

# Abounding in Thanksgiving: A Sermon on Prayer

Genesis 18:20-33

Psalm 138

Colossians 2:6-15

Luke 11:1-13



This morning's lectionary readings focus on prayer. The Genesis passage continues the story of three travelers who visit Abraham and promise that he will have a son. One of the visitors is identified to be God, and Abraham has a discussion with God. In fact, Abraham actually argues with God; he haggles with him like someone in a Middle Eastern market. In the Psalm (as in many Psalms), we have a specific example of a prayer: "I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart . . . I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name." (Ps. 138: 1-2) In the gospel reading, Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray in Luke's version of the Lord's prayer; the next paragraph in Luke contains Jesus' well known promise about prayer: "And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." (Luke 11:9-10)

In my sermon this morning, I am going to try to answer the question, "What is prayer?" I am going to begin, however, with

three examples of misunderstandings of prayer to help make clear what prayer is not.

The first is an objection to prayer that began with the New Atheists and often appears in the comments section on the internet when unbelievers want to make fun of people of faith. Atheist commenters regularly accuse Christians of having an "imaginary friend." The point is that prayer is something childish that an adult should have grown out of. Belief in a God who answers our prayers is like the boy Calvin in the old comic strip Calvin and Hobbes whose stuffed toy tiger was his imaginary friend.

The second approach views prayer as a philosophical problem. People ask: "If God knows everything and if God is going to do what he intends to do anyway, then what is the point of prayer? Surely we cannot change God's mind?" Prayer, then, becomes, not something we do, but a philosophical problem about how we bring together God's almighty power and human freedom.

The third approach is that of the prosperity gospel. The claim is made that if we have enough faith, God will answer our prayers. We will never be sick. We will never be poor. If we become sick, if we are poor, it must be because we do not have enough faith.

Each one of these approaches is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of what prayer is, and the best way to correct misunderstandings is to offer a proper understanding. For a proper understanding of prayer, we can look at the one passage in our readings that only mentions prayer in three words, "abounding in thanksgiving." In his epistle to the Colossians, the apostle Paul writes: "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving." (Col. 2:6-7) This is an example of what biblical scholars call Paul's "indicative-

imperative." Since God has done this in Christ; therefore, you should do that.

Although "indicative-imperative" is a kind of technical term for biblical scholars, there is nothing mysterious about the idea. It is just a way of saying that Paul understands there to be a relationship between knowledge and practice. What we do depends on what we know. Recently, the Christian philosopher James K. A. Smith has written a book entitled *You Are What You Love*. Smith's point is that the things we do show what we love more than the things that we claim to know. There's a great example in 1 John 3:17. John asks: "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" If we say that we love God, but we don't show it by how we treat people, we really don't love God.

But I would add that, while it is true that we do what we love, it is also true that we cannot love what we do not know. So the New Atheist does not pray because he believes that he has outgrown the god who is an imaginary friend. The New Atheist looks at the universe and he says that the lights may be on, but there's nobody home. Or maybe the lights are not even on. The Christian looks at the universe, however, and he says the lights are on, and we know that someone is home because Jesus is the light. Paul writes: "as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him," and "For in him," meaning, in Christ, "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority." (Col. 2:9-10) We Christians know that there is someone at home in the universe because that someone has actually paid us a visit. God has become one of us in Jesus Christ.

What then is prayer? Prayer is living in the world as if we believe that there really is a God and that God has done certain things. Prayer is living as if there is someone at home in the universe. Prayer is our response to how God in his

goodness has acted in Jesus Christ. It is how we walk as we have received Christ.

But prayer is also an action. It is something we do. It is not simply believing certain things or having the right doctrines. (And that is where Jamie Smith is right when he says that “You Are What You Love.”) “Walk” is a verb suggesting that the Christian life is a journey. The image is one of pilgrimage. We have a destination. We have a goal. We have a starting place and a path, and Jesus Christ is the starting place, the path, and the goal. But we actually have to take steps, to put one foot in front of the other. So prayer is a kind of shorthand way of describing the Christian journey. There are other things we do besides prayer: Worship, sacraments, acts of mercy, but, in a sense, all of Christian life is prayer.

