

# **The Structure of Lutheranism**



WERNER EIERT

CONCORDIA CLASSICS

The Theology and Philosophy of Life of Lutheranism  
Especially in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

# The Structure of Lutheranism

Werner Elert

Translated by  
Walter A. Hansen

*To Anne, my wife,  
whose counsel and comments I have  
cherished beyond measure while  
translating this important work*

Ἄλληλων τὰ βίαση βαστάζετε χαι  
οὕτως ἀναπληρώσε τὸν νόμον  
τοῦ Χριστοῦ

Galatians 6:2

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## *Foreword*

One of the earliest English names for a “Lutheran” was “Confessionalist.”<sup>1</sup> Because the Lutheran Church defined itself in a series of confessions but never adopted an official liturgy or a uniform polity, Lutheran theologians have often supposed that the key to understanding any section of Christendom is its confession or symbol. Thus has arisen the branch of theology called *Symbolik*, or more recently *Konfessionskunde*.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the German word for “denominations” is *Konfessionen*; but at least since the eighteenth century American English has been calling the *Konfessionen* “denominations.”<sup>3</sup> For even though academic theologians may wish that the denominations were confessions and expressed their genius in the form of a statement of faith, the mute realities of history make it clear that “in Great Britain and America ... the chief differences between the religious denominations are not doctrinal but institutional.... If therefore any one wishes to make a comparative study of the consensus and dissensus of British and American Christianity, he must pay more attention to religious institutions than to doctrines of Faith and Morals.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore American denominationalism as a religious and historical phenomenon<sup>5</sup> has been the despair of scholars in the field of “comparative symbolics,” who prefer the neater and more precise interpretations that come from a comparison of confessions and creeds.

Yet it does not take an inordinate amount of historical research to discover that the uniqueness even of the “confessional” denominations is not exhausted by their confessions. Thus a conscientious historian could not interpret Roman Catholicism adequately by expounding the decrees of the councils and the *Catechismus Romanus*, but would have to pay attention to the organization of the church, its speculative theology, its cultic life, its *spiritualite*, its social ethics, its definitions of personal morality, and the myriad of other factors that must be taken together as a *complexio oppositorum* before one can even begin to interpret the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>6</sup> Nor is the *Geist* of Lutheranism intelligible solely on the basis of the *Book of Concord* of 1580. It has been said—and it is probably true—that Luther’s Small Catechism has done more to unify Lutheranism than even the Augsburg Confession. Both are part of the confessions. But can one really understand the Lutheran Church without carefully studying (to name only three elements) its treasury of hymns, Luthers translation of the Bible, and the figure of the Reformer himself? To be sure, it would lead to a hopeless relativism if one were to say that Lutheranism is everything that Lutheranism has ever been or that Lutherans have ever said it

is. But it is also a hopeless reductionism if one isolates the confessions from Lutheran history and reads them apart from the context within which they arose and through which they have been handed down.

Between (or beyond) this impossible choice of reductionism and relativism is a method that can interpret the Lutheran confessions historically and Lutheran history confessionally. Such was the method of Werner Elert. He was a historian among the systematic theologians and a systematician among the church historians. That combination of gifts was evident in all his works, and most of all in the present one. Elert's career as a historical theologian moved backwards through the history of Christian thought. The first book by him that drew wide attention was a history of Christian apologetics during the nineteenth century set into the framework of general cultural history, particularly, of course, into the framework of the development of German idealism.<sup>7</sup> Then came the present book, which covered the centuries from the sixteenth to the twentieth with astounding comprehension. And in the last years of his life Elert occupied himself principally with the history of the early church, paying special attention to the theology of the Greek fathers.<sup>8</sup> It was a great loss that he did not live to fill one of the great needs of theological scholarship in our time, a new history of dogma, for which he was preparing.

Werner Elert was born on August 19, 1885, in the village of Heldrungen. His university studies, which he began in Breslau in 1906 and which he continued at Erlangen and at Leipzig, were devoted not only to theology but to philosophy, literature, law, history, and psychology as well. His philosophical dissertation at Erlangen, dated May 21, 1910, dealt with the thought of Rudolph Rocholl (1822—1905); his theological dissertation, dated May 18, 1911, was a study of the apologetic problems in the philosophy of history. Elert became a pastor in Seefeld bei Kolberg, Pomerania, in 1912. As his books and articles demonstrate, he never forgot that the final test of any theological system is its value for the proclamation of the Word of God to the man of today. After the First World War, in 1919, Elert became the head of the *althlutherisch* seminary in Breslau. In 1923 his university, Erlangen, made him professor of church history; and after the death of Philip Bachman, Elert became professor of systematic theology in addition. He died in Erlangen on November 21, 1954. Bishop Hans Meiser said of him in his farewell: "If I were to write an inscription on his grave, I would know of none better than the one I read in an Italian cemetery as an epitaph for a man who had given his entire energy to his church: *Dilexit ecclesiam*, he loved the church."<sup>9</sup>

The literary output of Werner Elert covered everything from a psychological study of St. Peter to systematic works on dogmatics and ethics that deserve the overworked label "monumental."<sup>10</sup> But his *Morphologie des Luthertums*, first published in 1931—32 and reissued in 1952, is undoubtedly his most important work. Published just at the time when the author was about to add dogmatics to his *Lehrauftrag*, this book partakes of the nature of both historical and systematic theology. Its foundation is historical research of the highest order. Although Elert was quite diffident about his training as a historian,<sup>11</sup> the historical equipment displayed in this volume amply refutes such diffidence. As was pointed out earlier, one cannot understand Lutheranism unless one sees, for example, that the person and experience of Martin Luther

have assumed a paradigmatic role in the history of Lutheran piety. To set this forth, Elert immersed himself in the literature on Luther's development that had been pouring out since the discovery of Luther's early commentaries and since the pioneering work of Karl Holl. The first five chapters of this book show the results. But Elert was an able enough historian to resist the occupational disease of German Luther research, a myopic preoccupation with the young Luther at the expense both of Luther's later life and of the subsequent history of Lutheranism. By contrast with many of his contemporaries, Elert emphasized the continuity between Luther's early thought and later developments, interpreting the Lutheran confessions, including, and especially, the Formula of Concord, as the legitimate outcome of Luther's work; at the same time Elert pointed out the misinterpretations perpetrated by later generations. To document this thesis of continuity and change, Elert drew upon a dazzling knowledge of later Lutheran theology, both before and after the Book of Concord. It seems safe to say that this is the most ambitious and most successful attempt in our time to encompass the whole of Lutheran history.

At the same time, this is certainly not history for history's sake—if indeed there is ever such a thing. Elert wrote as a confessional theologian and a Lutheran churchman. This accounts for the recurrence of the polemical accent throughout the historical expositions. The very structure of the book reminds one of a dogmatics, or of what a dogmatics could be like if more dogmaticians knew more about church history. Despite the abundance of historical and bibliographical detail, there is an organic unity and integrity in these chapters that shows a systematic mind at work. Even when his research ranged beyond the usual boundaries of theology, as it did so often, Elert's theological *habitus* made itself felt. *Der christliche Glaube*, his dogmatics of nine years later,<sup>12</sup> was clearly built upon the systematic schema that was already in evidence here. Elert was a committed and ecumenical Christian, a confessional and loyal Lutheran, and a modern and enlightened man; in the present work he showed that, despite the spirit of the age, one could be all of these at the same time. As a mutual friend has said of him, "he was counted as a Lutheran, and that is what he wanted to be. For many he was the most Lutheran among theologians. Those who were inclined to categorization listed him as a confessionalist. All of this he deliberately sought to be. But only if one reads his writings superficially can one fail to notice how involved he was in a continuing dialogue with his time."<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps a personal word of tribute will not be out of order as a conclusion to this Foreword. For a seminarian and graduate student, born in the first year of Elert's professorship at Erlangen and shaped through his family by the confessional tradition of Erlangen, the *Morphologie* came as liberating proof that a historical method and a systematic concern were not as irreconcilable as partisans on both sides were wont to make them. And for a Lutheran theology in America that seeks to be both faithful to its confessional legacy and responsible to its time, few works of European scholarship in the past generation would seem to be more important than this one. One may, of course, raise questions about this or that conclusion in it, as Elert himself did in later years. It seems, for example, that the theological relation between Luther and Melancthon was not quite what the author of this volume (as well as the author of this Foreword) originally thought, and that the relation of pietism to orthodoxy was perhaps even more complex than these chapters suggest. But these are problems over which debate continues or is about to erupt

once more, and it is the measure of Elert's greatness that the debate must still come to terms with his work. So must the theology of this generation.

JAKOSLAV PELIKAN  
*Titus Street Professor of  
Ecclesiastical History  
The Divinity School of  
Yale University*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Oxford English Dictionary* 11 (Oxford, 1933), 802.

<sup>2</sup> See the historical materials in Johann Adam Mohler, *Symbolik*, new ed. by Josef Rupert Geiselmann (Darmstadt, 1958—61), 1, 44—54; also Geiselmann's comments, "Zur Einführung," pp. 73—91.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *A Dictionary of American English* (Chicago, 1960), II, 747.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Augustus Briggs, *Theological Symbolics* (New York, 1914), pp. 29—30.

<sup>5</sup> See Sidney E. Mead, "From Coercion to Persuasion: Another Look at the Rise of Religious Liberty and the Emergence of Denominationalism," *Church History*, XXIV (1956), 317—337; also the Introduction to F. E. Mayer, *The Religious Bodies of America* (St. Louis, 1956).

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Heiler, *Der Katholizismus. Seine Idee und seine Erscheinung* (Munich, 1923).

<sup>7</sup> Wemer Elert, *Der Kampf um das Christentum* (Munich, 1921).

<sup>8</sup> Wemer Elert, *Abendmahl und Kirchengemeinschaft in der alten kirche, hauptsachlich des Ostens* (Berlin-Grunewald, 1954); *Der Ausgang der altkirchlichen Christologie*, edited by Wilhelm Maurer and Elisabeth Bergstrasser (Berlin, 1957).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Der Martin Luther-Bund*, XVII (March, 1955), 4.

<sup>10</sup> See the bibliography compiled in Friedrich Httbner, Wilhelm Maurer, and Ernst Kinder (edd.), *Gedenkschrift fur D. Werner Elert* (Berlin, 1955), pp. 411 to 424.

<sup>11</sup> In the *Vorwort* to his *Die voluntaristische Mystik Jacob Bohmes* (Berlin, 1913), p. i.

<sup>12</sup> Elert's colleague, Paul Althaus, has pointed out that his major works came at an interval of nine or ten years, *Werner Elerts theologisches Werk* in Hübner et al.. od. cit.. d. 402.

<sup>13</sup> Hanns Lilje, "In memoriam," *ibid.*, p. 7.

## *Werner Elert, Professor of Theology*

Others more closely associated and more intimately acquainted with Werner Elert have described him as a person and as a scholar.<sup>1</sup> I cannot hope to add to or even to summarize what they have written; I merely record some of the impressions which Elert left with one who studied under him with great gain.

Werner Elert studied theology in Breslau, Erlangen, and Leipzig. The names associated with those schools—e. g., Rocholl, Harless, Thomasius, Frank, Zahn, and Ihmels—indicate the broad complex of theological scholarship and emphases which formed Elert's heritage. Elert knew himself not only as a scholar dedicated to the appropriation and transmission of the learning handed down by previous generations of the church but also as a theologian responsible for its creative reinterpretation to meet the needs of the world and of the church in which he lived. On the one hand, Elert stood in organic continuity with the Lutheran Restoration and the Erlangen theology of the nineteenth century; on the other hand, he transcended both of them in the method and in the content of his theology.

In his five major scholarly works<sup>2</sup> Elert was concerned to demonstrate the way in which he met the scholarly responsibility which he bore as a member of the theological faculty, and each of these works is a monument to the dedication and discipline with which he fulfilled each of his assignments. They reveal the unique combination of historical knowledge and systematic insight, of confessional depth and ecumenical breadth, that made Elert one of the most learned and creative theologians of this century.

Elert was a theologian with his whole heart and soul. At the same time he was unusually interested in other disciplines. He devoted 90 percent of some of his university semesters to studies other than theology, e. g., philosophy, psychology, history, and military science. This broad spectrum of knowledge is more apparent in some of his writings than in others, but it underlies all of them. Because he felt that the theologian must constantly remain in conversation with the world in which he lives, Elert was a vocal defender of the theological faculty's place within the structure of the university and had little patience with those who wanted to isolate the study of theology on a seminary campus.

For all the richness of Elert's scholarship, his style as a teacher and as a writer must be described as economical. He justified this stylistic economy with a comparison to the art of painting portraits: everything depends on knowing what to omit. His readers, like many of his students, will find the combination of so much content and so few words forbidding at first

glance. Neither in his lectures nor in his books did Elert spread a feast of learning which could be memorized in scholarly indolence and stored for later use. On the contrary, Elert demands that one do the work with him; and for this reason he cannot be scanned or even casually read. Elert limited his scholarly judgments to those areas in which he had worked intensively with the sources, and he requires his students and readers to work through the essential content of the material with him before they can appropriate or even understand his conclusions. A certain type of reader will shy away from this; but those who take the trouble to do the work will learn the truth of the Erlangen proverb that for whatever reason one came to Erlangen to study theology, one stayed longer than planned, because he had come under the influence of Elert.

Elert made no effort to attract students. Indeed, it sometimes seemed that he was unconcerned to the point of turning them away. In time, however, one learned to see that he merely accepted students on the basis on which he himself wished to be accepted as a scholar, and that he required the same intensive study of the sources and the concern to draw relevant conclusions that he demanded of himself. He was a great teacher not only because he constantly maintained this demand at a high level but because he was able to communicate his own scholarly passion and his capacity for intuitively seeking out that chain of development which would be relevant to the problem under discussion. His critiques were honest and frank, sometimes sharp and stinging, always deadly accurate. Yet Elert never short-circuited the painful process of scholarly growth by revealing the way to be traveled or the goal to be achieved. At times it seemed that he wanted only students who did not need him as a teacher. The truth, of course, lay elsewhere. His goal for each student was that he learn to work in absolute independence of any personal authority of and guidance from the teacher. Elert took the idea of the university as a community of scholars, each contributing to the other, with radical seriousness. Membership depended on the capacity to give as well as to receive.

Not all students appropriated Elert's conclusions or even his methods and standards. Yet few students sat in his lectures without being decisively influenced in their theological thinking. His influence reaches far and wide through the Lutheran Church. It will be increasingly felt in the coming years, not only in academic theology but also in the life of the church; for he gave his students the same concern for participation in the practical life of the church that he himself demonstrated throughout his life.

