

## The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism

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The Theology  
of Post-Reformation  
LUTHERANISM

*A Study of Theological Prolegomena*

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## KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS IN NOTES

- CR        *Corpus Reformatorum*, ed. Carl Gottlieb Bretschneider et al. (Halle: C. A. Schwetschke and Sons, 1834—).
- CTM      *Concordia Theological Monthly* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House).
- Er. Lat.    Martin Luther, *Opera Latina* (Frankfort and Erlangen: Heyder and Simmer, 1865—73).
- Erl. Aus.    Martin Luther, *Sämmtliche Werke* (Erlangen: Carl Heyder, 1826 to 1857).
- LuW      *Lehre und Wehre* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House).
- PL        *Patrologia Cmsus Completus ... Series Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1878—90).
- RE        *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, begründet von J. J. Herzog, in dritter verbesserter und vermehrter Auflage unter Mitwirkung vieler Theologen und anderer Gelehrten herausgegeben von Albert Hauck, 3d ed. (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1896—1913).
- RGG      *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1928).
- WA        *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883).
- W<sup>2</sup>        Martin Luther, *Sämmtliche Schriften*, herausgegeben von Dr. Joh. Georg Walch, 2. Auflage (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1881—1930).

## PREFACE



The purpose of this work is to present clearly and sympathetically to the student and general reader the theology of a long and productive era in the history of Lutheranism, an era commonly called *classical Lutheran orthodoxy* and extending roughly from the time of the Formula of Concord to the first quarter of the 18th century. There is a pressing need for an investigation of this nature. No period in the history of Lutheran theology is so little known by direct acquaintance. The immense theological contribution of the era lies hidden for the most part in tomes that are inaccessible to the general public because so many of them are found only in rare-books sections of libraries and they are in an unfamiliar language. And yet, ironically, orthodoxy has exerted a tremendous influence on the theology of Lutheranism down to our present day. To a great extent Lutheran dogmatics even today, if it seeks to be confessional, still follows the doctrine, the methodology, and even the terminology of classical Lutheran orthodoxy. It should go without saying that everyone who aspires to be a theologian or pastor will wish to understand and appreciate his own theological heritage. The present study, therefore, seeks to offer the reader a large fund of facts and information about the theological leaders of that era and their contributions.

My purpose is not to trace all the theological strands and emphases of that day, much less sketch the novel opinions, however valuable, of one theologian or another, but to present a consensus of the period and trace the whole body of doctrine accepted by the orthodox Lutherans. And a consensus is not difficult to find. To accomplish this aim the present study will be replete with citations. This is the surest and best method of acquainting the reader with the heart and mind of the old orthodox theology. Without apology I must add that these citations—some very lengthy in order to present an argument in its entire framework, others

very brief or parenthetical, calculated to offer the reader only a theologian's turn of mind or impression—are chosen to exhibit orthodoxy's best side. One could easily bore the reader with tedious selections of outmoded casuistry, scholastic argumentation, or obsolete polemics, but that would have little value. If our study is to profit the reader we must select the best of what the orthodox theologians have to offer. We must, of course, criticize them when their theology is bad or when they ignore Biblical data in presenting articles of faith. But our chief purpose is to make Chemnitz, Gerhard, Calov, and the other great theologians of this epoch relevant for our day—or rather to recognize the relevance that is theirs.

It will not, however, be the aim of this work simply to present the doctrinal position of the old Lutheran dogmaticians. That task would be comparatively easy, simply gathering together the main theses on the various articles of faith. This is essentially what Heinrich Schmid has done in his *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*,<sup>1</sup> and this has been done also by the dogmaticians themselves, e. g., Hutter and Koenig. My interest is to show also how these Lutherans of a former day arrived at their theological position, the basis for their assertions, the way they thought and reasoned. A bald doctrinal statement may seem naive and untenable until one examines its basis. In some cases a tremendous amount of thought and labor underlies what might appear in these old theologians to be mere dogmatic cliches or truisms. For this reason I will attempt in many cases (1) to clarify precisely what their doctrine is and (2) to trace the argumentation that leads to it. This procedure will, I am convinced, show the old dogmaticians in a better light than was formerly done and will be more rewarding to the reader. Even where the reader cannot agree with the exegesis or reasoning behind the dogmaticians' doctrine, he will at least know that the old Lutheran teachers did not pull their theology out of thin air. And he will discover that the orthodox Lutherans, unlike theologians of a later day, never descended to the level of voicing mere assertions and declamations to be accepted on the authority of the one making them.

To carry out such a program, I will, whenever advisable and possible, trace the exegesis of these theologians, paraphrasing it for the most part, to its conclusions in clear and concise doctrinal formulations. This was not done in the anthologies of Walther or Schmid or in the dogmatics of Hoenecke, Philippi, or Pieper, who very often cited the orthodox Lutheran theologians favorably. But this new approach in studying the orthodox dogmaticians is, I believe, quite justifiable. Their theology is no better than its Biblical basis. On exegesis they stand or fall. And this approach

has the added advantage of taking these theologians on their own terms. For they would be the last to defend any statement of doctrine not grounded in Scripture.

A word must be said at this point about Scripture citations. The passages cited in this book will always be those cited by the dogmatists themselves. These passages should be checked out. They are of fundamental importance to the argument and to the continuity of the entire theological presentation. It is not without good reason that the old Lutherans often supply long lists of Scripture passages relative to their discussions. They expected their readers to turn to these citations and find their relevance. Our present study, too, cannot present the dogmatists' complete line of thought without interspersing the Biblical framework in which it all takes place. Therefore, if my discussion at times sounds something like a modern Biblical theology, it is because the discussions of the orthodox Lutherans often sounded just that way. In all my translations and discussions I have taken the liberty of correcting erroneous references to Bible verses. There is such a multitude of these mistakes that it would be sheer pedantry to point them all out and would serve no useful purpose.