And this is where all three of the misunderstandings I mention get it wrong. Prayer is not, like the New Atheists think, about having an imaginary friend. Prayer is living as if there is someone home in the universe because that Someone has come to us in Jesus Christ. Prayer is not a philosophical problem about whether our prayers can change God’s mind. It is rather what the apostle Paul calls a walk, walking in Christ, “rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” Finally, prayer is not magic, as the prosperity gospel preachers seem to think. Prayer is not a relationship with Santa Claus, but a call to follow Jesus Christ, and that will mean taking up a cross. When we assume that prayer means that God should answer all of our requests, we need to remember that Jesus Christ prayed in the garden of Gethsemane that the cup of suffering would pass him by, and it didn’t. Not even the incarnate Son of God had all of his prayers answered.

If prayer is an imperative – Do this! – what are the indicatives? What the Bible tells us about who God is and what he has done tells us why and how we should pray.

First, prayer is an acknowledgment that we are not alone, and that we are made for someone and something. At the beginning of his Confessions, St. Augustine wrote: "You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." Even here, once again, when we talk about creation, it is Jesus Christ who is at the center. Earlier in the letter to the Colossians from which we read this morning, Paul wrote: "He (that is, Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Col. 1:15-17) As John's gospel puts it: "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made." (John 1:3). So we live in a world that God has created, and he has created it through Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God who became flesh as one of us.

All of our texts tell us something about this God who has created the world and created us – that God is good and he cares for his creatures. In Abraham's argument with God in Genesis 18, he asks a fundamental question to which the answer is supposed to be self-evident: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen. 18:24) In the Psalm, we find a word which is one of the characteristic ways in which the Bible describes God, the Hebrew word *hesed*, which English Bibles translate as "loving kindness" or "steadfast love": "I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness. . . . The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever." (Ps. 138:2, 8) In the gospel reading, Jesus asks "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13) In the next chapter in Luke's gospel, we read Luke's version of material that we also find in Matthew's sermon on the Mount:

“And [Jesus] said to his disciples, ‘Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! . . . Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!’” (Luke 12:24-28) If the Creator of all things cares for birds and flowers and grass, he certainly cares for us.

Second, the texts speak of what theologians call providence. God not only has created the world, but he is in charge of the world. He knows what he is doing, and, in the end, he is going to make things right. The Psalmist writes, “For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life . . . The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.” (Ps. 138:6-8) In the Lord’s prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray that God’s kingdom will come, and his will should be done (Luke 11:2; cf. Matt. 6:10).

Third, Paul’s letter to the Colossians tell us that this God who has created the world and watches over it and us, has redeemed us in Jesus Christ. This redemption is good news and not bad news. God himself has come among us in Christ. Paul writes that in him dwells the fulness of God, but we also have come to share in Christ’s fulness. Paul writes that we have been buried with Christ in baptism, that we have been raised with Christ through faith in his resurrection, that when we were dead in our sins, God made us alive in Christ and forgave us our sins (Col. 2:9-13). Who we are – our identity – thus flows from our union with Christ. We are people whose sins are forgiven and who have new life because we are united to Christ in his death and resurrection.

Our temptation is to find our identity elsewhere, and that is why Paul warns us of the dangers of being held captive by what he calls philosophy and empty deceit. We live in a world in which the culture of consumerism attempts to fill our infinite hunger for the God who has made us for himself with baubles and trinkets – with all kinds of “stuff” that will, in the end, leave us hungry. As Augustine says, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” The empty promises of contemporary culture cannot compete with this one Jew from Nazareth in whom the fulness of Deity dwells. The false promises of our culture cannot give us something that can satisfy our infinite desire for love because only an infinite God who loves us infinitely can do that, and our culture only believes in the kinds of small things that can be sold by advertising. Contemporary culture can not believe in a God who loves us infinitely, or in a world that was created by love.

