

The **LUTHERAN** **CLARION**



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Gospel Reductionism

by John Warwick Montgomery♦

1. Definition

During the Seminex controversy, I spoke and wrote widely in support of the classic theology of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.¹ In my lectures and publications, I coined the expression which is the subject of this essay.

So, what is “Gospel reductionism”? Obviously, it is a species of the reductivist fallacy. “Reductivism” may be defined as a procedure or theory that reduces complex data or phenomena to a single factor. Example: the Marxist philosophy, asserting that everything other than materialist economics is epiphenomenal—that the only genuine explanations are materialistic ones.² The fallacy here should be obvious: though materialistic considerations surely account, at least in part, for a variety of historical events (e.g., the shift in the balance-of-trade in the Mediterranean leading to the Italian Renaissance), there are many historical events produced in large part or exclusively by non-materialistic ideas (the invention of the cotton gin, etc.). If one tries to account for Bach’s genius through materialism (his diet?), the difficulty will be that feeding that same diet to other Germans will not produce additional B-Minor masses.

Gospel reductionism, then, is the error of reducing the revelational quality of all biblical teaching just to gospel proclamation—or, even worse, regarding the Bible as necessarily trustworthy only in reference to the gospel or to the “proper distinction between law and gospel.”

2. Illustrations in the Context of Seminex

It was my conviction that the dissident professors who eventually walked out (*exited*) the Concordia Seminary in St. Louis had swallowed gospel reductionism—hook, line and proverbial sinker.

Let us take several examples, represented both by the Seminex crowd and by quasi-liberal Lutheran theologians

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www.jwm.christendom.co.uk;
www.apologeticsacademy.eu; www.globaljournalct.com.

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The Transforming Churches Network: Still Ablaze!

The Transforming Churches Network (TCN) was begun in 2007 to support the mission objectives of *Ablaze!*, the now-euthanized The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod evangelism “movement.” In the latter half of the twentieth century, the panic was on. The LCMS, like other mainline denominations, was shrinking, and it was up to us to stop the shrinkage—or so the narrative went. After decades of doctrinal slide due to such things as higher criticism, Mission Affirmations, Seminex, Oscar Feucht’s *Everyone a Minister*, and the Pastoral Leadership Institute, the LCMS was primed for its next church growth program, and TCN fit the bill.

TCN promises to revitalize churches using best practices, transforming your congregation into an outwardly-focused enterprise. Those best practices are gleaned from all parts of the theological spectrum, without consideration for whether or not they agree with what Lutherans believe, teach, and confess. They just have to “work.” TCN adopts a Lutheran cover, but the foreign theology inside will adopt you – *lex agendi est lex credendi* (the rule of deed is the rule of creed). To offer an example, if you’re a practicing homosexual, your practice will *insist* that you seek a compatible world view or creed, which *can’t* be orthodox Christianity. Your practice will nag at you incessantly until you embrace a compatible *Weltanschauung*. Similarly, TCN demands that laymen conduct the ministry of the church; hence, Lutheran doctrinal distinctives are necessarily skimmed off as a heterodox creed coalesces.

Unlike previous church growth programs which sought to attract unbelievers by offering a dynamic worship experience and popular church programs, TCN sends the empowered laymen into the community to reap the harvest. The real mission growth comes via the congregants turned mission specialists and via small group interaction – the Divine Service and the pastor take a back seat. This is a direct contradiction of Augsburg Confession Article V, which asserts “So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted.” Ministry actually occurs primarily in the Divine Service, not out on the street. The Sacraments

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Transforming Churches Network...