I mentioned earlier that my study would be both factual and sympathetic. There are two reasons for this. First, I have always felt drawn to these men, to their spirit and to their theology. Behind all their activities was the earnest desire to remain faithful to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. And surely every Lutheran today ought to feel akin to such a spirit. There is, after all, an ecumenicity that runs vertically, deep into the past periods of the church's history, as well as the modern ecumenicity that appears to be chiefly horizontal and geographical in scope. One may rightly feel as close to a Luther or Chemnitz or Gerhard as to a contemporary brother in the faith. Second, a sympathetic study of a subject is more likely to effect a true account of things as they are; and where theology is concerned there is no such thing as impartial objectivity. How difficult it is for modern dialectical theology, for instance, even to understand, much less assess correctly, the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy will be brought out in the course of these investigations. It is in accord with such a sympathetic motive, then, that I propose to portray, without being untrue to any facts, that which is most relevant and edifying in the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy.

The greatest problem encountered in preparing a work of this nature that is necessarily somewhat restricted is the question of selecting material. When one scans the scores of books by the representatives of classical

Lutheranism, some of them immense in size as well as erudition, where does one begin in gleaning what is really valuable and pertinent? It is impossible to consult all the hundreds of dogmatic works written during this productive period—to say nothing of the works in exegesis that must also be studied. The best we can do is select our material critically, basing our conclusions on the theology of the most significant figures of the day and those who represent the best in evangelical orthodoxy. One of the remarkable features of C. F. W. Walther's enlarged edition of Baier's *Compendium Theologiae Positivae* is clearly the huge amount of reading that must have preceded the editor's work. Walther drew not only from the recognized dogmatic texts of the 16th and 17th centuries but delved into many of the rarer and less read volumes for numerous valuable and edifying citations. To an extent this has also been my aim, for one often finds real theological gems among the more obscure authors and writings of the orthodox period. But I must confess that I have returned again and again to the standard works of the day, the great texts of Chemnitz, Gerhard, Hutter, Quenstedt, and Calov, for these authors too have ransacked the lesser known works of their time and have often epitomized—if one may use such a word in reference to their enormous tomes—the best of what was being said. For instance, it is remarkable how well and with what brevity Quenstedt has summed up—albeit without his mentor's flair and homiletic tone—the results of the extensive research in Chemnitz's *De Duabus Naturis*.

In selecting representatives of Lutheran orthodoxy I have limited my attention to those theologians who were loyal to the Lutheran Confessions and were impeccably orthodox according to the confessional standards of that day. Hence I shall not consider, except in passing, the theology of the Lutheran Syncretists or of the later Crypto-Calvinists unless it has direct bearing and influence on the development of genuine Lutheranism. Interesting as it might be to trace the theological conversations between these quasi-Lutherans and their orthodox contemporaries, pursuing these often bitter exchanges would add little of value to the present study.

This study is divided into two parts. The first volume presents background material to the period of Lutheran orthodoxy and a historical survey of the origin and development of theological prolegomena and dogmatics in Lutheran theology. It contains also a discussion of orthodoxy's doctrine of Scripture as the formal source of theology. Such preliminary investigations, which will be very thorough, are necessary before we can be in a position to appreciate and assess the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy.

The second volume will treat the actual position of the old Lutheran teachers on the chief articles of faith. The outline will bear a strong resemblance to the works of Pieper, Hoenecke, Hove, and even such modern and novel dogmatists as Karl Barth and Emil Brunner—and the outline goes back to Melancthon and Calvin. The reason for this similarity is that all these more recent dogmatists follow, sometimes rather closely, the arrangement of the old classical dogmatists. This should make the present work more relevant and handier to use in connection with other works in dogmatics.

Something must also be said about the literature pertaining to the period of orthodoxy. This secondary literature, which is quite scant, presents a bewildering picture. For instance, if one should take in hand two recent histories that deal in passing with this era, reading first the critical account of Lutheran orthodoxy in G. R. Cragg's *The Church and the Age of Reason*<sup>2</sup> and then turning to the accurate and sympathetic treatment in Bengt Hägglund's *Theologins Historia*,<sup>3</sup> one might well wonder if the two historians are writing about the same epoch. And unfortunately the busy reader would hardly be in a position to know that Hägglund has read the primary sources thoroughly and Cragg has not. These two modern studies are quite typical of an extreme diversity of opinion among scholars in their evaluation of Lutheran orthodoxy.

Of the 19th-century historians who dealt with the era of orthodoxy, most were highly censorious. Tholuck,<sup>4</sup> who in the mid-19th century did more than any other historian to revive interest in the era, was too opinionated and partisan. He loved Gerhard, despised Calov; he admired the spirit in Wittenberg in the first half of the 17th century, deplored the spirit during the second half. Unfortunately Tholuck's judgments became normative for many historians who followed. Gass, Dorner, and Planck<sup>5</sup> were all too unsympathetic to be able to present a fair account of the spirit and theology of the era. Only with the more recent studies of Otto Ritschl<sup>6</sup> and Werner Elert<sup>7</sup> do we gain a reliable picture of the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy.

Some incredible judgments were made against Lutheran orthodoxy by these older historians. Tholuck in his *Vorgeschichte des Rationalismus* and his *Geschichte des Rationalismus* virtually makes orthodoxy the cause of the Enlightenment and of rationalism. Dorner does not hesitate to say that Lutheran orthodoxy made the material principle of theology the result of the formal principle and was thus unfaithful to the Reformation

and to Luther. When one hears such charges from fellow Lutherans, one is amazed. Is there something sinister and evil in orthodoxy? Was there something un-Lutheran or un-Christian or unevangelical about Chemnitz or Gerhard or Quenstedt? But even more disappointing is the discovery that in our modern and more cautious day these sweeping and severe generalizations still seem to be fixed in scholars' minds as the accepted and irrefutable judgment of history concerning orthodoxy. Thus we find this long era of dynamic theology and concern for the Gospel brushed aside as a "nominalistic-intellectualistic" distortion of Luther's theology or as a period of "arid controversy" that "poisoned every phase of life."