This influence cannot, however, be measured in terms of an "Elertian" school. Elert did not want to establish such a school. He himself was a confessional theologian and was concerned not to make his students over in his own theological image but rather to alert them to the strength and cohesiveness of Lutheran theology. The enthusiasm which he inspired was not enthusiasm for his person; it was enthusiasm for the subject matter and the task of theology. What he communicated was not a set of conclusions; it was a method.

ROBERT C. SCHULTZ

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Althaus, *Werner Elerts theologisches Werk*, in *Gedenkschrift für Werner Elert*. Ed. by Friedrich Hübner, et al. (Berlin, *Luthemches Verlagshaus*, 1955), pp. 400—410. Wilhelm Maurer, *In Memoriam Professor D. Werner Elert*, *Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*, VIII (1954), 378 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Der Kampf um das Christentum* (1921), *Morphologie des Luthertums*, 2 vols. (1931 f.), *Der christliche Glaube* (1940), *The Christian Ethos* (1949; Engl. transl. by Carl C. Schindler, Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia, 1957), *Der Ausgang der altkirchlichen Christologie* (1957).

## *Translator's Preface*

Werner Elert (1885—1954) was a giant among the important theologians of recent times. Throughout a long and highly significant career his extraordinarily active, inquisitive, and sensitive mind ranged over a vast expanse of theological lore. It went back to the dim and distant past, it concerned itself with the present, and it never lost sight of the future. Elert investigated with tireless diligence and with unusual circumspection. He sifted and weighed, rejected and accepted. He continued to search and probe until death intervened.

The *Morphologie des Luthertums* shows how zealously and how selflessly Elert sought to answer questions of vital concern to those who busy themselves with the study of theology. The famous scholar strove to be objective, and his very passion for objectivity impelled him at times to lash out with telling incisiveness against conclusions which he held to be incongruous and untenable. Here and there the *Morphologie* contains brief but striking examples of his ability to resort to sharp invective whenever he considered it necessary to do so.

Naturally, many theologians will find fault with some of Elert's conclusions. After reading and rereading his *Morphologie* I myself shake my head now and then in disagreement. Others are bound to have the same experience. But this does not mean that Elert did not strive with self-effacing determination to see and to picture the impressive structure of Lutheranism as it actually exists.

Years ago Anatole France, the famous French critic, pointed out with unassailable logic that no author can fail to be autobiographical in his writings. Elert, too, was autobiographical in what he wrote. The *Morphologie* enables one to envisage the man as he thought and worked; it paints the portrait of a courageous scholar whose richly stored mind invariably revealed honesty of purpose. The disagreements which Elert's epoch-making study of the structure of Lutheranism will undoubtedly call forth in this or that quarter can render a significant service by leading to painstaking examination and reexamination of the points of difference.

Elert did not write for the purpose of seeking publicity; he wrote for the purpose of stating the truth as he saw the truth. His *Morphologie* is an outstanding classic in the field of theological literature. But it is not outstanding as a literary achievement per se. The writing is uneven. Sometimes it is downright cumbersome. In numerous instances, however, it is full of elemental power. Occasionally it is beautiful in its texture. Elert himself was keenly aware of "deficiencies" in the *Morphologie*. He was eager to eliminate them. But death came to him before he had the opportunity to do so.

I have tried in the sweat of my face to reproduce Elert's distinctive way of writing. It has been my purpose to let Elert appear as Elert, not in a garb devised by a translator. Alexander Pope, William Cullen Bryant, and Johann Heinrich Voss translated Homer. But they did not actually reproduce Homer; they mirrored generous portions of their own traits. John Dryden did the same thing when he rendered Vergil's *Aeneid* into English. This was Dryden—even though Dryden told Vergil's story.

Yet it is an axiomatic fact that no translation can ever be a perfect replica of the original. Furthermore, one must always bear in mind that even in this domain there can be differences of opinion with respect to some points. I have tried to hit every nail on the head. Any misses the discriminating reader may discover are altogether unintentional. Elert, like many other lecturers, often crowded numerous thoughts into the confines of a single sentence. This resulted in writing which, in some cases, must be traversed two, three, or more times before one grasps everything that is being said. In addition, Elert frequently switches tenses in the middle of the stream. I have switched in harmony with his switching. I did not consider it my duty to polish Elert's style; it was my business to try to reproduce it. For this reason I have sought to avoid paraphrastic renderings, and I have studiously refrained from any attempts to refine the fine gold that sometimes characterizes his way of expressing his thoughts. Whenever his writing is powerful in its burning eloquence, my translation into English lags far behind the original in forcefulness of expression. Here, in fact, it is bound to be afflicted with an unmistakable limp. Translating is a difficult art, but I have realized again and again that Elert often hurls almost insurmountable difficulties across the path of anyone who undertakes to produce an English version of the *Morphologie*. If I have failed at any point or at numerous points, I shall be grateful for the reprimands that will be showered on me.

Now I must call attention to a particularly perplexing problem—a problem that has been a thorn in my flesh, so to speak, ever since I began to translate the *Morphologie* into English. What is the exact English equivalent of *der evangelische Ansatz*? Is there an exact English equivalent? I have striven long and hard to find one. I have sought help from numerous sources, and I myself have devised and rejected more than one translation. I must add, however, that I have been opposed on principle to the use of any rendering that would require a recasting of the sentence in which the expression occurs; for in such cases one could easily withhold from Peter without being able to reimburse Paul. After long deliberation I have finally decided to translate *der evangelische Ansatz* with “the impact of the Gospel.” I realize that this rendering is not completely adequate in every respect. But I have not been able to find anything that is better.<sup>1</sup>

The first edition of the *Morphologie* appeared in 1931, and the late Dr. Theodore Engelder, a member of the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary in St. Louis, contributed a long and detailed review of the book to the September 1932 issue of the *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Dr. Engelder stated that Elert uses *der evangelische Ansatz* synonymously with “the doctrine of justification.”<sup>2</sup> Although there is much merit in what this learned reviewer, for whose theological acumen I have profound respect, said about the meaning of *der evangelische Ansatz*, his explanatory remark does not solve the knotty problem with which Elert's expression

confronts the person who undertakes to translate the *Morphologie* into English. Elert frequently uses the word *Rechtfertigungslehre* (“doctrine of justification”). If a translator could substitute *Rechtfertigungslehre* for *der evangelische Ansatz* in every instance, there would be no problem at all. But would this rather simple expedient be completely in keeping with Elert’s dialectic? I do not think so. While I recognize the relevance and the pertinence of what Dr. Engelder said about *der evangelische Ansatz*, I do not believe that it would be wise or proper to interchange *Rechtfertigungslehre* and *der evangelische Ansatz* every time these two expressions occur in the book.

In the preface which Elert wrote to the 1952 reprint of the *Morphologie* he states that “for technical reasons improvements are confined, in the main, to the weeding out of typographical errors.” But typographical errors are elusive and malevolent creatures. I have discovered a few of these pests in the 1952 reprint of the *Morphologie*, particularly where Latin quotations are adduced. In one instance the punctuation was misplaced. I struggled long and fruitlessly to arrive at a translation before it finally dawned on me that a number of commas were in the wrong places. But I am not finding fault with Elert on this account. In numerous instances the time-honored sources from which he quotes are notoriously inconsistent and seemingly arbitrary with respect to punctuation and uniformity of spelling.

I dare not conclude without expressing my boundless admiration of Elert’s penetrating and far-sweeping acquaintance with the writings of Martin Luther. In addition, I must state that this famous scholar, who must be numbered among the most distinguished theologians of recent decades, never fails to stress the difference between Law and Gospel. If he did not do so, his *Morphologie* would fall far short of exhibiting the structure of Lutheranism.

*In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus autem caritas*

WALTER A. HANSEN

St. Louis, Missouri  
May 21, 1962

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<sup>1</sup> Those who understand German will undoubtedly arrive at a clearer understanding of what Elert means when he uses the expression *der evangelische Ansatz* if they give special attention to what Paul Althaus said in the address he delivered at the University of Erlangen on February 19, 1955, at a memorial service in honor of Elert. I quote without translating: *Er unterscheidet bei seinem Erfassen des Luthertums “Dynamis” und “Gestalt,” Morphe. Jene ist die Konstante, diese der immer neue geschichtliche Ausdruck, in dem die Konstante aufzusuchen, der zugleich an der Dynamis zu messen ist. Jene Dynamis findet Elert—mit einem seiner seitdem weithin rezipierten Termini—in dem “evangelischen Ansatz.” Er versteht darunter das grundlegende lutherische Verstandnis der menschlichen Existenz, zuerst als “unter dem Zorne Gottes,” sodann unter dem “Evangelium.” Wir erhalten hier ein ungemein starkes Bild dessen, was man in Anlehnung an einen Begriff Elerts das evangelische Pathos nennen kann, Luthers “Urerlebnis” unter der Verborgenheit Gottes, seine Erfahrung des Evangeliums und den theologischen Ausdruck von beidem. (Gedenkschrift für*

D. Werner Elert, *Lutherisches Verlagshaus*, Berlin, 1955, p. 403.) I must add that these words of Althaus have strengthened me in the belief that my translation of *der evangelische Ansatz* is by no means an out-and-out blunder or what the Germans would call a *Fehlgriff*.

<sup>2</sup> I quote from Dr. Engelder's review: *In diesem grossartigen Werk wird nachgewiesen, wie die Rechtfertigungslehre, durchweg "der evangelische Ansatz" genannt, dem Luthertum und dem lutherischen Wesen zugrunde liegt. Sie bildet das Herz des Luthertums, hat ihm auch seine dusserlichen Züge aufgeprägt. Wie die Lehre der Schrift das ist, was sie ist, eben weil es eine Rechtfertigung durch den Glauben gibt, so steht auch in der lutherischen Theologie die Rechtfertigungslehre im Zentrum, beherrscht auch den Kultus, die Verfassung und das Leben.*

## *From the Preface to the First Edition*

The following presentation strives to accomplish in one respect what I demanded in the inaugural address I delivered here on the necessity of reconstructing the study of the confessions. On that occasion I said that one must give attention to the activity of modern church bodies in its entire extent, even in “nonecclesiastical” areas. Those sections of the first volume that deal with the philosophy of life undertake to comply with this demand so far as Lutheranism is concerned, and the entire second volume seeks to achieve the same end....

*Erlangen*

*January 1931*

## *Preface to the Reprint*

Since the first appearance of this work not a few new investigations have been added to the writings mentioned in connection with each part. Since that time Swedish and Finnish research has concerned itself in a particularly intensive manner with Luther's theology. But German research has also done so. Further work has been done with respect to Melancthon and other Lutheran theologians. Important monographs dealing with problematical historical matters—for example, with the doctrine of Holy Communion in the sixteenth century—have appeared. Furthermore, research that is historical in the stricter sense is overlaid with so many writings that it is well-nigh impossible to examine every one of them. With regard to the questions raised by systematic theology in our time, these writings range through identical subject matter or reflect points of view that are of current significance for the church. In this very respect the theological movement is in a complete state of flux. Therefore it was necessary to ask whether this state of affairs does not confront the *Morphologie* with a new assignment—an assignment that might have to lead to a total recasting of the entire work. Nevertheless, a reprinting of the first edition was preferred, and for technical reasons improvements are confined, in the main, to the weeding out of typographical errors. So far as I myself am concerned, the following considerations have been decisive.

The principal objection to the whole work was directed against combining dogmatical and historical points of view into a homogeneous thought structure. In his *Kirchliche Dogmatik* Karl Barth speaks about the "*Morphologie* that cannot be sufficiently condemned," and Hermann Sasse decrees in his letters to Lutheran pastors that "there is no morphology of the confessions." With respect to this, however, the critics have not convinced me. Even if the work had been revised, the total arrangement would have remained the same. In that case I myself would have had the opportunity to make stylistic improvements, to express myself more precisely in many instances, and to omit a few unnecessary comments. This would have been the only advantage. But attention to works that have appeared in the meanwhile and the discussion of these works would have necessitated making the book almost twice as large as it is. For me it was contrary to the command to love one's neighbor as well as one's enemies to pass this added expense on to the purchaser. Sympathetic reviewers have found the book valuable because it cites sources that are either unknown or have not been considered in the past, and even unsympathetic reviewers have acknowledged this to the extent that they have appropriated not a few of the quotations it contains. In my opinion, a reprint will continue to serve this purpose.

But it is necessary to add that from the very beginning—not subsequently—I myself have regarded the two volumes as a mere torso. At the very outset I intended to expand the presentation in the direction of the present as well as in the direction of the past. The modification of my teaching assignment at the University of Erlangen induced me to establish the relationship to the present in two systematic books—in a Lutheran work on dogmatics, *Der Christliche Glaube*, 1940—41, and in a work on the Lutheran ethic, *Das Christliche Ethos*, 1949. So far as I am able to see now, the presentation of the relationship to the past is still an unsolved problem. Early Lutheranism affirmed its consensus with the early church, and today the whole thinking of the church—the thinking that is expressed in this consensus—has received renewed significance for our time. Consequently, from this point of view it seemed to me to be more urgent to examine the history of dogma of the early church than to revise the two existing volumes of the *Morphologie* and thus to eliminate the deficiencies, which I myself know best. I hope soon to be able to present some of the results of the recent investigations.