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and the pastor have been subordinated by the TCN creed. With this arrangement, Article IV, *justification*, is also threatened – without the means there is no justification. *By default*, therefore, the underlying doctrine of TCN *must* contradict Lutheran Symbols or the result will be cognitive dissonance: “The affinity among members of these [thriving] congregations will not be theology or doctrine but a powerful, personal experience with Jesus that has and is transforming their lives.”¹ Compare that with the Apology of the Augsburg Confession: “The true adornment of the churches is godly, useful, and clear doctrine, the devout use of the Sacraments, fervent prayer, and the like” (Ap XXIV, 51). By undermining the importance of the Church’s sacramental life in favor of an internal experience, TCN focuses on what we’re doing rather than on what we’re receiving:

By investing yourself and your congregation in a church revitalization process now, you can be sure that, by God’s grace and power, there will be those that will not have to pay later for their sins in hell, because they will come to know the One who has paid for everything by giving His life for us all.²

What we can be sure of is this: “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (John 6:37 ESV). Besides the obvious Law-driven motivation, the TCN quote undermines the article of faith on election, making God dependent on you or me *particularly*, in order to accomplish His salvific work. This kind of synergistic thought devolves even further: “Isn’t it amazing what God can do when his people are empowered to use their gifts and talents?”³ God is not dependent on us to do anything. Their flawed thinking borders on full-blown Word Faith heresy, where God cannot act without our prayer: “Creative energy will be released when a prayer coordinator owns the responsibility to stir a heart for prayer in the congregation.”⁴

Psychological manipulation is used to great effect. Discontent with the current environment is created along with a sense of urgency for the utopian future...

Much of the process used to transform your congregation to an outward-focused mission machine doesn’t even rise to the level of theology and is simply modern business technique, which can be problematic. Psychological manipulation is used to great effect. Discontent with the current environment is created along with a sense of urgency for the utopian future; guilt-motivation is employed; small group discussion is used to break down doctrinal objections via a Hegelian dialectic and group think. Accountability partners and frequent assessments ensure adherence to the vision. Covenants are signed with TCN which lock the pastor and congregation into the transformation process. The pastor becomes the vision-

New Book!

by Rev. Dr. Kristian Kincaid

Living with Grief:

Bound by Sorrow, Wrapped in Comfort

In his new book, Dr. Kincaid offers guidance on how Christ is your comfort through the grieving process. Pastor Kincaid has been through substantial loss, mourning the death of seven different family members, all taken in tragic and horrific ways. The effects of grief, loss, and mourning are long lived, even if it seems the rest of the world has moved on. Sometimes you question your faith, wondering where Christ could possibly be in the midst of this mess or why Christ would take this beloved person from you. With biblical application wrapped throughout, Dr. Kincaid’s book offers strength through Christ to lift the unexplainable burden of loss off your shoulders. Dr. Kincaid is a member of the Board of Directors of the Lutheran Concerns Association.



The book is scheduled to be available in February 2020, from Concordia Publishing House. CPH Item #: 124590 / 2020 / Paperback / 148 Pages / \$12.99 / Bulk Discounts available. [Excerpted with permission from Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved. To order this publication, please visit www.cph.org or call CPH at 800-325-0191.]

casting leader who is on a mission from God, and you don’t question God! Those who do not make the transformational jump are accused of the greatest heresy of all, an unwillingness and inability to change. “...The manifest presence of transcendent spiritual power that is able to transform peoples’ lives is lacking. In its place is adherence to tradition and form, activities designed to satisfy the religious club members’ nostalgic preference for the past.”⁵ These churches “in which the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered” (AC VII) are consigned to eventual oblivion by TCN. “To demean such works (the confession of doctrine, sufferings, works of love, suppression of the flesh) would be to demean the outward rule of Christ’s kingdom among people” (Ap V 72).

To complete the TCN transmutation an accountable leadership polity is often put into place; the pastor becomes a CEO-type figure, neglecting his call. A small church board is installed which is sympathetic to the outwardly-focused vision, the oversight capacity of the voters is muted, and objectors are shown the door. Transition to the *au courant* paradigm is facilitated by constant bombardment with the new vision from every conceivable angle. Your former self, free in Christ to serve your neighbor (i.e. your spouse, child, parent, and those nearby), now serves the outside community and the “people of passion” who buy in. That means adopting the TCN

mantra, spending time in multiple small groups, bridge-building in the community, prayer-walking, and neglecting your God-given vocations for the brave new world of true transformation. Article XV of the Apology warns against this trap:

²⁵ After this look of wisdom and righteousness has deceived people, then countless evils follow. The Gospel about the righteousness of faith in Christ is clouded over, and empty confidence in such works succeeds. Then God’s commandments are clouded over. These human works assume the title of a perfect and spiritual life. They are preferred more than the works of God’s commandments (works of one’s own calling, the administration of the state, the management of a family, married life, and the bringing up of children). ²⁶ Compared with those ceremonies, the latter are judged to be ungodly, so that they are exercised by many with doubting consciences....

We may not appear to be “people of passion.” Yet in the ordinary duties of our seemingly humdrum lives, making dinner and providing for our families are good works equal to the sermons of St. Paul and the battles of King David. “...Because of Christ, they are holy, divine works, sacrifices, and acts belonging to the rule of Christ, who in this way displays His kingdom before this world. ...Through these works Christ celebrates His victory over the devil...” (Ap V 68, 71). Speaking to your neighbor about Christ through your vocations is a good work; stepping outside your vocations to do the same thing is a sinful self-made work. TCN would often have you do the latter – their teaching should be avoided. TCN’s theology has overrun many LCMS Districts, but perhaps that is changing. In 2018 TCN lost its LCMS Recognized Service Organization status for doctrinal reasons.

Twentieth century Lutheran missiologist Friedrich Wilhelm gets the last word:

The fact that the deeds of Christ are bound to Word and Sacrament defines the ministry of the church for the saving of the lost. It all depends on and comes down not to whether just anything happens in the battle against sin, death and the devil, even if it is done with the best of intentions. The issue is rather that what is being done is done as it is mandated, according to the command and promise of Christ. Christ’s deeds done through Word and Sacrament need no addition on the part of zealous, enthusiastic people. Their effect is neither due to people undertaking all kinds of other things, nor does it depend on “signs and wonders” taking place. Only one single condition must be fulfilled under all circumstances and in every case: the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments may not be adulterated; their purity and integrity must be safeguarded. ⁶

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For a more detailed analysis of TCN with thorough documentation, see the author’s paper presented at the 2019 Association of Confessing Evangelical Lutheran Congregations Free Conference: https://s3.amazonaws.com/mychurchwebsite/c2001/diekmann_paper.pdf

- 1 “Going Missional: Learning Community Nine,” Transforming Churches Network, 2014, 6.
- 2 Terry Tieman, David Born, & Dwight Marble, *Hinges: Opening Your Church’s Doors to the Community* (Nashville: Transforming Churches Network, 2015) 185.
- 3 Tieman, *Hinges*, 48.
- 4 Terry Tieman & Dwight Marable, *Skill Builders: Leadership Tools for Opening Doors to Your Community* (Cordova, TN: Transforming Churches Network, 2012), 61.
- 5 “Learning Community Eighteen: Building for Maturity,” Transforming Churches Network, 2010, 9-10.
- 6 Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, “The Lutheran Church Plants Lutheran Missions,” *Journal of Lutheran Mission*, trans. Rachel Mumme with Matthew C. Harrison, April 2015, 10.

The Lutheran Clarion—12 Years!

In September 2019, we started our 12th year of publishing the *Clarion*. We strive to present and uphold the truth of God’s Holy Word. During the 2019 Convention, many delegates thanked us for providing them with information on the many issues facing the LCMS. We could use your help.