There are two reasons for this negative judgment of the old Lutheran theology on the part of some historians.

First, these historians—even the knowledgeable Tholuck—have based some of their most damning conclusions on insufficient evidence. It would be surprising if this were not so. The literature of that era is astonishingly vast, and the temptation of busy historians to generalize on the basis of what one or a few theologians thought or did concerning a certain issue is a tendency easy to follow. Furthermore, it is difficult for even the most thorough reader to get through all the writings of these old dogmaticians, and the inclination to browse through the theses in large print and ignore the lengthy and often vital arguments that support these theses is very great. I shall have occasion later to produce examples of this fault.

Second, the old Lutherans were so outspoken on issues of fundamental concern that it is extremely difficult for a historian with any opinions of his own not to take sides, and sometimes rather sharply. Luther with his carefree way of speaking and his common use of the overstatement can often be twisted to say things surprisingly congenial to some of our modern *Zeitgeist*. This is not the case with the following generations of Lutherans, who in their discussions with the Reformed, the Roman Catholics, and particularly the rationalistic Socinians become increasingly careful and unequivocal in their language. When they say things not congenial to our *Zeitgeist*, there is no reinterpreting their words. And right here is the great danger for the modern historian or theologian—that he reads the Lutherans of the late-16th and 17th centuries too exclusively in the light of modern issues and not on their own terms in the light of their concerns and their theological situation. Like Luther, these orthodox theologians have much to say also to our day, but we must allow them to say it from and in their own context.

Where this principle of procedure is overlooked, the most ludicrous caricatures of the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy often result. For in-

stance, orthodoxy has more than once been lumped together with Fundamentalism.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the queer hermeneutics and obscurantism associated with the worst of modern Fundamentalism are linked with a theological posture that was the sanest and stablest and often the most open and unhampered of its day. Would one prefer Romanism of the 1600s or Socinianism or Arminianism or the extreme rationalism that emanated from the British Isles? It is strange how often modern scholars forget that Lutheran orthodoxy flourished 300 and more years ago. We cannot expect these theologians to speak to many of our modern concerns. They knew nothing of historiography, sociology, psychology, or linguistics according to our modern understanding. We do them a grave injustice if we do not judge them in the light of their own day. We would have more reason to condemn a Galileo, who in his old age rejected Kepler's discovery that the planets move in elliptical paths. It is an ironic twist when one who would be a confessional Lutheran becomes hypercritical of Lutheran orthodoxy. Without the hundred years in which Lutheran orthodoxy upheld and defended the doctrine of Scripture and the Lutheran Symbols, it is difficult to see how a Lutheran Church could exist today.

Among more recent dogmaticians there has been far greater appreciation and understanding of the old Lutheran theology and this, in part, because dogmaticians have spent less time reading about the old Lutheran teachers and more time reading their actual writings. Not a few of these 19th- and 20th-century dogmaticians have leaned very heavily on the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy.

I might refer first of all to the four informative anthologies of C. F. W. Walther, Heinrich Schmid, Carl Ratschow, and Emanuel Hirsch.<sup>9</sup> Schmid's collection of citations went through many editions in Germany, and the translation was popular enough in our country to be reprinted in 1961. Walther's greatly enlarged edition of Baier's compendium contains many lengthy citations from all the great Lutheran theologians of the 16th and 17th centuries, including Luther. In this work, which was for many years the dogmatics text at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and also at Luther Seminary of the old Norwegian Synod in St. Paul, Walther shows that he was no haphazard citation theologian. He had immersed himself in the writings of Luther and the old dogmaticians, and consistently he found pertinent and edifying sections from a vast and largely unexplored literature.

Of dogmaticians whose works were greatly influenced, if not dominated, by the theology of orthodoxy, we might mention Philippi, Hoenecke, and Pieper, and to a lesser extent Gisle Johnson and Elling

Hove.<sup>10</sup> Pieper and Hoenecke are two of the best secondary sources obtainable for the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy. Both lean heavily on Chemnitz and Gerhard; and among the later representatives of orthodoxy Pieper favors Quenstedt, Hoenecke prefers Calov. A better commentary on the Christology of 16th- and 17th-century Lutheranism could not be found than Pieper's discussion in the second volume of his dogmatics. It is worth noting that all these theologians who loved the old orthodox Lutherans were staunchly confessional Lutherans who drew heavily also from the theology of Luther. Only two contemporary theologians of note I have read thoroughly in the old Lutheran theology, and in their dogmatic writings drew to some extent from this literature: Werner Elert, who is usually appreciative, and Karl Barth, who is less so. Both Elert and Barth evince a profound perception of the issues and the theology of that former day.<sup>11</sup>

Whether there will be in the future any revival of interest in the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy is difficult to say at this time, although some excellent translations of works by Chytraeus, Chemnitz, and Gerhard and a few valuable monographs on the subject indicate some encouragement for the future.<sup>12</sup> One thing is certain: any responsible and appreciative renewal of study in the great literature of that former age will be all to the good. It has always struck me as noteworthy and gratifying that Roman Catholic and also Protestant scholars who have occupied themselves in the study of patrology and scholastic theology have been praised and encouraged in their endeavors by almost all. Their investigations have generally been marked by a growing respect toward and humility in the presence of the great theologians of the past. The days of disgust and overweening superiority toward the church fathers and even the scholastics seem to be at an end among systematic theologians and historians. We may disagree with an Augustine or a Thomas, and very intensely so, but we no longer belittle these men.