*Erlangen*  
*June 1952*

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*Werner Elert, Professor of Theology*

*Translator's Preface*

*From the Preface to the First Edition*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- ADB—*Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*  
AELKZ—*Allgemeine Evang.-luth. Kirchenzeitung*  
ARG—*Archiv für Reformationgeschichte*  
BBK—*Beiträge zur Bayerischen Kirchengeschichte*  
Bek. d. RK—E. F. K. Müller, *Die Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche*, 1903  
BFchrTh—*Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie*  
CA—*Confessio Augustana* (Augsburg Confession)  
ChrW—*Christliche Welt*  
Cohrs—Ferdinand Cohrs, *Die Evangelischen Katechismusversuche vor Luthers Enchiridion* (*Monumenta Germaniae Paedagogica*, vols. 20—23)  
Conf. Hafn.—*Confessio Hafnica* (Copenhagen Articles)  
Conf. Mont.—*Confessio Montana*, *Bekenntnis der oberungarischen sieben Bergstädte von 1519*, quoted according to Borbis, *Die evang.-luth. Kirche Ungarns*, 1861, pp. 22 ff.  
CR—*Corpus Reformatorum*  
Denzinger—Henr. Denzinger et Clem. Bannwart S. J. *Enchiridion Symbolomm*, Ed. XVI et XVII.  
DG—*Dogmengeschichte*  
Diss.—dissertation  
Drews—P. Drews, *Disputationen Luthers 1535—45*, 1895  
EA—Erlangen edition of Luther's works  
EA ex. lat.—Luther, *Exegetica opera latina*, Erlangen edition  
EA var. arg.—Luther, *Opera varii argumenti*, Erlangen edition  
Enders—*Luthers Briefwechsel*, edited by Enders, Kawerau, Flemming, and Albrecht  
Epit.—*Epitome of the Formula of Concord*  
FC—*Formula Concordiae* (Formula of Concord)  
Frank. Bek.—*Die fränkischen Bekenntnisse*, herausgegeben vom Landeskirchenrat der ev.-luth. Kirche in Bayern r. d. Rh.  
Gussmann—W. Gussmann, *Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte des Augsbürgischen Glaubensbekenntnisses*, 1911—30  
KG—*Kirchengeschichte*  
KO—*Kirchenordnung*  
Kopenhagener Art.—*Malmd-Beretninger om Religionsartikler og Forhandlinger paa Herredagen i Kjdbenhavn 1530*, udg. af Holger Fr. Rordam, Copenhagen, 1889  
Mirbt—Carl Mirbt, *Quellen zur Geschichte des Papsttums und des römischen Katholizismus*, 4th ed., 1924

Niemeyer—H. A. Niemeyer, *Collectio Confessionum in ecclesiis reformatis publicatarum*, 1840  
NKZ—*Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift*  
Plitt-Kolde—*Die Loci Communes Ph. Melancthonis in ihrer Urgestalt nach G. L. Plitt herausgegeben von Th. Kolde*, 4th ed. 1925  
PRE—*Realenzyklopadie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 3d ed.  
Reu—Johann Michael Reu, *Quellen zur Geschichte des kirchlichen Unterrichts in der evang. Kirche Deutschlands zwischen 1530 und 1600*  
RGG—*Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*  
Richter—Aem, Ludw. Richter, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16. Jahrhunderts*, 1846  
SA—Smalcald Articles  
SchrVRG—*Schriften des Vereins für Reformationgeschichte*  
SD—*Solida Declaratio of the Formula of Concord*  
Sehling—Emil Sehling, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnung des 16. Jahrhunderts*, 5 vols., 1902 ff.  
SW—*Samtliche Werke*  
Th.—thesis  
ThStKr—*Theologische Studien und Kritiken*  
TR—Luther's *Table Talk*, Weimar edition  
WA—Weimar edition of Luther's works  
ZBK—*Zeitschrift für bayer. Kirchengeschichte*  
ZKG—*Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*  
ZsTh—*Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie*  
ZThK—*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*  
ZW—*Zeittvende*  
ZZ—*Zwischen den Zeiten*

# **The Structure of Lutheranism**

## *Introduction*

Ever since the Council of Trent made the Western schism complete, the theology of all churches has been striving for the morphology of the confessions. In the background of the serious controversies in which Martin Chemnitz, Robert Bellarmine, Johann Gerhard, and Daniel Chamier engaged one is already aware of the elemental urge to ascertain and understand One's own position and the position taken by others, in order to present the two correctly in controversy. The picture recurs when Rudolf Hospinian, in his *Discordant Harmony (Concordia discors)*, and Leonhard Hutter, in his *Concordant Harmony (Concordia concors)*, square accounts between the two main Protestant groups, or when the Wittenbergians cross swords with the Socinians. Of course, these polemical works themselves are still part of the shaping of the modern confessions. But for this very reason their original dynamic is still clearly discernible. To be sure, the "objectivity" sought by the reader of yesterday and the day before in a presentation of information concerning the confessions cannot be found. For these men think existentially, not hypothetically. In their thinking they are obedient to a command to which they feel unconditionally obligated, to a claim which, by turning to them, makes them what they themselves are. In this way their observation of their own position and of that of others is applied to the very last thing that urgently sought to take shape here. Consequently, their writings themselves are not only products of confessional polemics but also reliable witnesses of the confessional morphology.

From a morphology we demand a complete picture of its subject matter. Whether the picture is obtained by fitting separate parts together or by sketching the profile; whether one proceeds from the outside to the inside or vice versa, unfolds the formative dynamic from the final shape, or presents the latter to the reader as resulting from the former—these are only differences in method. It is sufficient if, in the end, a complete picture can be seen. Measured by this demand, the works of those old polemicists appear as fragments. The "comparative study of the confessions" which was pursued during the past generation and, as was natural, made enormous progress accuses the polemicists and, in addition, nineteenth-century "symbolics," which preceded them, of having treated confessional differences with reference only to dogmatics. As if there were in human life a single area—from the state and the formation of capital to divorce and the gypsy plague—which had not been drawn into the discussions by Bellarmine and Johann Gerhard. And even though this accusation actually does apply to many of the nineteenth-century students of symbolics, there is still the question whether they, with

their one-sidedness in the matter of dogmatics, were not more closely on the track of the dynamic of the confessions than Troeltsch was when he thought he had discovered the secret of confessional differentiation in the various “social doctrines.” Measured by the demand for completeness of the morphology, the one was just as one-sided as the other. The fact that the ethos of the confessions—not only the ethic—proceeds in different directions was known long before Troeltsch appeared. Only the question regarding the relationship to the dynamic of the confessions is worth considering. “Dogmas exercise an influence on man’s whole behavior,” wrote Johann Albrecht Bengel;<sup>1</sup> and Schneckenburger, in his *Comparative Presentation of Lutheran and Reformed Doctrinal Concepts* (1855), made a very thorough attempt to prove this.

The impression that the early polemicists present only fragments of the confessional morphology is rather to be ascribed to the fact that they themselves wrote when things were beginning to take shape. The shaping itself is a process that goes on for centuries; it never ceases while there is still a spark of life. Even today it continues for Roman Catholicism as well as for Lutheranism. Therefore even today any attempt to present a morphology can result only in a fragmentary picture. Nevertheless, for several centuries the work has been making progress. We know what they already knew or suspected: that it is the aim of the confessional dynamic to take into its service and to shape the entire domain of everything human. Furthermore, we know what they could not yet know: that here there are changes in epochs, an increase in strength and a decrease, a dormant state of the formative will and power as well as an awakening. Finally we know what they indeed could know but did not make clear to themselves: that the confessional dynamic is often thwarted, hidden, and overpowered by other forces of history.

At first glance this threefold knowledge seems to facilitate for us the larger approach to the ideal of an actual morphology. On closer examination, however, it uncovers for us just as many difficulties as we had before. Every area of the sum total of human interests—something we need take no pride in at all—has become more extensive—so extensive that an individual is no longer able to ascertain at every point the relationship to the confessional dynamic. Furthermore, at the very outset changes in epochs wreck every attempt—easy though it may seem—to gain from a cross section of history at a specific moment an adequate picture of one of the confessions. The forms of expression sought by churches and other groups undergo changes, and the farther they get from their starting point, the greater the changes. There are, to be sure, cases of repristination; but there are no repetitions. In order, therefore, to find the relationship between dynamic and form, one must let the whole succession of epochs pass in review, just as the historian ascertains and describes what took place. But while the historian attempts to trace single events from their immediate causes, a morphology undertakes to find a constant that is effective in all changes, one that is operative beyond individual connections and, as a dominant force, either determines or helps determine the outcome. A morphology proceeds from the assumption that the confessional constant not only controls man, ideas, and patterns of a moment in history and welds them together into a confessional unity but also outlasts the succession of epochs, yes—this is at least possible—even brings about the epochal changes of the whole. Only an examination of history itself can show whether this assumption is correct.

But, as has been said, the task of constructing a morphology is complicated most by the fact that the confessional dynamic is in competition with very many other motives of historical development. It would be conceivable that just as early Christianity was said to be a syncretistic religion, so it would also have to be true of the modern confessional churches that they have no homogeneous blood stream of their own but, on the contrary, are nothing more than a product of heterogeneous components. In Catholicism, Brother Heiler has uncovered seven heterogeneous strata in which, as he says, the whole external world of extra-Christian religions is reflected. To find in them the dominant factor—if this has to do with a form (*Morphe*), with a homogeneous totality of life, the dominant factor must be postulated—is by no means easy! Here the causal relationship of Lutheranism to the act of the Reformation seems to facilitate the appropriate determining of the morphology. But at the very moment the morphology, as just demanded, seeks to take into consideration the changes in the epochs and focuses its attention on the dynamic that is operative in them, it sees its subject matter exposed to an explanation on the basis of other things—an explanation which, so it seems, arrives at its goal without any employment of the confessional perspective. No one will deny, of course, that the soil in which the Herrnhut Unity of the Brethren (*Herrnhuter Brüdergemeinde*) arose was Protestant. But the motives of its origin and the terminology in which it expressed itself have, when considered from the viewpoint of morphology, such pronounced similarity to contemporaneous phenomena in the history of art, literature, and society that the attempts to treat their peculiarity purely as a question of style seem easily understandable.

What is almost obtrusive in the case of this relatively small group can also occur in the case of large groups. The attempts to establish a connection between the Reformation and the Renaissance, not only with reference to ideas but also so far as the style characteristic of these periods in history is concerned, are not new. The Counter Reformation is baroque, pietism is rococo, the Enlightenment is the style of Potsdam and finally of the Napoleonic Empire, the Restoration of the nineteenth century is neo-Gothic or Biedermeier. It would not be impossible to consider the style changes per se consistent with the assumption of a continuously operative confessional dynamic. Conceivably, this could even bring the style changes into being. In reality, however, this is out of the question; for the changes recur in the terminology of all confessions belonging to the same cultural sphere. In any case, therefore, the historical terminology which churches and groups apply to themselves is also cocontrolled by a dynamic springing from other laws. As a result, a study of the confessions which must confine itself first of all to the historical terminology is confronted by the difficult task of looking for clues to its hypothesis concerning the confessional dynamic. This it must do in spite of the apparent or actual relationship in the matter of style. And it must reckon on principle with the necessity of laying down its arms at one point or another.

The following investigation does not claim to have given a complete solution of these problems for Lutheranism. But it has come to grips with them, and it tries at least to take them into account. So far as method is concerned, the direction in which it proceeded was the reverse of the presentation that follows, i. e., with those phenomena in history in which the dynamic of Lutheranism is still directly to be felt. Individual investigations concerning the relationship

of Lutheranism to nations, to the history of marriage, and to the ethos of warfare, as well as investigations concerning the effect its doctrine of the Lord's Supper had on the history of the philosophy of life (*Weltanschauung*), also concerning the phenomenology of anxiety, were, for this reason, published at an earlier date. Now they have been fitted in part into the larger context. Whenever possible, they sought a confirmation of the confessional hypothesis in matters that had been neglected by previous studies of the confessions. Nevertheless, the hope to arrive at a true morphology of Lutheranism in this way proved delusive.

For it became apparent that even from a purely morphological standpoint it is impossible to evade the media of characterization that had been the one and all for the old "symbolics," namely, the doctrinal features set forth in the "symbols," the official church confessions. To be sure, the problem presented and developed above permitted a deliberate abandonment of the attempt to describe Lutheranism merely as theological subject matter. On the contrary, it also necessitated a treatment of the content of the symbols, not as the dynamic governing the whole but as one of their forms of expression besides which altogether different forms can be seen. What Soederbloem established regarding churches in general—that the knowledge and the forces operative behind the council at Stockholm for "practical Christianity" and behind the council at Lausanne "for faith and church government" would have to be expanded—represents a position reflecting the form (*Morphe*) of Lutheranism either consciously or unconsciously.<sup>2</sup> Troeltsch, with his principle stating that "Christianity is practice" (*das Christentum ist Praktik*)—a principle developed when he occupied the chair of theology at the old university in the Palatinate—could not have arrived at such a judgment. But it is by no means possible simply to coordinate the various categories of expression Lutheranism has created for itself. This is evident from the fact that some are more variable than others and that in individual cases their amalgamation with motives springing from other laws reveals great differences in strength. It is strongest in the domain of sociology, weaker in the domain of the philosophy of life, and still weaker in the terminology of church government and worship. Beyond question, however, theology and, here again, the official church dogma come closest to our objectives—the dominant force.

Moreover, as the source of the morphology the confessions mean something different from the binding norms of doctrine formulated at a given time. For, in the first place, they have characteristics that pertain not only to the date of their origin. Even though the measure of their validity in many areas of later development was emphatically disputed, and even though theology as well as the preaching of the church was often at variance with them, yet they were never completely forgotten. They were known even when they were contradicted. Wherever one either agreed or disagreed when coming to grips with them, they were at least reference points of theological thinking. Yes, whenever in the history of Lutheranism it was necessary to come to grips with opposing groups, they were the point of departure for the necessary renewal of the understanding of Lutheranism's own character. In the second place, therefore, the confessions were never merely of a legal nature. Where there is no strict proof to the contrary, the morphology may rather reckon with the fact that, directly or indirectly, they actually helped shape the total picture of historical Lutheranism. In the third place, the confessions were not

only formal norms of doctrine; for the most part, they were synonymous with doctrine itself. This is true in large measure, for example, of Luther's Small Catechism. One can say without exaggeration that the simple appropriation of the doctrinal material contained in this book has been the most important factor even in the social life of Lutheran countries—and for centuries a constantly effective factor. The study of the confessions does not ask whether this is pedagogically right or wrong. On the contrary, it simply establishes this fact; and here it has found one of the dynamic elements to which Lutheranism's more or less peripheral forms of expression in history may be traced with certainty.<sup>3</sup>

But the confessions also point away from themselves to a dynamic of a higher order. Their materials—for example, in the Catechisms and in Melanchthon's treatise on the papacy or in the first and the sixteenth article of the Augsburg Confession—are in part so heterogeneous in character that what determines every single point in a uniform manner has to lie even farther in the past. Here the study of the confessions becomes involved in historical questions it cannot evade, even though, strictly speaking, these questions are not part of the study. For even though it seeks the confessional constant that accompanied Lutheranism for centuries and shaped it as a continuously operative dynamic, still this constant has to have a beginning. And if even the oldest confessions are part of what this constant brought about, the constant must have had its origin in the critical years that lead from the beginnings of the Reformation to the Augsburg Confession. But this outer bounding of the time of origin indicates at the same time termini of a series of hypotheses demanding from the morphology a decision that will probably keep it from being praised as "objective."