If you can help with our costs, there’s an enclosed envelope so you can mail your check to Lutheran Concerns Association, 149 Glenview Drive, New Kensington, PA 15068-4921. Do it now. **Thank you!!**

Gospel Reductionism *Continued from page 1*

outside the LCMS but lionized and touted by the Seminexers. ³

Arthur Carl Piepkorn (LCMS): “Where the stress is on a religious purpose, his [the biblical writer’s concern] concern with the precise and literal accuracy of concomitant historical or scientific detail may recede into the background.”⁴

Richard Jungkuntz (LCMS): Jesus’ assertion in John 10 that “Scripture cannot be broken” does not mean “If Scripture says something, that something is a fact,” but is a law-gospel preaching, equivalent to “Scripture cannot be kept from fulfillment.”⁵

Walter Bouman (LCMS): “If God deals with us in Law and Gospel, then we will look for *that* and be struck by *that* in Genesis, Joshua, and the Ascension story. And we will recognize that whatever the cosmology—our own or that of the Bible—God calls our idolatrous use of His world into question with the Law and creates everything—even sinners—anew out of nothing through the Gospel.”⁶

Joseph Sittler (ULC, now ELCA): “All verbal forms,

Can You Help the Persecuted Christians in Asia?

Rev. Dr. Daniel Jastram serves as a manager for theological education in Asia, based in Tokyo, Japan. He and his wife, Dr. Joan Jastram have been serving the LCMS in Tokyo since May 2016.



During an October meeting in Thailand, he heard firsthand about persecution in Southeast Asia. Rev. Jastram's December 2019 Newsletter quotes the details from a national pastor serving in neighboring Myanmar:

"My father [a pastor] was in prison twice for three months each, simply for sharing the Gospel. Every week, we were served a warrant and forced to appear at the courts....Buddhist leaders instigate Christian persecution because Buddhism is the country's national religion....More than 100,000 Christians live in IDP (internally displaced) camps, deprived of access to food and healthcare....In some instances, Buddhist monks have invaded church properties and built Buddhist shrines on church premises....Missionaries come and go, but a book like the *Catechism* or *Book of Concord* is around for generations to come."

To support the work of **Rev. Dr. Daniel Jastram**, please send a tax-deductible gift to: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, P.O. Box 66861, St. Louis, MO 63166-6861. Make checks payable to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Mark checks "Support of Asia-Jastram." Gifts can also be given securely online through the LCMS website, on my online giving page at lcms.org/givenow/jastram.

all means of communication through speech, prove too weak for this massive bestowal [of Revelation]. . . . We must ask after the Word of God in the same way faith asks after Jesus Christ. That is to say, that the Word of God *becomes* Word of God for us. . . . To assert the inerrancy of the text of scripture is to elevate to a normative position an arbitrary theological construction."⁷

Let us be very clear: the problem here in no sense lies with the gospel of God's free grace offered through the cross of Christ or with the proper distinction between law (what we are to do) and gospel (what God has done for us). The error manifested in the above catena of quotations is the denial of the plenary, inerrant nature of the Holy Scriptures by the claim that their revelational value lies only in the gospel and law-gospel distinction to be found there. Biblical truth is reduced to just one truth (granted, the supremely important truth) of gospel proclamation. Were the gospel reductionists correct, one might well ask why the Holy Spirit did not inspire just a fraction of the existing Bible—thereby saving Bible societies immense costs in the printing and distribution of a sixty-six book Scripture.

Why did the Seminex folk and their equivalent in other Lutheran bodies go this route? Simply because they accepted (often uncritically) the literary criticism of the Bible that began in the 18th century, became widely ac-

cepted in liberal theological circles through the Old Testament documentary theories in the 19th century, and contaminated liberal biblical scholarship of the New Testament in the 20th century. The Seminex theologians did not believe that the Bible was factually defensible, so they focused on the gospel—which, for them, constituted essentially an internal, existential experience, and therefore could not be touched by the higher criticism.

3. The Classic Lutheran Position

Classic Lutheranism—the Lutheranism of the 16th and 17th century Lutheran Confessions (as found in the Book of Concord) is a far cry from what we have just been describing. Classic Lutheranism insists that all proper theology requires two fundamentals: the so-called *material* and the *formal* principles: the Gospel *and the Holy Scriptures*. These function somewhat like the reversible reaction in chemistry, symbolized by the double arrow (↔). The Scriptures are the final source of all theological data, including the gospel, and the gospel is the overarching doctrine central to and proclaimed by the Scriptures. If one loses biblical inerrancy, one can no longer be sure of the gospel, and if one jettisons the gospel, one will necessarily lose the meaning of biblical revelation and thus suffer the loss of the Bible itself.