Such a fair and charitable disposition is, however, still lacking toward the old Protestant theology. Cruel and uncritical epithets are still hurled out at random, and orthodoxy is still the whipping boy for many a theologian who is cutting his teeth on a new thesis of his own. In the ensuing delineation I shall try to present the true image of Lutheran orthodoxy; to show from the sources themselves that these pillars of orthodoxy and of evangelical Lutheranism, with all their obvious faults, are nobody's whipping boy; and to illustrate from their own great theo-

logical output that in men like Chemnitz or Gerhard we have theologians of a stature as great as the Scholastics or the church fathers and much more evangelical.

By way of conclusion to these introductory remarks I would like to express my deep gratitude to a number of friends and scholars who have helped me offer this volume on the theology of post-Reformation Lutheranism. To my brother, Dr. J. A. O. Preus, to Dr. Fred Kramer of Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, 111., to Dr. John W. Montgomery of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, 111., and to Dr. Elmer E. Foelber and the able editorial staff of Concordia Publishing House I am deeply indebted for carefully reading my manuscript, correcting errors, and offering valuable suggestions. To Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, and to the Lutheran Brotherhood Insurance Company of Minneapolis I am indebted for generous grants, which made a year's research in American and European libraries possible. To the members of the Commission on Church Literature of the Missouri Synod, particularly to my colleagues Dr. Lorenz Wunderlich and Dr. Herbert J. A. Bouman of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and to Rev. Arthur E. Bohlmann of Springfield, Mo., I wish to express my gratitude for encouragement and good counsel as I did my research. To Mr. H. M. Fiskaa, head of the reading room of the Universitetsbibliotek in Oslo, and to his staff I am very grateful for so much kindness and helpfulness shown me as I pursued my work with them during a writing leave. And finally I thank my many graduate students of the last eight years, whose active and fertile minds were a constant source of stimulation to me and who have contributed toward whatever relevance this study has to many modern concerns.

## NOTES TO PREFACE

1. Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, 1899; reissued 1961, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis). A recent but scarcely better attempt at the same thing has been done by Carl Heinz Ratschow, *Lutherische Dogmatik zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung*, 2 vols. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1964). Unlike Schmid, Ratschow deals somewhat with the development of theology during the era. He also cites a larger number of theologians than Schmid; but it is doubtful if the choices he makes portray a clearer picture of the prevailing theology of the era.
2. Gerald R. Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1960), pp. 93—106.
3. Bengt Hägglund, *Theologins Historia* (Lund: CWK Gleerups Förlag, 1963), pp. 274—302. A recent English translation, admirably done by Gene J. Lund, is entitled *History of Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968); see pp. 299—324.
4. August Tholuck, *Der Geist der lutherischen Theologen Wittenbergs im Verlaufe des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg and Gotha: Friedrich und Andreas Parther, 1852); *Lebenszeugen der lutherischen Kirche aus allen Ständen vor und während der Zeit des dreissigjährigen Krieges* (Berlin: Wiegandt und Grieben, 1859); *Vorgeschichte des Rationalismus* (Berlin: Wiegandt und Grieben, 1861); *Geschichte des Rationalismus: Erste Abtheilung, Geschichte des Pietismus und des ersten Stadiums der Aufklärung* (Berlin: Wiegandt und Grieben, 1865).
5. Wilhelm Gass, *Geschichte der protestantischen Dogmatik*, 4 vols. (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1854—67); Isaac A. Dorner, *History of Protestant Theology*, trans. George Robson and Sophia Taylor, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871); Gottlieb J. Planck, *Geschichte der protestantischen Theologie von der Konkordienformel an bis in die Mitte des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 6 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1831).
6. Otto Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus*, 4 vols. (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung; and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1908—1927).
7. Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), Vol. I.
8. See, e.g., Regin Prenter, *Skabelse og Genløsning* (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gads Förlag, 1951), p. 446; Alan Richardson and Wolfgang Schweitzer, eds., *Biblical Authority Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951), p. 110.
9. Schmid; Ratschow; John W. Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, ed. C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis, 1879); Emanuel Hirsch, *Hilfsbuch zum Studium der Dogmatik* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1937).

10. Friedrich A. Philippi, *Kirchliche Glaubenslehre*, 5 vols. (Stuttgart: Verlag von Samuel Gottlieb Liesching, 1854); Adolph Hoenecke, *Evangelisch-Lutherische Dogmatik*, 4 vols. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1909); Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. Theodore Engelder, John T. Mueller, and Walter W. F. Albrecht, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951); Elling Hove, *Christian Doctrine* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1931); Gisle Johnson, *Den Systematiske Teologi* (Oslo: Dybwad, 1897). Positive theologians of the 19th century also made frequent use of the old Lutherans, although they can hardly be said to have sympathized with them. Cf. Karl Hase, *Hutterus Redivivus* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1845); Christoph Ernst Luthardt, *Compendium der Dogmatik* (Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1865).
11. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson et al., 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936—69); Werner Elert, *Der Christliche Glaube*, 3d ed. (Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1956).
12. Three translations recently issued are John Warwick Montgomery, ed. and trans., *Chytraeus on Sacrifice* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962); Herman A. Preus and Edmund Smits, eds., *The Doctrine of Man in Classical Lutheran Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962); and J. A. O. Preus, trans., Martin Chemnitz, *De Duabus Naturis* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970). Of recent monographs three of real merit are Jörg Baur, *Die Vernunft zwischen Ontologie und Evangelium: Eine Untersuchung zur Theologie Johann Andreas Quenstedts* (Gütersloh: Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1962); Bengt Hägglund, *Die Heilige Schrift und ihre Deutung in der Theologie Johann Gerhards* (Lund: CWK Gleerups Förlag, 1951); Johannes Wallmann, *Der Theologiebegriff bei Johann Gerhard und Georg Calixt* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1961).