These then are the indicatives. These are the reasons that it makes sense to pray. God loves us and created us. God cares for us and watches over us. God has redeemed us in Christ. What then are the imperatives? In light of the above, what should be our response? While volumes could be and have been written, I am going to mention three aspects of prayer that correspond to the three points I made above.

Our first response should be gratitude. The Psalmist writes: “I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart,” and later, “All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth.” (Ps. 138:1,4) Paul writes that we should “abound in thanksgiving.” (Col. 2:7). Prayer is the recognition that we are creatures and depend on God, that everything we have is a gift from God. Prayer is saying “Thank you” to a God who created us, who has given us our life and all the good things in our lives, and who has loved us and gave himself for us in Jesus Christ.

Second, prayer is a recognition of our dependence on God. Because everything we have comes from God, prayer is the

recognition that we can trust God and so can depend on him to meet our needs. So after thanksgiving, prayer consists of trust and petition. The Psalmist prays: "On the day I called, you answered me," and "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me." (Ps. 138:3, 7) In the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, he teaches us to pray "Give us each day our daily bread." (Luke 11:3) Jesus reminds us that if our child asked us for an egg, we would not give him a scorpion. If we care enough for our children to give them good things, certainly we can depend on our heavenly Father to care for us just as much (Luke 11:11-13). In 1 Peter 5:7, we are told to "Cast all of your cares upon the Lord, for he cares for you." This does not mean that nothing bad will ever happen to us. It does mean that in a world that is filled with troubles, we can trust that God is in charge and he knows what he is about. As Paul writes in Romans, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" And again, there are Paul's familiar words, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28, 32-32)

Finally, prayer is confession of sin. In the Lord's prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive as we forgive everyone who is indebted to us." (Luke 11:4) This is perhaps the hardest part of prayer for contemporary culture to understand. The reason, I think, is that there has been a shift in modern culture from a culture of guilt to a culture of shame. Guilt is an acknowledgment of wrong-doing, that someone has done something objectively wrong that really hurts other people. Shame, however, is not about objective wrong-doing, but about cultural disapproval. Shame is not so much about something we have done as about something we are. The current culture rejects language of sin because they think sin language is about cultural shaming, and no one wants to be

shamed. At the same time, our culture is one where people constantly shame each other. That is perhaps why there seems to be so much anger these days. Everyone shames, but no one wants to be shamed. With shame, there can never be forgiveness.

An important part of prayer is confession of sin, but confession flows out of forgiveness; it is not a condition of forgiveness. The gospel offers us forgiveness, not shame. Paul writes, "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." (Col. 2:13-15) In a culture of shame, forgiveness is good news because it can set aside our guilt. Forgiveness saves shame for those internal and external voices that would continue to condemn us, but no longer can because we have died and risen with Christ. In a culture of shame, it is good news to know that the God who created the world, who loves us, who watches over us, who cares for us, has taken upon himself in the cross of Christ all of those things about which we might rightly or wrongly feel shame. Confession is good news because it is good news to no longer have to bear the weight of guilt and shame.

So these are the three main tasks of prayer: gratitude, trust, confession. And prayer is the action that follows from the three things we know about what God has done for us: that the good God has created us and given us all things as a gift; that God cares for us, watches over us, and works all things for our good; that God has redeemed us in Christ, and delivered us from all that can condemn or accuse us. But at the same time, do not forget. Prayer is an action; it is something that we need to do. It is not enough to know that we should be grateful, that we should trust God for what we need,

that we should confess our sins. Prayer is a pilgrimage. Prayer is a journey in which we must put one foot in front of the other. As Paul writes, “as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.” As we leave this building this morning, let us take seriously the words of the post-communion prayer: “And we humbly beseech thee, O heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.”

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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 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)

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## [How to be Happy: Some offhand remarks](#)

Over at StandFirm, Sarah Hey has interrupted the usual grouching to post ["A Few Thoughts on Happiness: Is Happiness A "Moral Obligation"?"](#). This led to the following offhand remarks.