One of the most important Lutheran theologians, J. A. Quenstedt (1617-1685), put it as follows with characteristic, uncompromising clarity:

The canonical Holy Scriptures in the original text are the infallible truth and free from every error, or, in other words, in the canonical Holy Scriptures there is found no lie, no falsity, no error, whether in the things or in the words; but all things, and each single one, that are handed down in them are the most true, whether they pertain to doctrine or morals or history, chronology, topography, or nomenclature; no ignorance, no thoughtlessness or forgetfulness, no lapse of memory, can or dare be ascribed to the amanuenses of the Holy Ghost in their penning of the sacred writings.⁸

This same understanding of Holy Writ was solidly maintained by Martin Luther himself. We know, for example, that Luther was so concerned faithfully to maintain the accuracy of every single biblical word as he prepared his historic translation of the Bible into the German vernacular that he even pestered his butcher for the exact wording to be used in translating the vocabulary of the Old Testament sacrificial system.

Here is Luther's approach to Scripture in his own words:

I have learned to ascribe the honor of infallibility only to those books that are accepted as canonical. I am profoundly convinced that none of those writers has erred. All other writers, however they may have distinguished themselves in holiness or in doctrine, I read in this way: I evaluate what they say, not on the basis that they themselves believe that a thing is true, but only insofar as they are able to convince me by the authority of the canonical books or by clear reason.⁹

The Formula of Concord, the last of the Lutheran Confessions of post-Reformation time, is no less unequivocal

cal—and cites Luther in that connection:

Luther explicitly made this distinction between divine and human writings. God's Word is and should remain the only standard and norm of all teachings, and no human being's writings dare be put on a par with it, but everything must be subjected to it.¹⁰

There are theological viewpoints at present visible within the LCMS that are uncomfortably similar to what we have already seen as the heart of the Seminex theology.

The stark contrast between the classic Lutheran bibliography and the bibliography of Seminex could hardly be plainer. Doubtless, this disparity was not lost on the many Lutheran laity who rose up in wrath at the Seminex theology and were a vital factor in the voluntary exile from the Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, of the Seminex professors who then (unsuccessfully) attempted to create a rival theological education for Lutheran clergy.

4. And Today?

Very little is heard about the Seminex controversy today. This is entirely understandable outside of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (considered an aberrationally conservative church body by the mainline, essentially liberal denominations in America). But in the LCMS, one would think that Seminex would constitute a powerful historical argument against all forms of gospel reductionism. There are at least three reasons why this is not the case.

- (1) *Historical chauvinism.* As with Americans in general, Missouri Synod Lutherans think in the present and in the potential future rather than in historical terms. They have forgotten George Santayana's sage observation that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.
- (2) *Blind confidence in Synod.* Though anything but Roman Catholic, Missouri Synod Lutherans have an almost mystical belief in the perfection of their church body. Since the Missouri Synod is so solid in its confessional subscription, it really can do no wrong, and any past peccadillos will be ironed out as the ecclesiastical future unfolds. It is therefore considered unproductive and, indeed, unspiritually pessimistic to dwell on past mistakes, even when they nearly resulted in the destruction of the church's major seminary. LCMS churchmen are not particularly impressed by the fact that orthodoxy was restored at the St. Louis seminary not because of any exercise of church discipline by the denomination, but simply because the miscreants departed voluntarily in a huff. (Awkward question: can we really take the Lord's providence for granted when future doctrinal difficulties arise owing to our having ignored past lessons?)
- (3) *Repristination of gospel reductionism.* This deserves

the more detailed discussion to follow.

There are theological viewpoints at present visible within the LCMS that are uncomfortably similar to what we have already seen as the heart of the Seminex theology. Here are two sobering examples.