The one hypothesis proceeds from the character of the Augsburg Confession relating to constitutional law. It stresses the fact that the independence of Lutheranism as a church body was due to action on the part of the central authority of the German Empire. Accordingly—as is still the case of late in the cultural philosophy of Franz Zach—it seeks the origin of the dominant force in the motives and purposes of the German territorial rulers and cities. A second hypothesis prefers to hold to the theological character of the Augsburg Confession. Therefore it seeks a theological origin. It is maintained that Lutheranism, by making this document the starting point of its awareness of being a church body, committed itself to the theology of Melanchthon, which is set forth in the document. Recently this hypothesis has come to the point of stating that the Lutheranism shaped by the Augsburg Confession and therefore directly by Melanchthon signifies a falling away from the "young Luther." This contrasting of Luther with Melanchthon is not really new. It lies at the root of the theological disputes that followed Luther's death and came to an end in the Formula of Concord. At that time, however, the unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530 was still regarded as giving expression to a theology which Luther himself professed without having to renounce his own theology. And what had to be interpreted as Melanchthon's subsequent apostasy lost its right of domicile in Lutheranism because of the outcome of those disputes. Albrecht Ritschl also put very strong emphasis on that antithesis; but inasmuch as he pointed to the 1530s as the time when the development began to go awry, he remained true to the basic conception of Lutheranism as that conception had existed for centuries. To be sure, he also regarded the movement that led

to the Formula of Concord as a faulty development. And when he gave the reason for the manner of expression (*Sprachgebrauch*) which spoke only contemptuously of “Lutheranism” on Lutheran soil, he meant, of course, the Lutheranism which thought it had the right to view the Formula of Concord as the reversion from Melanchthon to Luther.

If since those days—i. e., in this perspective—there were two kinds of Lutheranism—the one, that which is contained in the confessions; the other, that which found its most fitting expression in the theology of the professors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—the second has recently made progress insofar as it has again set up an objective norm for what Lutheranism should mean in its original sense. This norm is the “young Luther.” His first lectures, discovered in recent decades, have given us very accurate knowledge concerning him. The prospect presented by publicizing the theology contained in them is very bright, because one can reckon with the capital of confidence and authority which the mature Luther acquired. The fact that in those lectures there is still a goodly amount of foreign theology, which Luther took over from tradition but deliberately rejected later on, yes, to some extent fought against with the utmost sharpness, presents no obstacle to this way of looking at the matter. Here the interpreter decides dictatorially what pertains to the Reformation and what does not. This Luther—unlike the later Luther, who, because of his important publications, is under the supervision, as it were, of publicity—may be used more easily as needed. Above all, he does not, like the Luther of 1529, break asunder the “united front of Protestantism,” since at that time Zwingli was still an army chaplain and “Protestantism” did not yet exist. Above all, the theology of those lectures still seems to leave room for the claim that Calvin was Luther’s “most loyal disciple.” Here the reader will discover that even church history is not without humor. For the role of Luther’s “most loyal disciple” was once ascribed by Heinrich Heppe, a member of the old Reformed Church, to him, of all persons, who allegedly created the Lutheranism that is said to be routed today by means of the young Luther, namely, to Melanchthon—the Melanchthon, of course, whom his Lutheran opponents linked with crypto-Calvinism.

In this way the other outermost boundary of the aforementioned series of hypotheses is marked. This third hypothesis seeks the origin and the fulfillment of its Lutheranism in the theology of the young Luther. So far as pointing to a person is concerned, this hypothesis is surpassed only by a fourth, advocated by Father Denifle, who undertook to find the key to the whole Reformation, and indirectly to Lutheranism, in Luther’s writing *On Monastic Vows* (*De votis monasticis*).

At the decisive point, therefore, our morphology is confronted with a difficult task. It is unfortunate that in view of the great number of hypotheses—which could easily be increased by a few more—the advice to rely on church history and on the history of dogma does not lead to the goal. If the morphology itself is not to become church history, it cannot enter into an investigation of individual details. At all events, it cannot take these as its point of departure. First of all, it must cling to what is historically incontestable. In this category there are primarily two things. In the first place, there is a Lutheranism oriented toward the confessions, a Lutheranism—sometimes set forth with greater sharpness, sometimes in a manner less strong—which has outlasted the centuries. In the second place, there can be no doubt that this

Lutheranism was rightfully derived from Luther, the Reformer. There can be no doubt about this, because Luther's Catechisms and the Smalcald Articles also belong to the confessions.

This means indeed that we seem to be back where we were before. Once again we confront the confessions, and we cannot discover the dynamic that shaped them until we have considered what took place before they came into being. In the following pages we shall designate this unknown as the impact of the Gospel (*evangelischer Ansatz*). To develop this will be the task of the first part. In doing so, however, the mode of procedure is different from what would be done in a purely theological-historical investigation. Naturally, it will be necessary to give ample consideration to the second point mentioned above—the dependence of Lutheranism on Luther. But one cannot take the confessions as the starting point without further ado. Like the Augsburg Confession, let us say, they are only an expression of that deeper-lying dynamic. In addition, it is necessary to consult other theological works of Luther. The morphology, however, does not write Luther's theology. On the contrary, it seeks to discover in Luther's theology only that which is able to carry the whole structure of the historical Lutheranism that followed. This, then, would be the impact of the Gospel (*evangelischer Ansatz*). Whether it has the capacity to hold what is expected of it must then be established in the various categories of historical expression that surround this center in larger and larger circles. To be sure, even this further task cannot do without Luther's theology. For his theology not only contains the impact of the Gospel (*evangelischer Ansatz*), but at the same time it is one of the first manifold embodiments of the effects of this impact.

If it is correct to define the impact of the Gospel (*evangelischer Ansatz*) as the center of the dynamic, there arises the further task of referring to it the demonstrable historical effects in such a way that one can see as complete a "picture" of Lutheranism as possible. This is the real task of a morphology. To be sure, the investigation cannot ignore historical development either as a whole or in detail. But it always traces this development merely for the purpose of discovering everywhere the constant, the permanent, "traits." Here it runs into the aforementioned competition with motives that spring from other laws. At the most widely varying points it will be evident that very often, indeed always, the development has a tendency to drift away from the dominant force inherent in the confessions. But even at its outer fringes one always continues to find a community of interests with its beginnings—even where, in the process, the Gospel dynamic has demonstrably faded from view. Here it is seen that the motives arising from Lutheranism have a supraindividual vitality that is operative and takes individuals into its service even where there is no longer a personal dependence on the impact of the Gospel (*evangelischer Ansatz*). The same thing could be true of the other great churches and groups. Here we see an indirect confirmation of the confessional hypothesis. The confessions are more than private affairs of individuals. They are supraindividual forces with their own morphology.

At all events, the main difficulty in the way of the task of presenting a morphology of Lutheranism is the change in epochs. In the morphological perspective the epochs appear as segments of the gradual weakening and restrengthening of the confessional dynamic. In the area of Lutheranism the first main phase embraces essentially the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Indeed, within this period of time it could also be possible to establish an undulating

motion. Nevertheless, the great constant can be seen clearly and uniformly up to the end of the so-called orthodoxy. Then powerful foreign control ensues, especially from the West. This goes at once to the roots of Lutheranism. The impact of the Gospel (*evangelischer Ansatz*) threatens to be lost. The next result is a deep-going readjustment of the theology as a whole, in part also of worship. Sociologically and in the matter of its philosophy of life (*Weltanschauung*) Lutheranism, so it seems, lives on only in the extreme peripheral categories of its expression. Nominally, to be sure, the churches retain their confessions; but in doing so they are apparently merely dragging along a possession that is dead. Then, in the nineteenth century, the third phase of retrogression follows this one. At first glance it appears to be merely a restoration, because, above all, theology picks up threads dropped at the end of the seventeenth century. But the impact of the Gospel (*evangelischer Ansatz*) itself comes to life again in an unmistakable manner, and now it frequently engenders entirely new forms of expression. This is true of theology as well as of sociology and the philosophy of life (*Weltanschauung*).

If, in spite of the great episode of retrogression, the constant actually remained operative here, one can hesitate to decide from which strata of sources one should take the colors and the brush strokes for the “picture.” It is self-evident that for the impact of the Gospel (*evangelischer Ansatz*) and for theology in general, the sources at the beginning of the development flow at their purest. Here, in the writings of the reformers, in the confessions—even those that were not accepted—in the numerous catechisms and sermons, “classical” material altogether inexhaustible is at our disposal. Certainly here, too, the impact of the Gospel (*evangelischer Ansatz*) must always be employed as the critical standard of measurement. But here everything is being built up from the bottom, not repristinated. This is still true of the generation living at the time of the Formula of Concord. In spite of all statements made by critics to the contrary, the governing motive of this confession is not a theologically lame searching for compromises but the struggle for the purity of the impact of the Gospel (*evangelischer Ansatz*) and its resolute application to the new theological situation. Beyond this the theology of the seventeenth century was drawn upon with greater emphasis—partly to demonstrate the dynamic of the beginning, partly to show the drifting away from the dominant force. The theology of the nineteenth century was touched on only at individual points. This is surely a defect. But it seemed more important to reserve the illustrative material of the past century for sociology.<sup>4</sup>

For this, one cannot confine oneself to Luther's time. It is true that the ethical and the theological impact (*Ansatz*) direct one back to the same starting point. For this reason sociology, too, must, in general as well as in particular, begin again with Luther and, what is especially important here, with Melancthon. But since experience teaches that in the domain of society—understood in its broadest sense—the ethical dynamic asserts itself much more slowly than new knowledge in the domain of theology, the sociological part of the study must, so far as possible, gather its material from longer periods of time than the theological. Here there will also be opportunity to go into the subject of extra-German Lutheranism with somewhat greater attention to detail than in the theological part. Indeed, for the time being a consideration of the whole political and economic history of the non-German Lutheran peoples goes beyond the ability of one person. For the time being—for it is to be hoped that the sketching of the

morphology of Lutheranism might also be undertaken in these nations. Here the German scholar must still rely on more or less productive investigations carried on offhand.

What we lack for the purpose of gaining a “picture” of extra-German Lutheranism threatens—because of its profusion—to overwhelm us when we characterize German Lutheranism. The following presentation is concerned to hear from as many different groups of sources as possible: the literature of controversy, books on dogmatics, debates, catechisms, rituals (*Kirchenordnungen*), and here and there also church hymns and sermons. In the field of sociology inspection reports and decisions of faculties and consistories must be taken into account above all. In the part dealing with economics one must depend in the main on secondary literature. For reasons of space it was impossible to draw more extensively on hymns and sermons. The few funeral sermons that are quoted show that here even the title, though shortened to the barest essentials, takes up a disproportionately large amount of space. In general, titles were named only of such old sources as are quoted or actually made use of in the text. If in this way the impression of arbitrariness arises, one must consider that here an attempt was made to sketch a form. And someone has said that the art of portraying consists in omission.

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<sup>1</sup> O. Wachter, *J. A. Bengel*, p. 370.

<sup>2</sup> Soederbloem, *Randanmarkingar till Lausanne, Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift*, 1927, pp. 336 ff.

<sup>3</sup> In his famous essay on the “three main branches of the Lutheran Church” (*AELKZ*, 1927; cf. “The Lutheran Church Quarterly,” 1928, pp. 302 ff.) Olaf Moe designates the definiteness contained in the confessions as a special characteristic of American Lutheranism. The correctness of this judgment will be substantiated when the field of sociology is discussed. Yet there, too, the history as well as the present situation is defined by characteristics that are totally different. For the time being I refer only to the collection of essays titled *What Is Lutheranism?* (New York, Macmillan, 1930), with contributions by Weigle, Evjen, Offermann, Wentz, Reu, Hefelbower, Scherer, Haas, Dau, Wendell, Rohne, and Ferm.

<sup>4</sup> Yet I confess that the wish not to collide, so far as the subject matter is concerned, with my book on *The Struggle for Christianity Since Schleiermacher and Hegel (Kampf urn das Christentum seit Schleiermacher und Hegel)* was another consideration that led me to reach this decision.

PART ONE

The Impact of the Gospel  
*(Der evangelische Ansatz)*

## Chapter One

# UNDER THE WRATH OF GOD

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### 1. THE PRIMAL EXPERIENCE<sup>1</sup> (*Das Urerlebnis*)

The first part of the Augsburg Confession begins with an article on God; it ends with an article on the saints. But God is more than the beginning. He is spoken of everywhere, even in the article titled “Of Civil Affairs” (*Von Pdlizei und weltlichem Regiment*). And the saints come last only because they are the end of the works of God. The whole confession has to do with these works. Here God is the selfevident presupposition for which one would look in vain in the Augsburg Confession for any “proof.” The Augsburg Confession was certainly not written for those who do not share this presupposition—which, of course, is not to be understood as saying that its contents have no validity for them, On the contrary. What is said about God must have unconditional validity precisely because Law and Gospel, which are appealed to as authoritative, have unconditional validity as the divine Word. But if they have validity even when man knows nothing about them, God is in any case independent of our consciousness. And if one investigates further, one finds as the beginning of everything from there on the knowledge that the consciousness of man as consciousness of himself is in original opposition to God, whether he knows about this or not. No man is without sin. Nor is there any neutral ground between sin and righteousness. And there is no sin that would not be enmity against God.

These statements lie at the bottom of the theses with which Luther attracted widespread public attention for the first time. They are the basis of his bitter fight against every kind of Pelagianism. The vehement struggles that took place in the era of Flacius were brought on by the fear that these statements could be obscured. These statements separate Luther from the idealism that followed. Neither the submersion of oneself in one’s own thinking nor the setting-up of one’s own idea of the “ethical person” can lead to any other result than opposition to God. For everything man finds in himself and everything he sets up is sin and therefore condemned by God.

At first glance this seems monstrous. It amounts to a condemnation of everything among men that appears to be great and noble. It apparently paralyzes every ethical activity, every step forward. It offends the Catholic, who believes in his saints. It led to Goethe’s coldness toward, and Nietzsche’s hatred of, Lutheranism. It was so hard to bear that again and again Melanchthon was tempted to whittle some of it away and the dogmaticians of the seventeenth century seem

at times to have retained it only in form. In all likelihood they would all have become weak in this matter if a break with it had not been felt as an open break with the result of the Reformation itself.