# Lutheran Orthodoxy and Its Champions

THE NATURE AND GENIUS OF LUTHERAN ORTHODOXY  
IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS  
THE CHAMPIONS OF LUTHERAN ORTHODOXY

## CHAPTER ONE



What do we mean by orthodoxy? When we speak of orthodoxy in connection with Lutheran theology and life, we do not mean merely a phenomenon of rigid conservatism, which has appeared in most Christian communions (Roman Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran) and even in political parties from time to time. We refer rather to the concrete historical development that we see persisting in Lutheranism from the time of the Formula of Concord, and even before, to the first quarter of the 18th century—150 years of a *theology and spirit* that has been called either *in malam partem* or *in bonam partem* “orthodoxy” by almost all historians and theologians.

### THE NATURE AND GENIUS OF LUTHERAN ORTHODOXY

Why has the theology and spirit of that particular era been given such a title? What is Lutheran orthodoxy’s unique nature or genius or rationale? It consists of three essential aspects.

#### 1. *A Conservative Attempt to Preserve the Evangelical Legacy of Luther’s Reformation*

A crisis faced the third, fourth, and fifth generations of Lutherans after the Reformation. They were no longer directly in contact with the deep religious experience and original theological insight of the Reformation. Although the issues underlying the Reformation still obtained, the climate of thought had changed in the late-16th and 17th centuries, and scores of

new issues had risen to challenge evangelical theology. How were the theologians of this era effectively to perpetuate the great work of the Reformation, its evangelical impact? How were they to interpret it all for their day? Those who have received the precious legacy of the Reformation must now stand back and assess what has happened, consolidate their forces, and continue Luther's work—this is clearly what Lutheran orthodoxy sees its task to be. It is fundamentally a theological task, a theological calling that claims each one of the great theologians of the day.

Edmund Smits has put it this way: “Martin Luther opened new horizons of the ancient church which had become obscured through the ages. However, to give aid to the lesser guide of the solitary traveler, the single shepherd of the local flock, there was needed a road map and a compass. At one point Luther compared himself to a pioneer and wood-cutter chopping down the trees of the forest and clearing the way. After him subtler scholars would be needed, highly skilled agriculturists and gardeners, who would cultivate the soil and raise the growth with loving care.”<sup>1</sup>

The work of Luther's successors will therefore be both constructive and conservative. There will be a healthy respect for tradition, the church fathers, Luther, and the Lutheran Confessions; and there will be a greater reluctance to break with the past than we find even in Luther. This outlook carries with it a distrust of new doctrines, an attitude aptly expressed in Selnecker's well-known stanzas:

And ever is there something new  
Devised to change Thy doctrines true;  
Lord Jesus! as Thou still dost reign,  
These vain, presumptuous minds restrain;

And as the cause and glory, Lord,  
Are Thine, not ours, do Thou afford  
Us help and strength and constancy,  
And keep us ever true to Thee.

But accompanying such a conservative viewpoint was a willingness and eagerness, born of necessity, to face new issues effectively and to find new approaches to the study and advancement of true theology.

## 2. *An Ardent Zeal for the Purity of the Doctrina Evangelii*

With what dauntless power, exact discipline, gigantic scholarship, and burning and stubborn devotion to a single end (evangelical orthodoxy) those old Lutheran theologians wrote and worked and fought the battles of their church has been brought out by even the most unsympathetic historians. That their zeal for the truth might have appeared at times to be inflexible and extreme, at least to our calm and cautious age of theologians, that their intense loyalty to Christ and His Word might result in forgetfulness of even the closest human ties are hardly faults to be despised. And this intensity of spirit and singleness of purpose were not the private possession of Lutherans during those two centuries following the Reformation but were common characteristics of Calvinists and Romanists as well. Even science and the arts, so long associated with heterodoxy and infidelity, were for the Lutherans, as well as the Jesuits, called into the service of orthodoxy.<sup>2</sup>

The Lutheran theologians of those days were generally well-rounded men who took in the whole range of theological study; they were not as specialized as today. This was the age of powerful chorales, deep and moving devotional literature, and even much philosophical reflection among theologians. The period of orthodoxy produced such evangelical hymn and devotional writers as Nikolaus Selnecker, John Heermann, Paul Gerhardt, George Neumark, Christian Scriver, Thomas Kingo, Hans Brorson, John Olearius, and a host of others. In Philipp Nicolai, John Gerhard, and John George Dorsch we see orthodox theologians and dogmaticians who were capable of writing the most stirring hymns, the most touching devotional literature, and the most moving sermons. Cundisius found time to edit a hymnbook, Dannhauer and others to produce fruitful studies in catechetics. There is nothing in evangelical orthodoxy that is withdrawn from practical church life or inimical to piety, nothing in the theology of the day that ignores the importance of the Christian life. However, to understand this age we must realize that Lutheran theology did not urge piety in isolation from the Gospel, for there was no piety in isolation from the Gospel. Christian piety was to be formed and incited by theology, by the *doctrina evangelii*.

Yet for some reason this spirit of orthodoxy is uncongenial and unpalatable to many today. Why? Certainly we cannot charge this movement with hypocrisy. There is none of the spirit of dilettantism, inordinate pomp, or self-aggrandizement here, but rather an exertion toward spiritual growth, faithfulness, and fellowship with Christ. It is no

doubt the spirit itself, the uncompromising and unbending zeal for purity of doctrine, the hatred of all syncretism and doctrinal indifference, that has estranged many. For this is a very significant feature of Lutheran orthodoxy: it is an attitude, a spirit, a posture; and it is difficult for one who is not vitally concerned about purity of doctrine to appreciate this. Tholuck has pointed out that “purity of doctrine” was an antiquated notion even in 1740 when Valentin Loescher was valiantly striving to keep orthodoxy alive.<sup>3</sup> But for the old Lutheran theologians pure doctrine was never an end in itself but always served the Gospel. The goal of all theology is evangelical and practical. This is seen particularly in their works in dogmatics where the *usus practicus* of every article of faith is carefully set forth. John Gerhard, for instance, in disputing against purgatory is careful to illustrate in every argument how this doctrine conflicts with the Gospel. The same may be said concerning the Lutheran polemic against the Roman Catholic *monstrum incertitudinis* and the doctrine of work righteousness. That pure doctrine is to serve the Gospel is seen also in Calov’s and the later Lutherans’ insistence that theology is a *habitus practicus*, a practical aptitude, practical always because of its aim: to foster living faith and bring salvation.