First: Not a few theologians and pastors within the Synod favour the so-called "radical Lutheranism" of the late Gerhard Forde. Forde's charismatic presentation of the law-gospel distinction and the central doctrine of God's free grace in Christ, though commendable, was joined at the hip with unqualified opposition to an inerrancy view of Scripture. Example:

Inspiration in this [Forde's] view refers to the entire activity of the Spirit by which he dwells in the Church and attends the proclamation of the Word. In the older theory, inspiration is too static and finally too anemic. It seems to assume that the Spirit can convince of the truth only through a book without errors. The Spirit has a much more powerful means than this at his disposal, namely the "two-edged sword of the Word" through which he creates faith. The question, therefore, of whether or not there may be human errors of one sort or another in scripture is of no particular importance. Just as the pastor on Sunday morning may make errors of one sort or another in preaching and still preach the Word, so also with scripture.

Often the question is asked of this method, "If you admit that there are errors in the little things, how do you know that they didn't make errors in the big things as well, i.e., once you start admitting errors, where do you stop?" To this the only answer is . . . the faith born out of the law-gospel experience.¹¹

This is, to be sure, a textbook example of gospel reductionism. Errors in Scripture are of "no particular importance." All that is important is the preaching of the Word (i.e., Christ) and the application of the law-gospel principle. Forde does not seem capable of fathoming the difference between sermonic errors and biblical errors: when the pastor errs, he can be corrected by scriptural teaching; but if the Bible errs, what will be the source of correction? Something infallible to a higher degree? The "faith born out of the law-gospel experience," if unable to be justified by Holy Writ, is apparently left to the vagaries of human experience—and why should Lutheran experience be preferred to non-Lutheran experience, or, for that matter, to any one of the numerous varieties of pagan religious experience?¹²

Secondly, an example even closer to home, since Lutheran theologian Forde was not an LCMS clergyman. We refer to Jeffrey Kloha, until just a few years ago Provost of the Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.¹³ This New Testament professor declared, *inter alia*:

If you want to rip Romans 15 and 16 out of my Bible, I can live with that. If you want Hebrews, James, Revelation torn out too, I can live with that. If you force me to look only at p46 or the bizarre majuscule manuscript W or one of thousands of Byzantine minuscules and use them as my New Testament—I can live with that. Give me only Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae, one of the most poorly copied, misspelled, error filled copies of Paul's letters, and I can live with that.

I could live with or without any of those, because even these poorly copied, corrupted by people, edited, to use Luther's words, preach Christ. And if they preach Christ, they are of the Spirit, for preaching Christ is the Spirit's work. And if they preach Christ, they are apostolic, for the apostle can speak nothing other than what he has been sent to speak. So apostles, no matter who they are, even one who has been aborted yet lived like Paul, who once persecuted the church, preach the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I can live without a perfect Bible. I cannot live without God raising Jesus from the dead.

On the other hand, force me read only the Gospel of Thomas, I cannot live with that. Or the Koran, or the Book of Mormon. Not because they are not "inerrant" or "perfect," or even "human," but because there is no Gospel: There is no new life in Christ.¹⁴

Here, Kloha asserts that a fallible text is not important as long as Christ is preached. The gospel is all we need. No criticism of this blatant gospel reductionism issued from Kloha's department chairman or from any other official source at the Concordia Seminary, where, a generation earlier, Seminec, holding much the same viewpoint, nearly destroyed that institution.

5. An Apologetical Conclusion

The most damaging aspect of gospel reductionism is not its impact within Lutheran parishes. There, believing church members do not worry much about questions of truth or epistemological weakness. Their pastors, having little contact with the contemporary world of intellectual unbelief and having seldom taken a course, at seminary or elsewhere, in the serious apologetical defense of the faith, spend their days dealing almost exclusively with the personal problems of the flock. Meanwhile, tragically, the secular world outside continues to descend more and more into post-Christian paganism.

...if the Bible cannot be relied on as God's truth, why should anyone accept what it has to say concerning the way of salvation—the gospel itself...?