The basic total picture of man's existence is developed by Luther exhaustively but also with unparalleled gloom in the lecture he delivered on Psalm 90 in 1534 (Erlangen edition 18, 264—334). "In the midst of life we are in death" (*Media vita in morte sumus*) is the theme. "Disasters, wretchedness, shortness of life, the pangs of an afflicted conscience, despair, temporal death, eternal death, death" (*Calamitates, miseria, brevitatis vitae, angores conscientiae afflictatae, desperatio, mors temporalis, mors aeterna, mors*) and again and again "death" (*mors*)— these are the variations. Here the poet who wrote this psalm is "Moses in the superlative degree, that is, the stern servant of death, of the wrath of God, and of sin" (*Mosissimus Moses, hoc est, severus minister mortis, irae Dei et peccati*). One asks oneself whether this black picture painted in black is not a completely personal testimony of Luther, who shows right here that he remained a monk throughout his life. But Luther himself regards this pessimistic view as universally valid. To be sure, he states emphatically that there is also another view of life. He knows very well that there are those who avoid every thought of death (276), who are addicted only to temporal joys and cares (325). He also knows that others do not shun the thought of death but want to have done with death by scorning it (266). On the other hand, he himself knows the value of man and of man's life. The melody of death is so frightful precisely because death strikes "such a noble creature" (286, 292). Here, however, Luther stands for no weighing of what is noble and beautiful against what is bad and base. For such weighing presupposes a dismemberment of life—a dismemberment that ignores the pivotal question. Life must be taken as a whole. But as a whole it is undoubtedly bounded by death.<sup>2</sup>

And death is by no means merely the end of temporal existence. Even if one wanted to evaluate it only chronologically, it would be infinite (284, 310). Life, however, is finite. Why, then, should death not be stronger than life? Life flees like a shadow (321). It is identical with time, which has no dimensions, which never "is." As time, life—even if it lasts a hundred years—is merely a mathematical point (*punctum mathematicum*) (321), merely a point of intersection, without surface, without space. The acknowledgment that our life is a mathematical point is meant when Moses demands "that we transfer ourselves outside time and look at our life with the eyes of God" (*ut transferamus nos extra tempus et Dei oculis inspiciamus nostram vitam*) (291). Here, then, we encounter God. "For man's death is something different from the death of animals, which die according to the law of nature. Furthermore, it does not take place by reason of coincidence or time. It is a threat of God; it has its origin in the wrath and the estrangement of God." (284.) Therefore by taking life as a whole, that is, as a mathematical point, one understands why it is always accompanied by the threat of death.

Yes, why?

That continuous threat which causes life to shrink to a mathematical point whence one can look on all sides into the depths of death must really be referred to all life, to the totality of its natural and ethical relationships, yes, even to its relationship to God—to the God whose existence theology, philosophy, and the church had certainly taught Luther to recognize as a

great, self-evident truth. After the breakthrough of the knowledge that led to the Reformation he characterized the totality of this relationship as *ratio*.<sup>3</sup> Everything he possessed by reason of thinking and knowing was self-evident, that is, self-evident in itself and from itself: that man as a ‘moral person’ should be subject to God and therefore obey His commandments; that when he does not succeed in doing so or at least does not succeed entirely, he must avail himself of the treasures of relics in the possession of the church; that he must follow the examples of the saved and the saints; that God cannot demand of him anything else than what He demands of them, and also that man will be able to accomplish this if he has the necessary good will. Otherwise God could surely not demand this of him. All this is understandable, yes, self-evident, just like the philosophy of Aristotle, which schools his thinking and feeds his knowledge, and in which everything proceeds in a rational way.

But while absorbed in this rationality of the world and in this clear conception of what should be done man suddenly falls to pieces. Dread takes hold of him. Of what? Perhaps every religion begins with dread. But here it is not a mere feeling of worldly uneasiness—the feeling that the world about him is uncanny, puzzling, and irrational. Neither is it merely a fear of his own insufficiency, of getting old, or of having to die. Nor is it the feeling of being crushed by the infinite. On the contrary, it is the dread one has when in the night suddenly two demonic eyes stare at him—eyes which paralyze him into immobility and fill him with the certainty that these are the eyes of him who will kill you in this very hour. At this moment all the trumpery of the philosophy of religion, which defined God as TO OV, as “something infinite” (*ens infinitum*), as “pure act” (*actus purus*); at this moment all the preventives and relics the church has to offer against punishment for sin, against temporal and eternal destruction—all this is gone and forgotten. From an object of meditation, from a paragraph in a book on dogmatics, God has suddenly become a Person who calls to me personally. And this Person calls to me to tell me that my time has run out. At the sight of this every prayer for delay is frozen. The will to live dies—the will to live the life one has led up to this time. Time stands still.

But why is man filled with such a dread when God calls to him directly? To this question Luther sought and found the answer in his book *On the Bondage of the Will* (*De servo arbitrio*).<sup>4</sup> Beneath the surface of the exegetical controversies with Erasmus he struggles for an understanding of his dread of God. He has grasped the reason for it. In this situation it is natural to look first at man. One tries to explain this dread to oneself psychologically. But under the eyes of God man comes to an altogether different conclusion. For he is totally in the grip of a power outside and therefore opposed to him. And indeed in a twofold sense. For one thing, God demands of him an accounting. God holds him responsible.<sup>5</sup> The fact that God holds him responsible shows him conclusively that he actually had an obligation to be something, to do something, or to leave something undone. But now the terrible discovery. God holds him responsible for something he can never accomplish.<sup>6</sup> The reason is that for the fulfillment of the great “Thou shalt” which hangs over his whole life he lacks the first and most important thing—free will. His will is in bondage.<sup>7</sup> Only when man can no longer be in doubt as to the mysterious power that binds him unconditionally and therefore keeps him from doing what he should does this knowledge become terrible in full measure. It is God Himself. This is the

second sense in which God has power over him. God makes demands of man and, in spite of this, brings about the very opposite in him.<sup>8</sup> As if in mockery, however, He holds him responsible for nonfulfillment. Man *should* do what is good, but he *must* do what is evil. We know why Luther is filled with dread. Now we know the connection between death and God. Furthermore, we know that this death is something different from the outer end. It is the end of the “moral person.”

In his anxiety man looks to God, who has inflicted this monstrous thing on him. But what does he learn? He sees burning wrath.<sup>9</sup> The evil must be blotted out, for it is enmity against God.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, God Himself had put into man’s hands the weapons he bore when he did what was evil and thus fought against God (WA 18, 710, 1–30). For everything man has is from God (18, 614, 12). But the outcome of the battle cannot be in doubt. Here man cries for an answer to the why! Why does God put him into this desperate situation?<sup>11</sup> But he gets no answer. He is standing before an inscrutable mystery. He feels the guilt that was bound up with his human nature from the very beginning because of the “Thou shalt.” But he does not know why. As he asks these last questions, the darkness becomes impenetrable. There is no answer.<sup>12</sup> This God, who holds us responsible for demands we cannot fulfill, who asks us questions we cannot answer, who created for us that which is good and, in spite of this, leaves us no choice but to do that which is evil—this is the “hidden God” (*Deus absconditus*). It is the God of absolute predestination.<sup>13</sup> It is the God who hardens the heart of Pharaoh and hates Esau before Esau was born, the potter who forms vessels that fill one with loathing<sup>14</sup>—and, in spite of all this, thunders at these luckless creatures in a brutally despotic manner: “Your fault!” (*Tua culpa!*)

Here morals and *ratio* really come to an end. And one must accompany Luther up to this point in order to estimate what revelation, grace, and faith mean to him. Here at the same time is the turning point. “It is obviously,” he writes against Erasmus, “utterly repugnant to common sense, for God to be guided only by His own will when He abandons man, hardens his heart, and damns him. For He seems to take pleasure in the sins and in the eternal torment of the unfortunate ones, even though preachers praise the greatness of His mercy and loving-kindness. It seems that for this reason one must look upon God as unfair and brutal, as unbearable. This repugnant thought has caused many distinguished people of all times to go to pieces. And who would not find it repugnant? More than once it hurled me down into the deepest abyss of despair and made me wish I had never been born—until I learned how salutary this despair is and how close it is to grace.” (WA 18, 719.)<sup>15</sup> But without the Gospel the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*) must end in despair, hatred of God, and blasphemy.<sup>16</sup>

The writing against Erasmus contains the reason for that gloomy outlook on life which Luther develops in his commentary on Psalm 90. It will be seen, of course, that in the light of the Gospel a completely different picture comes into view and that therefore the validity of all this is merely provisional. Accordingly, it would be a mistake to conclude from this that Luther had a closed mind with respect to his pessimistic view of the world. But even this further analysis of what has been developed so far leads to danger of misinterpretation and faulty development—as history teaches. In any case, it is necessary to keep in mind without qualifi-

cation, in the first place, the bearing the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*) has on God and, in the second place, the indissoluble connection between elements of fate and those of morals.

Luther's denial of free will (*liberum arbitrium*) had already been condemned in the papal bull of June 15, 1520; and Aleander, the papal nuncio, knew what it meant when in the Edict of Worms he let the charge of pagan fatalism be brought up against Luther.<sup>17</sup> Luther's stand against freedom of the will, on which Aleander based his charge, could actually appear as a break with every system of ethics, not only with the official ethic of the church. His burning of the book on church law, referred to further, seemed to confirm that in his case the ethical consciousness was actually out of joint. In this connection the edict pointed out that Luther's doctrine had a line of ancestors, and this was meant to finish him off so far as public opinion in Christendom was concerned. Denial of the freedom of the will amounted, so it seemed, to a denial of responsibility. But then only stoical-fatalistic conclusions or those of libertinism were left. Whether Luther drew the latter or the former, it seemed in any case that he had to put himself in opposition to the Christian belief in God. In the conviction that this belief embraced God's justice as a Judge, which separates man's good works from his evil deeds and therefore presupposes the free decision and, consequently, the "free will" of man, the representatives of the church had the humanists on their side, that is, in the commonly accepted sense, every normal ethical outlook on life.

Here one can already see a misinterpretation which resulted from the one-sided consideration of one of those two elements which Luther held to be firmly connected. For Luther did not by any means deny man's responsibility. Ever since his theses against indulgences his whole appeal to the church had been one great call to repentance. But it is self-evident that a denial of responsibility would have nullified this call. In numerous sermons on individual questions pertaining to ethics, especially in what he wrote about good works (1520), he had, on top of all this, proclaimed a positive ethos that was in opposition to every form of libertinism as well as to every ethic based on fatalism.

Yes, there was even a point of view on the basis of which Luther was ready to acknowledge that there is a free will (*liberum arbitrium*). This was the same point of view that Melanchthon stressed. In the *Loci* of 1521, which, by the way, reflect a strictly deterministic way of thinking, Melanchthon himself taught that there is "a certain freedom of external works" (*Ubertas quaedam externorum operum*) (Plitt-Kolde, p. 71). The counsel given at Ansbach in 1524 expressed itself in an altogether similar manner. As yet, therefore, it was by no means a defection from the original position when Melanchthon again included the subject of ancient morality in his lectures and, as one way of justifying the inclusion, stated that this morality could be achieved through the power of man's will.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, he asserted in the Augsburg Confession and in the Apology that man has a free will "to some extent" in matters "which reason comprehends." Finally even the Formula of Concord, in spite of its attack on synergism, could adduce similar statements by Luther. For Luther, too, asserted—and precisely in his writing against Erasmus—that man is lord over the things that are under him, that vis-a-vis them he has "right and a free will" (*jus et liberum arbitrium*).<sup>19</sup> Therefore in Luther's writings and throughout early Lutheranism the denial of freedom of the will had its basis neither in

libertinism nor in philosophical determinism. When Luther spoke of “the lower things” (*inferiora*), which he wanted to be understood as being subordinate to man’s freedom, he meant exactly what Melancthon had in mind when he said this about the things that are subject to reason (*ratio*): the inner realm of human existence, of the world, of human consciousness insofar as it applies to the world. As long as one maintains the position of immanence, one can bring thoughts and decisions into play at will. Here man is autonomous. Immanence and autonomy belong together.

But the nub of Luther’s polemics is not to be found in the question whether man has the ability to do what he *wants* to do; it is to be found in the other question: whether he is able to do what he *should* do. In all circumstances, however, the “should” strikes him from the outside and therefore signifies that a breach has been made in immanence. Moral judgment goes astray when it undertakes to appraise man according to the measure of his agreement with the “moral sense” set up by the “moral sense” itself. What sin is, what a good work is, one should rather “learn from the commandments of God and not from appearance, great or numerous though the works themselves may be, nor from the approval of men or of man’s law or custom” (WA 6, 204, 20). Moral autonomy is destroyed as soon as there is a break with immanence, which is subject to the divine commandment. This is what Luther means when he denies that there is freedom of the will. “Freedom of the will is at an end over against God” (*Cessat liberum arbitrium erga deum*) (WA 7, 146, 37). Therefore man’s obligation and responsibility over against the “should” ordained by God are not, as the Edict of Worms falsely concludes, weakened or even denied. On the contrary, they are emphasized with the utmost sharpness.

At the same time, however, the realization of responsibility before God carries with it self-accusation (*accusatio sui*) on the part of the sinner. What is more, the admission of guilt extends to every area of life. As long as the moral judgment remains within the framework of what is merely human, one can measure an individual case on the basis of an individual case. According to the first thesis of the Reformation, however, one’s whole life should be repentance (WA 1, 233, 10).<sup>20</sup> This word “whole” dare not be taken as the sum total of many individual cases; it must be taken as meaning an overlapping totality. Repentance should lead directly out of the sphere of reflections that are merely human. It should place the totality of human nature before God. In all circumstances the call to God strikes us from the outside—even when it strikes us in our “own” conscience—because it deals a destructive blow directly to what is purely one’s inner nature, that is, one’s autonomous self-determination. If the sum total of our moral life is the result of this self-determination, the call to God thus deals a destructive blow also to the whole man, not only to his individual acts. From the inside we are autonomous—therefore also responsible. But when, as Luther demanded, we “look at our life with the eyes of God,” life and at the same time autonomy shrink to the “mathematical point.” Before God autonomy cannot achieve comprehensive fulfillment. It remains merely as a demand of our ego. But this demand embraces both our responsibility and our guilt before God. Thus what Luther pointed out in his commentary on Psalm 90 becomes entirely clear: the outer side of our life is death.

If, therefore, all libertinistic inferences have been pared away from the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*), even the fatalistic inferences bring no relaxing whatever of the dreadful tension in

which it has placed us. If the former are founded on a false evaluation of the moral element, the latter have their basis in a misinterpretation of the idea of fate contained in them. One could imagine, of course, that all fear of God would be allayed, provided that man were willing to acknowledge the power of fate in an altogether logical way and thus to entrust himself completely to the hand of the Creator. Then this acknowledgment and this entrusting of oneself would surely mean that one “gives the glory to God.” In that case the rift would be done away with, and peace would be made between God and His creature. In this belief German mysticism is in agreement with Spinoza and Goethe. And even Nietzsche hit upon this way out: “You can no longer endure your domineering destiny? Love it! You have no other choice!”

This first question is: How does the power of destiny which God has over life really make itself perceptible? Precisely when it rests on absolute authority—only then, of course, would this attempt at relaxing it make sense—must it be thought of as being as extensive as possible. So far as man is concerned, it must, therefore, be found in the totality of his relationship to life. For everything we see and recognize, experience and suffer, is our fate. Obviously, the fact that in the Catechisms and elsewhere Luther describes man’s relationship to his environment by emphasizing its divine origin as the reason for giving thanks or as an object of prayer cannot lead us any further along at this point; for there he is speaking from the standpoint of faith, Man, to whom the other creatures are referred there, already stands in another relationship to God than that of the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*).