### 3. A Definite Confession and Doctrinal Position

Orthodoxy is more than a mere attitude or spirit. The concrete feature of Lutheran orthodoxy is its doctrinal platform, a definite and permanent doctrinal position based on Scripture as interpreted by the Lutheran Confessions and (in harmony with the Confessions) by the ancient creeds, the church fathers, and Luther. Since theology is based solely on God’s written Word, its content does not change; Law and Gospel and the articles of faith remain the same, being the summation of God’s unchangeable Word to man. This confessional and doctrinal constant is to the old dogmaticians more than a mere statement of belief and platform for action; it is an expression of the very Gospel, a power that controls and changes lives and ideas and movements in history. Lutheran orthodoxy is utterly convinced of this.

Theological formulations, however, will change, often swiftly and radically, as the life and work and fears of the church shift direction. In this matter the orthodox Lutheran theologians were pliable and progressive, altering their terminology and sometimes their entire approach to a subject, whether for better or worse, and doing so thoroughly. We might mention that the *approach* made by the old Lutherans to the theological problems of their day was not nearly as monolithic as is commonly

thought. While all held to the absolute authority of Scripture as the source of Christian doctrine and subscribed wholeheartedly to the Lutheran Confessions, there are great differences among the theologians of this period, differences in outlook and stress and treatment of issues. One need merely peruse the works of two contemporaries during the later period of orthodoxy, John Andrew Quenstedt of Wittenberg and John Conrad Dannhauer of Strasbourg, to learn how totally differently dogmatics can be presented by like-minded men.

## IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS

We must now amplify our description of Lutheran orthodoxy by pointing out a number of important characteristics of this movement as it progressed and took shape.

### 1. *Doctrinal Unity*

A remarkable doctrinal unity prevails throughout the period of orthodoxy, a unity achieved by a very conscious and deliberate Biblical and confessional faithfulness. This unity is further bolstered by a thorough familiarity with Luther's writings and a firm loyalty to his theology. One will search long and possibly in vain to find any criticism of Luther's teaching among the orthodox Lutherans. Even his untenable utterances on canonicity were palliated or "explained," usually as outbursts that could not be taken as expressing his mature views. It was observed, for instance, that his editions of the Bible never omitted the antilegomena.<sup>4</sup> Even the controversies leading to the formation of the Formula of Concord did not contribute greatly to divide Lutherans after 1580 except in cases where political considerations prevailed, as in Sweden and parts of Germany. The Syncretistic Controversy among Lutherans in the 17th century served more to rally and unify confessional Lutherans than to divide them.

What is most surprising but also indicative of the feeling of unity that prevailed after the Formula of Concord is the loyalty among orthodox Lutherans to Melancthon's theological contributions. It is no doubt correct that the later orthodoxy in Denmark (after ca. 1600 when the Crypto-Calvinistic influence of Niels Hemmingsen, professor at Copenhagen, was finally subsiding) manifested a more Melancthonian influence than the German orthodoxy of the day.<sup>5</sup> But German theology, too, recognized its debt to Melancthon, followed his theology where possible, particularly his method, and was most reluctant to criticize him. Chemnitz patterns

his *Loci Theologici* after Melanchthon's *Loci Communes*. So do Hafenreffer and others. Hutter, whose undeniable adherence to the Formula of Concord is evinced in more than one lengthy apology, writes his massive *Loci Communes Theologici* in conscious imitation of Melanchthon's work and with acknowledgements of his debt to "our Melanchthon" and "our blessed author" on almost every page. The works of Chemnitz and Hutter in turn become archetypes for later dogmatists. Chemnitz is cited so often by the later Lutherans that by the time of Quenstedt, who is usually scrupulous in identifying his references, long quotations are not even acknowledged. Hutter's *Compendium Theologicum*, like Melanchthon's *Loci Communes* and Thomas' *Summct Theologica* in Roman Catholic circles, becomes the basis for large and important commentaries. The commentary of Cundisius is extremely useful, and that of Friedemann Bechmann is the best book Bechmann wrote. Thus it is the Biblical and confessional emphasis of the orthodox Lutherans and their profound respect for those great leaders who went before them (Heb. 13:7) that serves to unify them and their theology.

This unity of doctrine is not broken even by an occasional and bitter controversy among the orthodox Lutherans themselves. For instance, the Kenotic Controversy (1619—27) between the faculties of Giessen and Tübingen, although an offense and tragic waste of effort, served to reveal in a remarkable manner the unity of orthodox Lutheran Christology. Even the personal bitterness and extravagant charges of the two parties made it plain that there was only one Lutheran Christology.

The doctrinal unity common to Lutheran orthodoxy extended far beyond the borders of Germany into Sweden,<sup>6</sup> where Calov for a time exercised a particularly strong influence, and also into Denmark and Norway.<sup>7</sup> One will not fail to see the same spirit in Brochmand or Aslaksen as in the orthodox Lutherans of Germany.

