the importance of justification.

[5](#) David S. Yeago, "Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and Reformation Theology: Reflections on the Costs of a Construal," *Pro Ecclesia* vol. 2, no. 1 (1993) 37-49.

[6](#) Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heideberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 27.

[7](#) Paul Zahl, *Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 6, 22.

[8](#) Forde, *Christian Spirituality*, 30.

[9](#) Forde, *On Being A Theologian of the Cross*, 109.

[10](#) Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 104-105.

[11](#) Hordern, 170.

[12](#) Zahl, 252,254.

[13](#) Martin Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness."  
<http://www.mcm.edu/~eppleyd/luther.html>

[14](#) Martin Luther, "On the Councils of the Church."  
[http://www.godrules.net/library/luther/NEW1luther\\_e14.htm](http://www.godrules.net/library/luther/NEW1luther_e14.htm)

[15](#) David Yeago, "Scripture and Rule of Faith in the Lutheran Tradition"  
[http://www.tsm.edu/audio/aef\\_2013\\_scripture\\_and\\_rule\\_of\\_faith\\_in\\_the\\_lutheran\\_tradition](http://www.tsm.edu/audio/aef_2013_scripture_and_rule_of_faith_in_the_lutheran_tradition)

[16](#) William G. Witt, "Anglican Reflections on Justification by Faith," *Anglican Theological Review* Spring 2013.

[17](#) Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (NY: Harper & Row, 1996), 39.

[18](#) The Church's Guide for Reading Paul" *The Canonical Shaping of the Pauline Corpus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 105.

[19](#) Martin Luther, "The Councils and the Church"  
[http://www.godrules.net/library/luther/NEW1luther\\_e14.htm](http://www.godrules.net/library/luther/NEW1luther_e14.htm)