On the contrary, the question is: How does man experience divine destiny without Christ? Luther’s answer is unambiguous. “He who does not have faith,” he answers, “is cast down below all creatures, nor is there any creature that could console him. For he who has God as his enemy also has all God’s creatures opposed to him; these never stand still.” (*Qui fidem non habet, infra omnes creaturas deiicitur, nec ulla creatura est, quae consolari ipsum possit. Nam qui deum habet inimicum, is et omnes creaturas dei habet contrarias, hi non consistunt.*) (WA, 24, 23, 1.) According to Luther, it is precisely the identification of God with the creatures round about us, that is, with our environment—the identification which edifies Spinoza and Goethe—which depresses man without Christ, yes, intensifies his fear. “All creatures seem to be nothing but God and the wrath of God, even though it is a rustling leaf, as Moses says in Lev. 16” (WA 19, 226, 14). Here all creatures become “God’s whips and weapons” (WA 17 II, 59, 6), whether it is “the sea with its waves and billows” (WA 19, 227, 3) or “sickness, hunger, pestilence, fire, water, war” ... or “the government” (WA 17 II, 59, 3ff.). All this terrifies, not because one cannot master it but because, strictly speaking, these are weapons of God directed against us.<sup>21</sup>

Is Luther seeing ghosts? Is it the overwrought fantasy of a monk that is speaking here? Or is he here merely constructing a situation in order later on to be able more effectively to draw from it the freedom and the cheerfulness of the person who has been justified—a situation no man has actually ever experienced? One cannot arrive at a complete answer before one knows what Luther means by sin. If sin were only disobedience, that is, the deviation from a norm, the damage could be repaired forthwith by obedience, and the problem of destiny would be solved by “composure.” In reality, however, sin, in the strict sense, is “enmity against God,” that is, active opposition to the will of God, which, to an equal degree, is active against sin. God

replies to sin with a judgment that can terminate only in our death. But since, as developed previously, in God's eyes the mark of sin clings not only to individual acts but to the sum total of our life, we have become hopelessly subject to this judgment, even if, from a particular moment on, we were to try to put an end to our opposition to God. It was altogether in conformity with what Luther meant when later on a pupil of Johann Musaus said by way of objection to Spinoza's conception of religion that obedience to God could take neither the relationship of the sinner to God nor the relationship of the justified person to God into full account; for that, too, was determined, among other things, by "fear of divine wrath" (*metus irae divinae*).<sup>22</sup> This meant that it is not belief in Christ which, in the first instance, runs counter to Spinoza's "love of fate" (*amor fati*), but that even in the elementary experience of destiny Spinoza overlooked an essential point. Luther, too, says that this is actually the fear of the wrath of God. It is the expectation of divine judgment—not, however, only as mere fear of punishment but as that primal experience (*Urerlebnis*) in which it just is not possible simply to balance sin and punishment against each other. God's power over destiny is seen, not in the fact that He shapes our destiny in general but in the fact that He shapes it in such a way that we cannot escape sin. Logically, "submission to destiny" also means submission to the inevitability of sinning. Accordingly, the "love of destiny" (*amor fati*), which is thought of as obedience to God, includes corroboration of the opposition to Him. Although it would like to achieve the opposite, it is at the same time a renewed defiance of God.

If, therefore, God's sovereign power over destiny actually embraces all relationships in our life, it is no fantasy of Luther's but an undeniable fact that all creatures, too, must, in their relationship to us, serve to execute His inscrutable judgment on us. To us "all creatures are death, for they all have a connection with God" (WA 24, 578, 5). Even fatalism brings no deliverance from the torment of the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*).

## 2. SIN<sup>1</sup>

The primal experience (*Urerlebnis*) must be understood as "natural man's" relationship to God. It is full of existential contradictions. These the Enlightenment aims and seeks to destroy. Readiness for revelation results from realization and recognition of their existence. The contradiction contained in the whole returns of necessity in connection with all the individual elements embraced by the whole.

This is seen with special clarity in the concept of original sin. This concept is the most elementary synthesis of destiny and guilt, of dependence and responsibility. To be sure, a superficial consideration would seem to indicate that here the real problem should be deferred and that the riddle of our destiny should be "solved" on the basis of some previous history. It is true that original sin has a reference to the past, namely, to the fact that originally all mankind was bound up with the beginning of our race. But for this reason alone it was impossible for Luther to speak of it in the Smalcald Articles as the principal sin. For involvement that lies in the past could, of course, relieve us, at the most, of responsibility. And when the Augsburg Confession says that original sin cleaves to us "from birth" (*von Mutterleibe*), the point is, not

that it is there “from birth” but, as Melanchthon emphasizes untiringly in the Apology, that it has affected everything embraced by the life transmitted to us. The statement that original sin is concupiscence directs attention to this totality. For it is pointed out emphatically that the whole man is under the domination of original sin.<sup>2</sup> But the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*) makes itself heard still more sharply when original sin is characterized by stating that man can have no true fear of God, no true faith in God (*CA II, Apol. I, 8*). The error of Flacius stemmed from the fear that something could be subtracted from the totality. And when the Formula of Concord contradicted him, it had no desire whatever to punch holes in this totality—which, on the contrary, it maintained to the full extent (*SD I, 11*)—but it wanted to define the totality only in such a way that man’s need for deliverance might not indicate that he could not be delivered. In no case did the Formula of Concord want the possibility of being delivered to be understood as some “religious-moral” predisposition that had been excepted from the guilt-relationship determined by original sin. Luther, too, had maintained the “passive fitness” (*aptitudo passiva*) taught by later dogmaticians. In fact, he had done so even against Erasmus (*WA 18, 636, 18 ff.*) When the Formula of Concord gives the reason for this fitness by stating that in spite of original sin man is God’s creature, this is indeed a great comfort for the man of faith, with whose eyes the matter is viewed there. At the stage of primal dread (*Urgrauen*), however, it is the final push (*Anstoss*) into despair. For the distress (*Not*) of the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*) finds sharpest expression precisely in the fact that God’s creature is enmeshed in hopeless opposition to his Creator.

Accordingly, the doctrine of original sin enabled early Lutheranism to keep alive the following factors connected with the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*): first, that our whole life as constituted by nature is far distant from God; secondly, the realization of responsibility before God for the total substance of our life—both lie within the concept of sin; thirdly, however, also the realization that our whole life is dependent on the origin to which we were destined—this lies within the concept of original sin. Thus the doctrine of original sin establishes the contradictory state of affairs in the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*) as comprehensively as possible. Accordingly, one could imagine a doctrinal procedure which derives the concept of sin from that of original sin, since indeed in all circumstances the latter includes the former as a factor and also recognizes the state of affairs in question as comprehensively as possible. Perhaps it was the pattern of scholastic theology—perhaps, too, merely the picture conveyed by the term “original sin”—which induced the dogmatics of a later day to proceed in an entirely different manner. The term “original sin” leads involuntarily into the temptation to interpret its intended content as a special instance of the general concept of sin. But if one were to proceed from the latter assumption instead of from the former, danger of shallowness would arise at once. Then the inevitability of sin easily appears as a mere supplement which could also be lacking. Actually, up to the time of the Enlightenment dogmatics did not yet succumb to this danger, because it adhered earnestly to the doctrine of original sin as upheld by the Reformation and constantly sought to formulate the concept of sin in such a way that original sin could at least be included in this concept. Nevertheless, the contradictory elements inherent in that state of affairs were weakened and, in the end, completely ignored.

For Luther the concept of sin was constantly oriented toward God—not toward an impersonal law that is transgressed. It is oriented toward this law only insofar as this law is felt directly as God’s will. Naturally, Luther appropriates the Pauline doctrine of the Law, especially the statements that the Law leads to knowledge of sin and—outwardly—holds the godless in check. But precisely when it reveals its effect completely, it drives—in case the Gospel is not heard—more deeply into enmity against God. Through sin God is hurt. Murmuring against God, yes, hatred of God, is inevitably connected with this.<sup>3</sup> Even in his writing against Erasmus, Luther—in spite of his emphasis on the thesis pertaining to destiny—declared that man is in direct opposition to God. Of Pharaoh he says that, because of the wickedness of his will, he could not do otherwise than hate what was “in opposition to him” (*contrarium sibi*) (WA 18, 711, 35). The hardening brought about by God leads to this *contrarium*. By seeing Pharaoh reply with hatred Luther—in spite of “determinism”—ascribes to him not only independence vis-a-vis God but also an active manifestation of his ego, a manifestation that is more than a mere transgressing of legal bounds. It is stated later (714, 4) that Pharaoh is hardened to such an extent that he resists God. Elsewhere, too, in this book Luther writes about war, fighting, enmity, man’s hatred of God.<sup>4</sup> To him all this is an inevitable result of the claim to autonomy, the claim implicit in the delusion that there is a “free will” (*liberum arbitrium*). Here, too, Luther leaves no doubt that in all this hostility toward God sin is not an occasional stumbling but clings without fail to every one of our steps. “The godless man sins against God whether he eats or drinks” (*In Deum peccat impius sive edat, sive bibat*) (768, 23).

“Man’s heart is inscrutable” (*Cor hominis inscrutabile est*), says Luther where he appropriates the Pauline expression “enmity against God” (WA 43, 203, 30). Thus the nature of sin itself actually becomes incomprehensible in more than one sense. In his Ascension Day sermon of 1522 Luther reduces the primal relationship (*Urverhaltnis*) of man who is still to be born to the unmistakable formula: “Therefore there is always enmity between man and God, and they cannot be friends or be in agreement with each other” (WA 10 III, 136, 7). It is impossible to express with greater sharpness the inadequacy, in Luther’s sense, of the conception which defines sin merely as a deviation from the right path. But even in Luther’s general conception of sin—not only of original sin—that unresolvable contradiction is kept alive precisely in this way. The Creator creates the creature, watches over it, and guides it. But He creates it in such a way that it is able to fight against Him, yes, to hate Him. As a result, He Himself must reply to this with death and destruction.

Even though one looks in vain in the writings of Melanchthon for the directness of this knowledge which Luther had, still Melanchthon never overlooked the opposition to God that is implicit in sin. Where he defines sin as conflict with God’s Law, he does not fail to add “offending God” (*offendens Deum*). But disobedience to the Law is also “not only actual but universal, which in man’s nature is opposed to God” (*non tantum actualis sed universa, quae est in natura hominis adversus Deum*) (CR 21, 667). And how seriously he wants the relationship to God to be taken is shown in the statement: “Reason understands that there are offenses against God’s Law, but it is indifferent to God’s wrath” (*Ratio intelligit vitia contra legem Dei esse, sed iram Dei negligit*). He, too, is aware of the completely incomprehensible element in the

nature of sin. Paul, he declares, made use of that “terrible expression” (Rom. 8:7) to enable the reader to realize that the weakness of human nature is too great to be sufficiently understood and estimated by human reason (CR 15, 661). In the Augsburg Confession he says of the godless that they are hostile to God (XX, 25). He is also aware of the possibility of hatred of God (CR 16, 286; 21, 98 and 163). In the final edition of the *Loci* it is still stated of those who are not converted to God that they will remain “eternal enemies of God” (21, 876).

As has been stated, it was the primary purpose of later dogmaticians to express the concept of sin in such a way that original sin could be included. On the other hand, man’s responsibility was not to be compromised. For a long time a voluntaristic definition, which may have been best suited to prevent one from losing sight of the element of inner contradiction, was avoided, obviously because it seemed to come dangerously close to “free will” (*liberum arbitrium*).<sup>5</sup> Therefore John’s statement that sin is “lawlessness” (dvopla) (1 John 3:4) was most welcome. It was so flexible that both the active element of “sins in deed” (*Tatsünden*) and the destiny-controlled (*schicksalhaft*) element of original sin could be included in it; and at the same time it permitted a connection with the Pauline trains of thought concerning Law, sin, guilt, and punishment.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, from this point on everything the dogmaticians have to say about sin is concentrated increasingly on the statement: “Sin is a deviation from the divine Law” (*Peccatum est aberratio a lege divina*).<sup>7</sup> Naturally, this statement could also be the starting point for the understanding which the Reformation based on Paul. But it did not express the directly personal relationship to God. On the contrary, this definition is founded on the picture of a wanderer who strays from the right path. By doing so he certainly exposes himself to danger, yes, perhaps is already lying in the abyss. Normally, however, rescue comes about by calling him back out of the abyss, pulling him up, or helping him climb out. This definition lacks the element of actual opposition to God which determines Luther’s conception of sin. Consequently, it can also delude a person as to that contradictory state of affairs in the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*) and give outright support to the thought that man may make amends for individual transgressions of the bounds of the Law. Then this would be the end not only of Luther’s theology but also of Paul’s.

The dogmaticians of the Enlightenment succumbed to this danger. From that alleged definition of sin in 1 John 3:4 Johann Gottlieb Tollner developed, among other things, the two statements: “Every actual sin arises from a vague conception” and “Every actual sin arises from failure to make use of freedom.”<sup>8</sup> Here the fact that sin is an activity aimed directly against God is completely overlooked. In reality, it is no longer even judged on the basis of the objective Law of God. It is still only that which prevents our realization of the ideal man. Where there is knowledge of sin, man’s thinking is no longer directed toward God; it is directed toward himself.

The second of Tollner’s statements points beyond itself to Kant’s philosophy of religion. Exactly like the early dogmaticians, Kant, too, calls sin a “transgression of the moral law as a divine command.”<sup>9</sup> It is true that he does not trace it back to failure to make use of freedom, as Tollner does. On the contrary, he maintains the intelligibility of “what is radically evil in human nature,” precisely in order to preserve its character of freedom.”<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, Kant and Tollner are agreed in the conviction that it must “be possible to outweigh” the evil propensity

(what is radically evil) “because it is met with in man as something that has freedom of action.” Here one sees at once how the humanizing of the concept of sin also carries with it a catastrophic misjudgment of what man can do. It is only logical when in the writings of rationalistic dogmaticians like Semler and Wegscheider the association of sin with the doctrine of freedom leads to a furious attack on the doctrine of original sin as maintained by the Reformation. In it Wegscheider—referring to Reinhard’s sermon, “That Every Man Has His Price, for Which He Surrenders” (*Dass jeder Mensch seinen Preis hat, wofür er sich hingibt*)—sees the gravest danger to him who is morally weak.<sup>11</sup> Now there was but one step to Schiller, who considered it the right of a philosopher “to congratulate” human nature on the first sin, this “tremendous progress of mankind.”<sup>12</sup> In the first of Tollner’s statements, that every actual sin arises from a vague—and, as he says later on, a “confused”—conception, one can find the precursor of Schleiermacher’s teaching that every “actual” sin is “a pollution of the consciousness of God” (*Glaubenslehre*, 2d edition §74, 2). Yet one dare not deny that in relating sin to God—even though only in the form of consciousness of God—Schleiermacher is, in a sense, leading back to the doctrine of the Reformation.