## 2. Polemics

A characteristic of Lutheran orthodoxy, and in harmony with its deep concern for purity of doctrine and hatred of all heresy, was a polemical tone that pervaded much of the systematic and exegetical theology of the day. This fact must not lead us to conclude that there is some inevitable connection between orthodoxy and bitter invective and plain belligerence. Polemics was the order of the day, as it had been during the time of the Reformation. The greatest Roman Catholic theologian of the late-16th century, Robert Bellarmine, occupied the chair of controversial theology

in Rome; and his *opus magnum* was entitled the *Controversies*. Today we have difficulty comprehending and abiding the polemics of the 16th and 17th centuries, which was so often carried on with bad purpose and unnecessary rancor. It is not impossible that polemics played a part in hastening the eclipse of orthodoxy in the Lutheran Church. Theologians sometimes purposely misunderstood the position of their adversaries. Particularly annoying to us today was the general practice among theologians of pressing the arguments of their adversaries to their logical but absurd conclusions. Thus we find the Lutherans explaining hundreds of times that they did not teach a Capernaitic, cannibalistic eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper. And just as often the Calvinists are compelled patiently and firmly to protest that they believe in a real incarnation and personal union. Why should such endless expense of time and labor have been necessary? It was as if neither party really listened to the other side.

And yet the excesses of that day must not blind us to the fact that not all polemics is bad and there is a positive need of it at times. Can a disciple of Christ stand by silently when what to him is most precious in all the world is attacked, namely the Gospel? Polemics often springs from the highest Christian motives and concerns, from the strong desire to help a brother. "How often does the divine Spirit admonish us to employ ourselves earnestly and diligently in bringing an erring brother back on the right way. God definitely wills that we return the stray ox or ass of an enemy (Ex. 23:4). How much more are we bound to work for an erring brother and restore him to the right track (Matt. 18:25)."<sup>8</sup> A church no longer engaging in polemics may have lost the spirit of testimony.

Polemics should not be made light of, as though what is produced in the midst of controversy is not very important or reliable. Justification by faith as taught by Paul in his letter to the Galatians is not a peripheral teaching but is so important that it occasions Paul's letter. However it may affect the church's theology or formulation, polemics does not make a doctrinal position less binding, even though the immediate cause of the doctrinal formulation may be long forgotten. The Lutheran teaching of justification, the communication of attributes, and the verbal inspiration of Scripture will always be important even though the heresy or heresies that occasioned the significant formulations of these teachings may not always be apparent. The real issues must be sifted from any polemical situation; then principles that are timely will often be found, even though these principles emerge from controversies that seem barren and futile.

The church is strengthened in controversy and forced in times of tension to confess her faith boldly and articulately, as can be seen in the case of the Lutheran Confessions.

But if polemics is not to be minimized in the life of the church, neither is it to be exaggerated. Heresy and controversy must not be made, in Hegelian fashion, an inexorable force underlying and giving rise to the church's doctrine. Polemical circumstances may cause the doctrine of Scripture to be unfolded in a certain direction and with a certain terminology, but they will not contribute to the content of the church's doctrine. For this reason it may be wiser to study the old Lutherans dogmatically rather than historically.

The nature of polemics in the old Lutheran theology needs comment. Contrary to the opinion of some historians, Lutheran theology did not become more controversial as the 17th century wore on. Giles (Aegidius) Hunnius is more polemical than Calov, and Gerhard more than Dannhauer or Bechmann. What does happen during the last half of the 17th century is that polemics becomes more ordered, controlled, and even stereotyped. There is less of the broadside and sarcastic blast that was typical of Luther. A carefully worked out polemic theology develops—a calm, careful analysis of every influence that threatens Lutheran doctrine on each *locus*, and an elaborate, Biblically based defense of the Lutheran position. Dogmatics becomes *theologia didactico-polemica*, the didactic side consisting of a systematic, thetical arrangement of the Biblical material pertaining to each *locus*, and the polemic side dealing with the problems of terminology, Biblical interpretation, and historical development as these factors impinge on each dogmatic *locus*. The first to produce such a *systema*, as it was called, was Abraham Calov. He was followed by John Quenstedt, whose work was the very quintessence of thoroughness, clarity, and command of the issues. Each *locus* is divided into a didactic and polemic section; and it is interesting that the second section, designed primarily to bolster the first, is often less polemic in tone than the didactic section. Polemics to Quenstedt involved tracing the many antitheses to every article of faith, clearing up misunderstandings and difficulties connected with the Lutheran position, and particularly providing exegesis for the pertinent *sedes doctrinae*. In all this almost none of the invective so common to Luther or, in a much later day, to Kierkegaard is found. If anything, Quenstedt bores the modern reader with his dispassionate approach to things. However, some of his contemporaries make up for Quenstedt's lack of fire.

### 3. *Catholicity and Confessionalism*

It would be a grave mistake for any serious theologian to consign the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy to the limbo of irrelevant and outdated matters that concern only the antiquarian. For orthodoxy not only works under the Scriptures as the only source of theology, but it also is eminently catholic and confessional in its approach to theology.

The orthodox theologians, therefore, will always be relevant and must be taken seriously. They were conservative theologians. They did not, as we shall see, whimsically jump on theological bandwagons, overwork precarious theological and philosophical motifs, or impose alien philosophical schemata on theology; but—even if we recognize that their exegesis was “dogmatic” at times—they were eminently catholic in all their work. A tremendous amount of labor was plied by the orthodox Lutherans in presenting the contributions of the church fathers on every point of theology. For they claimed the church fathers as their own. They also expended much time in refuting the numerous ancient heresies, which had a way of recurring at the time of the Reformation and later. Chemnitz in his *De Duabus Naturis* and Gerhard in his *Loci Theologici*, before they present their own theological positions, offer lengthy and accurate accounts of the Christological struggles of the 4th and 5th centuries. They stay primarily with the ancient creeds and the accepted church fathers, such as Damascenus, Augustine, Hilary, Gregory, Cyril, and others.<sup>9</sup> It may be recalled that the first patrology ever written was by Gerhard, who also coined the term. Gerhard’s huge *Confessio Catholica*, which was written to support the Lutheran doctrine with citations from the fathers, more than demonstrates his great respect for the church fathers and his thorough acquaintance with them. Of the later dogmaticians Calov in particular makes extensive use of the fathers. It is worthy of note that at least the leading patristic students through the orthodox period (Chemnitz, Gerhard, and Calov) approach the fathers independently, each introducing his own catenae of citations. The Lutherans were convinced that the church fathers were worthy of being read directly, although critically, “dividing the straw from the gold.”<sup>10</sup>