Gospel reductionism reduces historical Christianity to cultic status. Why? Because proclamation occurs without any solid, factual foundation, just as in the other major world religions and the sects. When good Lutherans preach the gospel today, the non-Christian will almost inevitably ask its source and justification: "But how do I know it's true?" The only satisfactory answer quite obviously has to be the Bible, but gospel reductionism makes this answer impossible. The impression is therefore given that only "personal experience" will validate Christian claims and the soundness of the law-gospel distinction.

Is there any difference between this kind of experiential religion and, say, the Muslim credo, for which the Qur'an offers no objective foundation whatever?¹⁵ In the case of Christianity, where the case for Jesus Christ and his gospel are presented on the basis of historically sound New Testament documents, the non-Christian religious seeker

can be brought to confront an objectively verifiable fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus' life and ministry and the proof of his divine claims through his miraculous resurrection from the dead. And, unlike the Book of Mormon, replete with historical errors and scientific nonsense (e.g., anti-DNA claims as to the origins of native Americans),¹⁶ the Bible offers a defensible revelation both in its "secular" and in its "religious" content.¹⁷ As our Lord put it: "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe me if I tell you heavenly things?" (John 3: 12).

And, to reiterate, if the Bible cannot be relied on as God's truth, why should anyone accept what it has to say concerning the way of salvation—the gospel itself, together with Lutheran teaching concerning the law's condemnation and the gracious promises of the gospel?

Gospel reductionism, in short, means the destruction of not only the revealed Scriptures but also the gospel itself on which those Scriptures centre.

- 1 Montgomery, *Fighting the Good Fight: A Life in Defense of the Faith* (2d ed.; Bonn: Germany: Verlag fuer Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2020), pp. 52-56.
- 2 Cf. Montgomery, "The Marxist Approach to Human Rights: Analysis & Critique," *Simon Greenleaf Law Review*, Vol. 3 (Academic year 1983-1984).
- 3 The examples presented here are treated in considerably more detail in Montgomery, *Crisis in Lutheran Theology* (new ed., 3 vols.: Irvine, CA: 1517 Legacy/New Reformation Press, 2018), Vol. 1.
- 4 A. C. Piepkorn, "What Does Inerrancy Mean?," 36 *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 577-93 (September, 1965).
- 5 R. Jungkuntz, "An Approach to the Exegesis of John 10:34-36," 35 *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 556-65 (October, 1964).
- 6 W. Boumans, "The Teaching of Religion: A Theological Analysis," in John S. Damm (ed.), *The Teaching of Religion: Twenty-second Yearbook* (River Forest, IL: Lutheran Education Association, 1965), p. 43 (Bouman's italics).
- 7 J. Sittler, *The Doctrine of the Word* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), pp. 62-63, 68 (Sittler's italics).
- 8 J. A. Quenstedt, *Systema*, I, 112; quoted in the comprehensive discussion of biblical authority in Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* (4 vols.; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950-1957), I, 223.
- 9 Luther, "Defense Against the Ill-tempered Judgment of Eck," *WA*, 2, 618.
- 10 F. C. (Sol. Dec.), Summary Formulation, 9.
- 11 G. Forde, "Law and Gospel As the Methodological Principle of Theology," in *Theological Perspectives: A Discussion of Contemporary Issues in Lutheran Theology* (Decorah, IA: Luther College Press [1962]), p. 65. Since Forde does not hold to the full authority of Scripture, it is not surprising that he has real problems with the substitutionary atonement; and, though a Lutheran, he denies the Third Use of the Law (explicitly taught in the Lutheran Confessions—F. C. [Sol. Dec.], Art. 6).
- 12 See Montgomery, "Constructive Religious Empiricism: An Analysis and Criticism," in his *The Shape of the Past* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1975), pp. 257-311.
- 13 For a detailed critique of Kloha's philosophy of textual criticism and biblical authority, see Montgomery, *Crisis in Lutheran Theology* (op. cit. in note 3 supra). Vol. 3.
- 14 J. Kloha, "The Authority of the Scriptures," Paper delivered at the 2010 Concordia Seminary, St. Louis Symposium on "The Scriptures: Formative or Formality?"