While Aristotle (and Christian eudaemonists like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas and Richard Hooker) granted that beatitude (translated “happiness,” but more like “complete well being”) was correlated with character, they saw it as a byproduct of something else, namely doing a worthwhile activity. To set out to pursue happiness in itself led to unhappiness. However, doing something inherently worthwhile, and doing it well, can lead to happiness.

This is the unexpressed assumption in Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*, the intent of which is to help sort out one’s vocation. One begins not by asking “What makes me happy?,” but “What do I love?”

How to be happy? Pursue those things you love doing, and, to the extent it is possible, do good. Don’t pursue happiness for its own sake. Be aware that if you’re unhappy, that may be a sign that you need to change something you’re doing.

May be, not must be. Our ancestors were very savvy about the passions (not to be equated with the emotions, full stop), and recognized that some people just had a disposition to melancholy.

The most significant way in which Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Richard Hooker differ from Aristotle on happiness is that Aristotle believed neither in a personal God nor in an afterlife. Like so many of our contemporaries, Aristotle believed that if we were going to be happy, it had to be here and now. In contrast, the Augustinian tradition recognizes

that God is the Greatest Good (*summum bonum*), and true happiness can be found only in the beatific vision (seeing God “face to face” and enjoying him forever). This is what we are made for, and it is the fuel that drives all our seeking for happiness. As Augustine expressed it at the beginning of the *Confessions*: “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

This is a tremendous help insofar as it relieves the [implicitly Pelagian] demand of our culture that we *MUST* be happy, and we must be happy now. Augustine, Thomas and Hooker correct not only Aristotle, but the contemporary culture’s notion of happiness in the following ways:

1) They make clear that only God can truly make us happy. This does not mean that there is no genuine happiness connected with created things or “secular” activities, but it does relativize the kind of happiness we expect from them. We shouldn’t be surprised if our spouses, our jobs, our bodies, or our “stuff” does not make us happy. They’re not supposed to.

2) They introduce a personal dimension to happiness. Happiness comes not from things, but from friendship with God, and, to a lesser extent, from friendship with others. Thomas Aquinas is especially good here.

3) They remind us that life is a pilgrimage, and we are pilgrims (*viators*) on a journey. We’re moving to happiness, and we can be certain that some day we will have it, but we’re not there yet, and we don’t have to insist on having happiness NOW. Meanwhile, we can get on with the task at hand.

4) Their understanding of happiness helps us to be grateful for the genuine goods that we enjoy, realizing that they are gifts from our Creator.

5) They remind us that some of the things that our culture tells us will make us happy will not. Happiness is not

equivalent to pleasure. Pursuing activities that are contrary to our true end—knowing and loving God—will actually make us unhappy. For Augustine, the first step in ethics is sorting out true from false goods, and learning to pursue those goods that will actually make us happy, while avoiding those siren voices (apparent, but false goods) that promise us happiness, but will ultimately make us miserable because they are self-destructive.

6) A rule of life is important. Mundane activities like regular private prayer, reading/praying the daily office, Sunday worship, *lectio divina* (reading Scripture and “spiritual” texts), being with friends, physical exercise, being in nature, playing music, doing “chores,” preparing a good meal and sharing it with friends and family, are the kinds of “habits” that make the conditions possible for the kinds of limited happiness we can expect in this life, and help form us to be the kind of people who will be happy with the only kind of happiness that God has to offer in the next life—himself. Contrary to certain distorted forms of Lutheranism, this is not “imposing law” on people. It recognizes that there is a correlation between our practices and the kinds of people we become. I do not have to buy flowers for my wife to prove that I love her, and I certainly do not buy flowers for my wife in order to “earn” her love; however, occasionally buying flowers for my wife is one of those practices that helps create friendship; it not only expresses love, it helps create love. Similarly, we don’t pray, read the Bible, receive the Eucharist to “earn” God’s favor. Nonetheless, these are practices that not only express our friendship with God, but help to make it grow over time. We don’t do these things because God needs them, but because we do.