To be sure, even in Kant and Schiller one can find suggestions of the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*) of the Reformation. Schiller the dramatist knows about the tragic synthesis of destiny and guilt—a knowledge which, in view of the facts of our life, no ethically-minded person can escape. In Kant’s philosophy of religion, it is true, one seeks for it in vain. On the other hand, his dualism of theoretical and practical reason gives evidence of a related knowledge. The former teaches the unconditional involvement of man in the interdependence of cause and effect in nature; the latter teaches his independence over against nature insofar as he is “a moral being” (*ein sittliches Wesen*). Yet the second remains but a claim. One can speak of actual moral independence only as long as one measures man merely by his own reason. But this independence appears as an illusion if, as in Luther, it confronts God.

### 3. THE LAW AND THE WRATH OF GOD<sup>1</sup>

Before the “hidden God” the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*) comes to an end. But the fact that God is hidden does not mean that we know nothing at all about Him. Two things we know only too well: that He commands “Thou shalt” and that He lets us be born in a state which makes the fulfillment of this “Thou shalt” impossible for us. The sense and the purpose of this contradiction are hidden from us. God Himself is hidden from us because He has other thoughts about us than these. Logically speaking, however, the mistrust that comes upon us as we realize the inability of our reason to resolve the contradiction must also have a bearing on the whole present attempt to arrive at a knowledge of God. If we are entirely sin—in the totality of our doing and thinking—is this perhaps also the whole primal experience (*Urerlebnis*)? Luther does not hesitate to give an affirmative answer to this question. For the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*) produces unbelief.

But the inevitability of our destiny becomes clear because of the fact that, after all, we can by no means deny the individual facts that have a bearing on one another in the primal

experience (*Urerlebnis*). To preserve us, above all, from self-deception, as though we were able to escape sin by ignoring the “Thou shalt,” God “reveals” Himself to us in the Law. Indeed, this revelation has already taken place—according to Paul—in the conscience, which we heard speaking to us in the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*). There, to be sure, we were assailed by doubt, and despair of unbelief overshadowed us. Secondly, however, this revelation takes place in history, when God gives the Law. Scripture tells us about this. These two announcements concerning the divine will have a reciprocal relationship to each other. God’s giving of the Law, reported in the Old Testament, must be understood as an announcement to the ancient people of the covenant; it cannot be transferred without further ado to other peoples and ages. Nevertheless, it confirms what the conscience knows: that God makes definite demands on men. Yes, over and above this, the conscience also affirms those demands according to their specific content—insofar as nothing characterizes them as being unrepeatable in history. “Thus I now keep the commandments that Moses gave, not because Moses gave them, but because they have been implanted in me by nature; and here Moses is in agreement with nature” (WA 24, 10, 3). Naturally, the correspondence of the written or proclaimed Law to the implanted Law is not accidental. The former would leave us untouched if the latter did not exist. If it is proclaimed, man’s heart replies: “So it is!” But the opposite is also true: Satan’s opposition blinds the heart to such an extent that the proclaimed Word must first awaken that voice of the heart (WA 16, 447, 10). By means of that correspondence the voice of the Law in our conscience points beyond itself to something supraindividual and transmundane, to a regulation that has validity whether we affirm it or not.<sup>2</sup> The Law faces the conscience as something else, something that demands without showing the possibility of fulfillment (WA 18, 677, 7 ff.), something that makes an accusation and requires satisfaction (WA 12, 679, 17 ff.). Conscience and the Law are by no means identical. There even comes a moment when conscience frees itself from the Law, when it says to Moses, who wants to frighten it: “You are a heretic!” (WA 40 I, 558, 4.) But this really presupposes the Gospel. Up to this time the conscience must in any case affirm unconditionally the regulation that confronts it. The correspondence of the conscience to the Law points out that both have their origin in the Creator (WA 50, 331, 15).

Recognition of the validity of the Law is not fulfillment. On the contrary, the Law confirms for us the correctness of the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*). It reveals to us the incompatibility of our ability and our obligation. To be sure, it illumines the darkness in which we were lost; but it is “a light of such a nature that it shows sickness, sin, evil, death, hell, the wrath of God. But it does not help or deliver from these. It is content to have shown. Then man, after coming to a realization of the sickness of sin, is sad, cast down, yes, in despair.” (*talis lux, quae ostendat morbum, peccatum, malum, mortem, infernum, iram Dei. Sed non iuvat nec Uberat ab istis. Ostendisse contenta est. Turn homo cognito morbo peccati tristatur, affligitur, imo desperat.*) (WA 18, 766, 25.) The Law shows man “what he *should* do, not what he *can* do” (*quid debeat, non quid possit*). It is a “revelation of the wrath” of God (WA 50, 474, 20). It makes us guilty. It accuses, damns, kills. It makes the heart a hell and confirms for us that the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*) takes place with the cooperation of God.<sup>3</sup>

Yet the Law seems to lead beyond the previously developed situation, in which the sinner is in conflict with God. If in that situation man faced God in absolute loneliness, which “assails” (*angreift*) him altogether personally, plunges him arbitrarily, so it seems, into complete helplessness so far as knowledge and willingness are concerned, yes, drives him to despair, in this way the concept and the content of the Law bring in an element of order, an element which at first appears to serve as a deliverance. After all, God’s will vis-a-vis the creature is, therefore, not pure arbitrariness; He has put it into a form that is “eternal and unalterable” and, as a result, also offers some measure of security. In addition, the imperative form of the Law breaks through the compulsion determined by nature and replaces the dull “must” with a shining “shalt.” The perception of this “shalt” makes us rational human beings. It is conscience that distinguishes us from the donkey, to which one would proclaim the Law in vain for hundreds of years, because it does not feel the Law in its heart (WA 16, 447, 10).

In connection with these reflections it is certainly correct to say that through the Law something general enters into the seemingly altogether individual character of the divine command, something that in any case forbids the thought of arbitrariness on the part of God. But He is, of course, not only the Lawgiver. He is also the Judge. To have God as Judge, however, forbids one again to refer His judgment solely to individual matters in our life and in what we do, to offer Him deeds or excuses, works or merits. He is outside the bounds of our life. Therefore He always sees our life as a whole. Accordingly, He must always judge it as a whole. But this immediately causes an element of uncertainty to come over us, because we always see only the individual matter and, as a result, even in the case of fulfillment of individual commandments, we could never be certain that we have satisfied the requirements of the whole (WA 18, 783, 26). Yes, this uncertainty turns very quickly into the terrible certainty that I have been unsuccessful not only in individual matters and, therefore, have committed sins, but that I am a sinner. Man’s moral quality cannot be determined from the sum total of his thoughts and actions. The opposite is the case. His thoughts and actions can acquire their moral character only from the total personality (WA 1, 188, 12ff.; WA 7, 32, 4ff.). The Law must not only be kept; it must be loved (WA 10 I, 1, 467, 6). But if man can never change himself into another person, neither does the Law by any means lead him out of the distress into which we previously saw him sinking. On the contrary, the Law reinforces with unmistakable clarity the contradiction in which man finds himself by nature: “You have not fulfilled, nor are you able to do so. Nevertheless, you should.” (*Non implesti, nec potes, et tamen debes.*) (WA 40 I, 256, 15.)

The heightening which the Law signifies for the tension between God and the sinner does not lie ultimately in the concept of the Law. If it precludes the thought of God’s arbitrariness in an evil sense, it likewise precludes the hope for His arbitrariness in a good sense. A judge proceeds according to right and law. Therefore he does not sentence arbitrarily. But neither can he acquit arbitrarily. By facing man as Lawgiver and Judge, God reveals a trait of His nature that is founded, to be sure, on His quality as the Creator but is not exhaustively expressed by this trait. When God imposes legal demands on His creatures, the pure interrelationship of cause and effect between God and man is breached in any case on one side. But in this way a legal relationship is established in which God and man face each other in relative independence.

And this legal relationship is already implicit in the concept of the Law—does not, therefore, as may be mentioned here, appear for the first time in the Lutheran doctrine of justification.

In Luther's sense, however, one must keep firmly in mind that the Lawgiver and Judge is and remains the Creator too. If to Him sin is not only the overstepping of a boundary but, as shown, "enmity against God," Luther also learns from Scripture, and especially again from Paul, that God cannot give an answer to this after the manner of a judge who is not personally concerned. "The whole human race was deserving of hatred" (WA 1, 274, 28). God's justice and truthfulness, which compel Him to keep His own Word unconditionally, make Him at the same time a Zealot who cannot tolerate sin (WA 40 II, 332, 3). Over against the sinner this zeal for His justice appears to be wrath, which must consume the sinner precisely because sins are outgrowths of the sinner's whole being (WA 14, 595, 34). As Judge, God *must* punish; as Creator and as Lord over all creatures, He *can* punish and *wants* to do so (WA 28, 582, 3). God in His majesty and the human creatures are enemies (WA 40 II, 329, 10). And because conscience is that place in man where his consciousness of being a creature is aware of opposition to the Law, for Luther it is at the same time the ear with which he hears the voice of divine wrath (WA 42, 429, 6).

Luther points out again and again how reason bristles up at the thought of God's wrath. It would be ready to acknowledge His justice if by this a reasonable relationship between sin and punishment can be meant. But this would amount to an immanent settlement, one which overlooks or denies the very transcendence of the Divine Majesty. It is precisely in His wrath that His majesty finds expression, and His wrath reaches beyond a balancing according to reason. The whole ethic of the medieval church, especially the doctrine of penitence, was concerned with the thought of a settlement according to reason. Therefore the advocates of this doctrine "became disciples of Aristotle, the dead, damned heathen" (WA 10 I, 1, 472, 10). This doctrine presumed "to deal with God as though God and our nature were good friends of each other" (473, 19). Thus it has had the result that "no one acknowledges, bewails, or deploras God's terrible wrath against us." The collision of God's relationship to man as Lawgiver and Judge—which lets Him demand and sentence—with His relationship as Creator—which makes man what he is—this is really the deepest offense to reason. Reason judges: "It is wrong for such a high, merciful Majesty to do this" (WA 36, 556, 12). It demands "that God act according to human law and do what to them seems to be right or what God could permit to be right" (*ut Deus agat jure humano et faciat quod ipsis rectum videtur aut Deus esse sinat*) (WA 18, 729, 15). It tries again and again to find immanent grounds for excusing His attitude. "But faith and the spirit judge otherwise. They believe that God is good, even if He were to destroy all men." (*Sed fides et spiritus aliter judicant, qui Deum bonum credunt, etiam si omnes homines perderet.*) (WA 18, 708, 7 ff.)

Faith and the spirit—naturally, they cannot grow in this soil. If they alone—in spite of this whole state of affairs, which ends with man's damnation—are able to acknowledge the goodness of God, this is final proof of the immanent fact that it is impossible to solve the riddles presented here. At the same time the realization that unbelief is the greatest sin begins to dawn, yes, the

realization that unbelief is the real essence of sin (*Lectures on Hebrews*, 188, 7; WA 18, 782, 13). But this realization cannot be complete until man has learned to believe.

In the confessions nothing has as yet been subtracted from Luther's teaching concerning the wrath of God, concerning its close connection with Law, death, and conscience. Like Luther, Melanchthon—in the Apology too—traces the fundamental error of the medieval ethic back to the fact that this ethic no longer knew what God's wrath is. According to him, this is the reason for its belief that one can love God without first receiving forgiveness of sins. One can fear the angered God, but one cannot love Him. It is equally impossible to confront God's wrath with one's own merits.<sup>4</sup> Why? Luther substantiates this with the thought that then God would be dealing with man according to "human law" (*jure humano*). Then one would confuse His wrath with immanent justice, Melanchthon, too, calls the attempt to put God's Law and man's work into a plausible relationship a "doctrine of reason" (*doctrina rationis*) (III, 167). When, in contrast, he points out that God's Law reveals His wrath (II, 79), he also sees in God's wrath an actuality that lies beyond man's concepts of right and justice. Accordingly, he also calls God's wrath "inexplicable" (*inexplicabilis*) (V, 34); and Justus Jonas says in his translation into German that it is "beyond man's understanding and thinking what a terrible wrath of God we have inherited" (43).<sup>5</sup> Exactly like Luther, the Apology sees conscience as the place where God's wrath strikes man (32); and, like him, it teaches that death is not regarded as punishment until this wrath is felt (VI, 56). Accordingly, just as in Luther, we hear that the Law not only has the task to give instruction concerning God's will but also to accuse constantly and to torment consciences (V, 34), because it shows the wrath of God. To be sure, our heart bristles up at this; it seeks to lull itself into security; it "despises God's wrath, judgment, and threats. It is malicious and hostile to His judgment." (II, 35.) But this only aggravates our guilt, for doubt about God's wrath is not an ἀδιαφοροῦν (I, 42). Finally—in contrast with the Calvinistic teaching—one must still point out that according to the Apology all men are deserving of "eternal wrath" (*ira aeterna*) (II, 40).

In all decisive points the Formula of Concord, too, held on to what Luther taught about the wrath of God.<sup>6</sup> So far as Flacius is concerned, this is self-evident. But then a swift decline ensued. It is true that in connection with the doctrine concerning the Law, punishment, and especially death they regularly use the expression "wrath of God." But this appears as one punishment among others. This becomes noticeable even in the writings of Johann Gerhard. Here sin and the wrath of God stand in a simple interrelationship of cause and effect. Wrath is "the just wrath of a vengeful God" (*justa vindicis Dei ira*) (*Loci XX*, 178); it is in exact proportion to sin (199). Therefore Gerhard must propound the question whether the doctrine concerning the wrath of God is at all compatible with His justice. To this he replies that Scripture uses the expression "only with reference to human feeling" (dvdpamojra\$cog). Without comment he quotes Augustine's opinion that Scripture calls what is done in the case of His servants the wrath of God, because this is done by means of the divine laws. Yes, he appropriates the argumentation of the scholastics, that, strictly speaking, one can ascribe to God no wrath whatever (III, 176). If for Luther and also for Melanchthon's Apology the wrath of God was proof that one dare not or can not understand God's relationship to the sinner according to

“human law” (*jure humano*), in the sense of the “doctrine of reason” (*doctrina rationis*), security against this error threatens to be lost because of Gerhard’s dilutions. This is clearly seen in the fact that with regard to this question he fights against the Arminians and the Socinians with dull weapons (VII, 47 f.). The whole inability of the later dogmaticians to grasp Luther’s doctrine concerning the wrath of God in a deeper sense is connected with the headway made by “natural theology,” which will be described later.