- 15 Cf. Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (rev. ed.; Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), pp. 498-500.
- 16 *Ibid.* pp. 501-504; also Simon G. Southerton, *Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA and the Mormon Church* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004).
- 17 See such publications as this author's *History, Law and Christianity: God's Inerrant Word; Tractatus Logico-theologicus; and Defending the Gospel in Legal Style* (available from 1517 Legacy/New Reformation Press, Irvine, CA).

Thoughts on Entering a New Year

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8

The beginning of 2020 brings with it several milestones.

We are 20 percent through the 21st century! This January marks the beginning of a new year and a new decade. February will be a day longer as we observe a leap year. April 1 will be the decadal census of the United States. In November will be the election for president of this nation. It will be an eventful year.

With the increase of rigid partisan politics, civility suffers. People are quick to judge and dismiss others who hold a different point of view. Political correctness demands that you accept everyone else for how they define their gender and sexual practices. Others have freedom of speech but you or I don't unless it agrees with the prevailing whims of the moment. Public discourse is increasingly vulgar and angry. If events do not go a particular way, will there be violence on the streets?

History repeats itself in cycles back to the Garden of Eden. The first-born to Adam and Eve murdered his brother. Sin increased globally until it became the only thing on people's minds (Gen. 6:5).

God preserved Noah and his wife, their three sons and their wives in the universal flood. Afterward, sin continued.

“The intention of man's heart is evil from his youth [infancy].” Gen. 8:21

Through it all the Lord intended mercy and grace through the Seed of a woman. His appearing would see God set things right in His Son.

Israel had the promise and knew that the Messiah would come through them. The cycle of sin, rebellion, repentance and forgiveness continued through the Old Testament and into the New. Jesus came in the fullness of time, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (Gal. 4:4-5). What does God expect of us? We can give Him nothing but our sins, guilt and rebellion from our sinful flesh. He gives us Jesus and the forgiveness of sins in Him.

God does not need your good works. Your neighbor does. This is what Micah says. Three things are highlighted:

To “do justice”

It begins with being fair and honest. This involves listening carefully to all of the facts and then acting honestly and in good faith with your neighbor. He welcomes and needs

Student Aid Endowment Fund! Concordia Theological Foundation, Inc.

In early 2018, in honor of Mrs. Ginny Valleau's contributions to the publication of the *Lutheran Clarion*, a **Concordia Theological Seminary Student Aid Endowment Fund** was established at **Concordia Theological Foundation, Inc.**, which is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) religious charitable organization. Contributions are tax deductible as permitted by federal and state law. As of December 31, 2019, the fund assets were \$15,184.33 .



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that as much as you do.

To “love kindness”

The root of kindness is mercy. Mercy is not giving your neighbor what they deserve. Rather you help them with what they need. God is merciful and gracious to us. He does not count our trespasses against us or treat us as our sins deserve. So also should we act toward others, our neighbor included.

To “walk humbly with your God”

By nature there is no one who is righteous, no, not one (Ps. 14:1-3, 53:1-3). If the Lord kept an ongoing record of our sins, who of us could stand before Him? No one. That is why boasting to the Lord about this or that is vain and foolish (Luke 18:9-14). If we need to brag and boast, it is the Lord who receives all credit, glory and honor that we are not consumed in our sins.

It is the name of Jesus that is above all names for nailing our transgressions to His cross and blotting them out through His blood. Keeping this in mind, we have a different approach to walking with God. We are completely dependent upon Him for life and salvation.

Micah's words from the Holy Spirit are as fresh, valid and necessary today as they were when he penned them. If you want to do something that makes a difference in the lives of others, here is a start. If you lament the foul discourse and bemoan the hatred and outrage, here is a God-pleasing manner in which to address it.

All flows from a daily dependence on the grace of God. Without Him, we are dead in our sins, just like our neighbor. Jesus makes all things new, including you.

Do you believe it? Then live it.

Rev. Timothy Scharr

District President, Southern Illinois District

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