



Mission of the Cross Lutheran Church
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MOTC NEWS & NOTES

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF MISSION OF THE CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Sunday Worship at 9:30 AM
[Holy Communion celebrated every Sunday]
Fellowship Time 10:30 AM
Youth Sunday School 10:45 AM Sept.-May
Adult Bible Study at 11:00 AM

† ***By Scripture, Grace, and Faith Alone!*** †



Greetings Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

March came in like a lamb and went out like a lion this year, but not because of the weather, but rather because of the Corona virus threat. Our nation these past weeks has faced this menace and people have been paralyzed by the fear of contracting it.

Certain government offices, Schools, and many

Businesses were all ordered to shut down and close their doors to prevent the spread of this disease which is not well known or its effects scientifically substantiated.

For this reason, many have felt adrift upon the unknown which causes great emotional trauma, especially when the outcome of contracting this virus might well cause our death. Fear, therefore, is a powerful emotion that acts upon us and causes us to either “fight or flee” as it is said of our response to personal threats upon our person.

So how does a Christian respond to all of this? First, let me say that I am not advocating that anyone take such an event lightly, while at the same time I would encourage you to consider that because we are *“in Christ,”* and have the gift of forgiveness and salvation, our understanding of the world and such terrible events can be seen differently than what the world sees. For example, while the unbeliever fears death and has no hope beyond the grave, and cannot see death as anything other than the last door closing on life. We, on the other hand, recognize that death is simply a door that opens up to let us enter into a new life, eternal life, as God’s so wonderfully promises. So while death is still a frightening reality because we were created to cherish the gift of life from our creation, it is possible as a Christian not to fear death in the same way as the world since we know it is not the end, but a new beginning. That being said, we can have a different perspective on the frightening specters that confront us in this world corrupted by sin.

And this is made possible by turning to God’s Word to hear what He says to us about life and salvation. For in His Word He promises us that we will find comfort and reassurance in the midst of our fears. So right now, in the face of this virus, and no less when this life throws any number of life threatening calamities we can find comfort. We might face a cancer, the common flu, a car accident or a slip on the ice, since any of these can take our life and in fact most of these events have a greater percentage of taking our life than what has been said about Covid – 19.

MOTC News & Notes

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So let me present to you a number of verses from God's Word that are meant to strengthen our resolve, quell our fears and lead us to trust that no matter what befalls us in this life, if we are "*in Christ*," we have nothing to fear. Hear what God has promised His people in the midst of all trials!

"Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield, and thy exceedingly great reward." Genesis 15:1

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee. Be not dismayed; for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Isaiah 41:10

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord." Romans 6:23

"And the angel said to them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:10-11

"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows." Matthew 10:29-31

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Romans 8:18

"What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Romans 8:35, 37

So, here is my encouragement to you, consider what the Lord says in these days of trial and tribulation and turn to Him in His Word to find peace and have your fears calmed. Do what is prudent and wise, take care of yourself, be patient with one another and serve each other's needs in Christian love as we walk together with our Lord through these trying days. *In Christ Pastor Uhrinak*

PS. Don't forget to read the Confessional Corner !!!

April Worship Schedule

*He is not here;
he has Risen!*
Luke 24:6

April 1st – Fifth Wednesday Lent Service

Gospel - Matthew 27:22-26

Vespers – The Lord’s Supper

April 5th – Palm Sunday

Gospel – John 12:12-43

Divine Service 3 – The Lord’s Supper

April 9th – Maundy Thursday

Gospel – Matthew 26:17-30

Service of Corporate Confession and Absolution

The Lord’s Supper

April 10th – Good Friday

Gospel – John 18:1--- 19:42

Chief Service - The Lord’s Supper

April 12th – Easter

Gospel – Matthew 28:1-10

Divine Service 3 - The Lord’s Supper

April 19th – Second Sunday of Easter

Gospel – John 20:19-31

Divine Service 3 - The Lord’s Supper

April 26th – Third Sunday of Easter

Gospel – Luke 24:13-35

Divine Service 3 - The Lord’s Supper



“And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not; for I know that ye seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as he said, Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”
Matthew 28:5-6

Our Mission Statement at MOTC:

To bring peace, healing, and salvation through faith in Christ to all people by:

Supporting a powerful proclamation of His Gospel through Word and Sacrament; Providing quality liturgy, education, pastoral care, and hospitality; and by fostering acts of love and mercy among the people of our church and community.

God's Word to Ponder!

“And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And He laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am He that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen, and have the keys of hades and of death.”

Revelation 1:17-18

Confessional Corner: Our Lutheran Understanding of Faith

Gospel Reductionism

by John Warwick Montgomery

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.”

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 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 preachment, 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, 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 accepted 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.

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 (\leftrightarrow). 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—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

The stark contrast between the classic Lutheran bibliology and the bibliology 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.

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 peccadilloes 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 Seminean 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 minuscule's and use them as my New Testament—I can live with that. Give me only Codex Boernarianus, one of the most poorly copied, misspelled, error filled copies of Paul's letters, and I can live with that. 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.

Page 6 The Lutheran Clarion - Volume 12, Issue 4 – M 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, Seminex, holding much the same viewpoint, nearly destroyed that institution.

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.

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. Boumsn, "The Teaching of Religion: A Theological Analysis," in John S. Damm (ed.), *The Teaching of Religion: Twentysecond*

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?"