Gerhard’s restrictions made it possible even for the dogmaticians of the Enlightenment to employ the concept of the wrath of God. To them it is merely a Biblical expression for God’s disapproval of sin. In accordance with their whole system, sin and God’s reaction to sin are, as they see the situation, in arithmetical proportion.<sup>7</sup>

Another attempt was made to take into account, as a matter of dogmatics, the terrible mystery which Luther perceived in the wrath of God. It was the dogmaticians of the nineteenth century who tried to do this. They proceeded from various starting points. Although A. Ritschl wanted to banish this concept entirely from Christian dogmatics, he thought he still had a right to ascribe to it an eschatological meaning in the New Testament. Julius Kaftan had a similar opinion. Philippi’s definitions harked back to early dogmatics. He, too, adopted the proportional interpretation—which, incidentally, goes back to Augustine—when he illustrated its force and its magnitude by saying that this wrath “can be satisfied and stilled only by constant and endless wretchedness on our part.” At least he comes close to Luther’s interpretation when he associates anguish of conscience directly with God’s wrath. On the basis of his Biblical assumptions Kahler realized that the concept of wrath stresses God’s personality in connection with His reaction to sin. He also says that the outcome points out that he who is excluded from association with God when appraising a thing never gets down to the real value. Frank, too, associates wrath with God’s personal reaction to sin. When he traces wrath back “to the absolute, personal God in His relation to the world,” one dare not let the recollection of his concept of absoluteness lead to the conclusion that he, too, came very close to Luther’s interpretation. At least insofar as here, too, just as in Luther, the supposition that God deals with the sinner according to “human law” (*jure humano*) is out of the question.<sup>8</sup>

But this, of course, is Luther’s decisive concern in what he teaches about the wrath of God. The Law certainly reveals the “moral law of the world,” and conscience can certainly not avoid acknowledging the validity of this law. But the distance which conscience perceives between itself and the Law is something altogether different from the discovery that in place of the moral law man has put confusion, that he has transgressed several sections. The Law can by no means neutralize the personal call of God which man hears in his conscience. Neither can it suggest moral freedom to man. Rather it convinces him of his lack of freedom. Man lacks freedom both because the Law has been given to him and because he is not able to keep it. Mere awareness of transgression could be put at ease if an individual sin could be atoned for by a corresponding individual punishment. This would regulate the matter according to “human law” (*jure humano*). According to divine law, however, an individual transgression makes one guilty of the whole: the whole man is in opposition to the whole Law—as a whole creature he is in opposition to his Creator. Because this is true of man’s whole existence as established by

the Creator, man concludes: “God hates me” (*Odit me Deus*). This, says Luther, is “the greatest temptation” (*summa tentatio*). But as long as he knows God only as Creator and Lawgiver, man cannot look upon this as a temptation that can be overcome. He is unable to discover any immanent logic in this relationship to God—nor any justice comprehensible according to “human law” (*jure humano*). The law, this “moral law of the world,” is the curse that burdens man.

#### 4. FEAR<sup>1</sup>

The concepts of fear, of the Law, and of the wrath of God forbid the assumption that the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*) was nothing but an individual occurrence in Luther’s life. One should rather say that no one who takes the facts of the “Thou shalt” and the inability to obey, of guilt and destiny, seriously in the same way can escape Luther’s realization: “You have not fulfilled, nor are you able to do so. Nevertheless, you should.” (*Non implesti, non potes, et tamen debes.*) He who recognizes the voice of God in the “Thou shalt,” His verdict in guilt, His work in destiny, stands, as Luther does, necessarily before the “hidden God” (*Deus absconditus*), in whose presence one can be filled with nothing but dread. According to what has been set forth concerning the attenuation of the concepts of sin and the wrath of God, it is not surprising that in early Lutheranism this knowledge very soon was weakened and, in the end, completely lost. In connection with the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*), which correlates these concepts theologically, the falsification proceeded in two directions. For one thing, Luther’s fear, with its existential bases of knowledge, became nothing but a matter of emotion. The task of using the Gospel to overcome the “fear” of those who were troubled was rightfully assigned to the church’s proclamation. But this led to the belief—and this was not right—that it was neither imperative nor necessary to pursue further the knowledge on which Luther’s fear was founded. What was taught with regard to a pre-evangelical and extra-Christian knowledge of God could, it was supposed, be understood in such a way that consciences need not be terrified because of this. The “natural theology” which resulted was the second path to falsification.

It would be a totally inadequate interpretation of Luther’s fear to define it as being merely fear of punishment. Certainly one can also find this fear in it (WA 5, 217, 26). In like manner, it contains a universal pessimism which transfers the gloomy prospect of one’s own future to the judgment of the world in general (cf. *Cross and Vale of Tears*). But this pessimism, too, lies on the periphery as an incidental effect. The primal dread (*Urgrauen*) is, of course, not alarm about one’s own fate; it is dread of God. It is alarm about one’s own fate only insofar as it proceeds from the knowledge that, in spite of the Law and the will to fulfill the Law, one is enmeshed in everlasting guilt and must serve sin (WA 40 II, 8, 7). But this knowledge is terrible because looking at the Creator and the Lord of our destiny does not mitigate it but confirms or rather directly substantiates it. Here indeed man stands before the majesty of God; but “then one’s neck is broken, Lucifer falls, and there is everlasting despair” (*da folget hctls stortzen, casus Luciferi et desperationes sempiternae*) (ibid., 330, 12).

As has been shown, Melanchthon, following Luther's paths, sought to let not only the active element of sin but also the wrath of God and the doctrine of original sin come into their own theologically. One would think that then he must also have felt the unresolvable contradiction of the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*). But he immediately adduces qualifications. He timidly side-steps the thought that guilt and destiny are intertwined—the thought that cannot be avoided when the doctrine of original sin is presented logically. He knows only the Stoic thought of destiny, and he warns against it (*CR* 21, 650). Here one is already aware of the first impetus toward rationalization. It would be better not to say anything at all about destiny. Otherwise responsibility, that is, morality, is endangered. The inevitable consequence is that then sin, wrath, and punishment are brought into a simple logical chain which is entirely understandable to reason,<sup>2</sup> whereas Luther speaks about wrath precisely because reason is unable to understand God's attitude toward sin. Accordingly, in Melanchthon the agnostic element of God's "concealment" and the fear of God, which in Luther are inseparably connected, fall apart. It is true that the original, adequate knowledge of God is lost because of sin (21, 669). It will be seen later that in the process "ignorance in the mind" (*ignorantia in mente*) is said to have left behind a variety of good remnants. In addition to these, however, there are, as a further consequence of sin, the fears of the conscience on which Melanchthon also puts strong emphasis, but which no longer have any inner connection with the first result. This is exactly the case in the writings of the later dogmatists, from Martin Chemnitz on and wholly so since Johann Gerhard. Just as the wrath of God is in arithmetical proportion to sin, so the former is to the fears of conscience. From the primal dread (*Urgrauen*) there has arisen partly fear of punishment, partly an "imperfect" knowledge of God.<sup>3</sup>

If for this reason the profound knowledge which, in Luther's case, is at the bottom of the primal dread (*Urgrauen*) is missing in the dogmatists, one can scarcely be surprised that in the preaching of the church his fear of God also becomes something completely different. In Luther it is something that must simply be overcome. The Gospel brings a knowledge of God that is the very opposite—a knowledge, of course, that can be gained only from faith, because it is faith that must overcome that primal dread (*Urgrauen*). But even in the literature of dying (*Sterbeliteratur*) that continues to crop up in Lutheranism in the sixteenth century according to medieval patterns, individual elements of Luther's fear appear plainly as characteristics of a believing Christian. They must not be fought down; they must be cultivated. Naturally, not the fears of conscience—against them Johann Arndt's books on true Christianity (1603) and the *Sacred Meditations* (*Meditationes sacrae*) (1606) of Johann Gerhard, Arndt's disciple, are directed. What is meant, however, are those universally pessimistic elements that are also contained in Luther's fear but, together with this fear, are to be overcome by faith (cf. *Cross and Vale of Tears*). As early as 1593, in the *Manual on Preparation for Death* (*Manuale de praeparatione ad mortem*) by Martin Moller, pastor in Sprottau, it is stated that a Christian should be brought up to think constantly of death. And Johann Arndt, like Johann Gerhard, undertakes to impress upon his readers the vanity and the transitoriness of the world. In Luther the thought of death and transitoriness is—because he has his understanding of it from God—an element in the fear of God, therefore a way of giving expression to doubt about God, who, with the

threat of death, seems to contradict His will as Creator or rather, in view of man's guilt, *must* contradict it. But because of the Word of the Gospel faith comes to the knowledge that the Creator does not deny His creature but acknowledges it. Consequently, the believer, while walking through God's nature, will experience the joys of Paul Gerhardt, not the pains of Johann Gerhardt.

In contradiction to its intention of recommending the joys of heaven, the literature of transitoriness clings precisely to the present world by instructing the Christian to make empirical sufferings and the necessity of physical dying the basis of his vital consciousness. Accordingly, Heinrich Muller, of Rostock, in his *Hours of Spiritual Comfort (Geistliche Erquickstunden)* (1664), can give a frank description of "the dangers of a long life" and instruct his readers to fear life in this world more than death. Here another element of Luther's fear is unraveled from the primal dread (*Urgrauen*): the realization of unavoidable entanglement in guilt and the fear of not being able to get rid of sin. But while here, too, Luther gains freedom from this fear through faith, in Muller the bondage must be maintained artificially. Under the influence of pietism, of which Muller is already an adherent, this falsification of the meaning of fear and the thought of death also insinuates itself into orthodoxy. In 1745, therefore, Valentin Ernst Loscher, superintendent in Dresden, founds the "Christian Academy for Preparation for Death" (*Christliche Akademie der Sterbensbereitung*), and in his book with the same title he gives instruction in the art of Christian dying. Sebastian Friedrich Trescho is concerned with the same subject in his *The Science of Dying a Blessed and Happy Death, or Bible of Dying (Wissenschaft selig und frohlich zu sterben oder Sterbebibel)* (second edition, 1767). How far the thought of death has departed here from the elemental dread of the primal experience (*Urerlebnis*) can be seen from the fact that the same Trescho, on order, could also write a counterpart: *The Art of Living Happily (Die Kunst glücklich zu leben)* (1765). On order—for the suggestion to do so came to him from Fraulein von Klettenberg, who in Goethe's book, says in the confessions of a beautiful soul: "I realized, of course, where I had been unworthy, and I also knew where I still was unworthy; but the knowledge of my shortcomings was altogether without fear.... I did not want to be lacking in seriousness. I let myself be persuaded for the moment, and I would gladly have led a life that was sad and filled with terrors. But how amazed I was that once and for all time this was not possible!" (*Wilhelm Meister*, Book VI.) These sentences show that one still knows the thought of death only as something that must be evoked artificially. The age knows the melancholy of English graveyard poetry as Klopstock feels it, but no longer does it know dread of God.

If through this gradual psychologizing (*Psychologisierung*) fear is deprived of its intrinsic theological meaning, nevertheless others have not entirely forgotten Luther's knowledge. And these others, too, are now historical witnesses that this is by no means merely a matter of Luther's individual perspectives. Thus in the writings of Jakob Bohme one can find insights that reveal the same profundity, insights that are all the more important, since Bohme evidently lacked a thorough acquaintance with Luther's works. Besides, he listened for years to the sermons of the aforementioned Martin Moller, whose last pastorate was in Gorlitz. It is true that Bohme, too, is acquainted with the purely emotional elements of fear. In addition, he is

acquainted with fear of punishment. But he is also acquainted with dread of God's incalculable fury, and he notices how God completely escapes discovery by him who is tortured by anguish of conscience. Like Luther, he sees the devil at work in man's despair; and the devil employs every trick to keep man from believing, to cast his sins into his teeth, and to induce him to commit suicide. Like Luther, he advises to counter Black Hans (*Schwarz Hans*) with the Word of God, to look to the cross of Christ, and to take refuge in the light of God's love. As in Luther, questions pertaining to predestination (*das prädestinatianische Fragen*) are considered as belonging in the sphere of the thinking of reason (*Vernunftdenken*), which is to be overcome by faith. In his case, of course, all this is embedded in his magical speculation and expressed in the language of his magical psychology. But the directness of the relation of the primal dread (*Urgrauen*) to God, who demands, compels, and renders guilty in accordance with destiny (*schicksalhaft*), is clearly discernible in his writings.

In the sermonic literature of the seventeenth century there are also numerous instances of a feeling that man's natural relationship to God amounts to real distress. Of course, it is scarcely ever stated that this is distress so far as knowledge is concerned. Yet at that time renowned preachers of the church reckon all the more earnestly with "terrified consciences." Men like Valerius Herberger, Christian Scriver, and Joachim Lütkeemann declare in their sermons that fear should not be evoked but should be overcome by means of the Gospel and faith. Accordingly, they, like Luther, are convinced that man's natural thinking and experience, if actually thought out and experienced to the end, must terminate in disconsolateness at least and that accordingly an optimism that is not based on the Gospel is founded on self-deception. Johann Albrecht Bengel, too, commented pertinently on the artificial way of stirring up thoughts of death. "Many," he says, "put all theology into the art of dying. But this is wrong. For a Christian it is most important to come from sin to grace and then not to await death but to look forward with joy to the appearance of Jesus."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, at the end of the eighteenth century a man like Matthias Claudius also stands in opposition to the "purveyors of graveyard melancholia." In his works, too, there is lyricism pertaining to the grave, but as an element that has been overcome—exactly as fear is contained in Luther's faith as an element that has been overcome. Whether the *Wandsbecker Bote*<sup>5</sup> prefixes *Death the Skeleton* (*Freund Hein, der Knochenmann*) to Claudius' collected works or puts a large black cross above the *Letters to Asmus* (*Briefe an Asmus*)<sup>6</sup>—here the bugbears grave, death, and cemetery are conjured up to be scared away. The *Bote* looks them straight in the face. Claudius knows them and their terrors. But his faith in Christ has finished them off.

In his book titled *What Is Fear? (Begriff der Angst)* (1844) Kierkegaard undertook a determined approach to the theological understanding of the primal dread (*Urgrauen*). He revives Luther's realization that "the individual is fashioned for faith only through fear." Here he no longer means fear in the sentimental sense of pietism and the Enlightenment. He seeks to conceive of it as a transcendental presupposition of freedom and therefore also of sin. For he knows no other freedom than the freedom to sin. Therefore fear is the a priori of guilt. It is true that he also takes it to be the result of sin. He speaks about the fear of evil and the demonic fear of what is good. This is not to say that Kierkegaard's "fear" corresponds perfectly to Luther's