There was also a certain amount of dependence among the orthodox Lutherans on the medieval scholastics, notably Thomas Aquinas. Chemnitz and his contemporaries, although well acquainted with the scholastic theology, had no time for it at all. With Gerhard a change takes place, and he often quotes Thomas to clarify or illustrate a point. His treatment of theology proper, for instance, is handled according to the scholastic ar-

rangement. In 1656 John Dorsch wrote a book entitled *Th. Aquinas Confessor Veritatis* (Frankfort) in which he tried to show that Thomas Aquinas could be made to support Lutheran doctrine more than Roman Catholic. This was no mere tongue-in-cheek jest—one would hardly write 800 pages for such a flippant purpose—but a serious attempt to illustrate that Lutheranism was fully aware of the continuity of doctrine in the church and had no intention of leaving the mainstream of catholic dogma, which had been so vital for the church throughout her history. Something like this and Gerhard's *Confessio Catholica* had earlier been done by Matthias Flacius (Illyricus) in his *Catalogus Testium Veritatis* (1556), wherein were mentioned 700 witnesses through every century of the Christian era, even during the height of papal power, who had not “bowed the knee to Baal” and could be called forerunners of Protestantism. Flacius' list included even Catherine of Siena and Thomas Aquinas. The purpose of such books was to show that the Lutheran Church was no new sect but the continuation of the apostolic church.

The strict confessionalism of Lutheran orthodoxy is a well-known fact, which need not be demonstrated here.<sup>11</sup> This confessional loyalty ties high Lutheran orthodoxy theologically to the preceding era but not in such a way that the theology of orthodoxy becomes a mere redundant echo. It is true that the orthodox Lutherans read the Scriptures with certain presuppositions and in the light of the Lutheran Confessions. This is also what C. F. W. Walther did in our country. And this is what it means to be Lutheran, that one recognizes the claim of the Confessions that they are the church's normative exposition of Scripture.<sup>12</sup>

At least one of the Lutheran dogmaticians, Leonard Hutter, constructed a *Compendium Locorum Theologicorum*, or small dogmatics book, that was really an epitome of the Lutheran Symbols. Hutter cited primarily the Augsburg Confession and the Formula of Concord. This work, first published in 1610 and going through many editions, was popular for generations as a textbook. But for the most part the Lutheran dogmatics was worked out without any subordination to the Confessions. Although the terminology is often the same, the Confessions are rarely cited in most of the works in systematic theology, not nearly as often as Luther and the church fathers. It is only when the Confessions have been misunderstood or misinterpreted that they are discussed to any extent, e. g., in the sections on man's freedom of will and the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. In other words, there is a

## CHAPTER TWO



Protestant dogmatics, as it developed in the 16th and 17th centuries, was something new and singularly significant in the history of Christian doctrine. It was neither an imitation of scholastic theology nor a continuation of Luther's *ad hoc* approach to theological issues. It has an origin and rationale of its own that can be correctly traced and fully grasped only after we have investigated thoroughly the principles and assumptions that underlie it. To understand and evaluate Lutheran dogmatics—or any teaching, for that matter—we must know (1) the presuppositions on which it stands and (2) the attitudes and posture that the dogmatician has felt he must assume for the assignment he has set for himself. In short, we must know a good deal about what is generally called *prolegomena*, and we must know something about the background to these prolegomena.

In prolegomena the theologian looks at himself and his work. Prolegomena seek to set the stage for the theological task. They do not merely outline what the theologian intends to do; but they set the tone for all that will follow, and above all, they lay the ground rules for the theologian in constructing a Christian dogmatics. Prolegomena are the attempt to establish a substructure and starting point for the work of presenting Christian doctrine in the church.

But just as other human disciplines or pursuits are often put into practice before their underlying axioms and assumptions are clearly conceived and spelled out, so it has been in theology. Only after they have been involved in the work of theologizing—after they have grappled with great problems, encountered serious and pernicious aberrations, and ar-

rived at momentous decisions and conclusions—do theologians look back, retrace their steps, assess what they have done in the light of the sometimes unexpressed principles they have followed, and finally articulate these principles and attitudes that have been so fundamental to their task all along the way. Often belatedly, and necessarily so, the theologians begin to ask the elementary questions of dogmatic prolegomena: What is theology? What is the theologian? What is the source of theology? What is theology's relation to reason and philosophy? What is religion? Significantly, theologians find that they have been implicitly asking these questions continually and answering them piecemeal and unsystematically. They also discover that now in answering the questions explicitly they must bring to bear the conclusions of all their previous theological endeavors. Thus we find that in the more thorough prolegomena of Calov and Quenstedt and Musaeus an entire systematic theology is present in embryo; every major article of faith is considered at least in passing. And we learn as well that theological prolegomena are an ongoing business, for the theologian's assumptions and principles and work must continually be considered anew.

Like philosophy, theology and its concerns and prolegomena will move with the times. But this movement is something like the waxing and waning of the moon: it is usually more or less within a prescribed orbit. The basic, elementary matters have a way of persisting through the years—Is theology (language about God) possible? What is its object? its nature? its goal? Is there a divine revelation? What is the heart of theology (the Gospel)? and so on. In other words, the interests and the subject matter of dogmatics and its prolegomena are perennial. And so Melancthon or Gerhard or Calov, theologians very influential in their own day, will often say much that is relevant to our age too. Our world view and other scientific, social, and cultural factors conditioning our approach to these perennial concerns of theology have, of course, changed with the times, but the same old concerns remain. In fact, it is surprising how little change there has been in the basic prolegomena of Protestant dogmatics since they were first gradually worked out after the Reformation.

## EARLY DEVELOPMENT

The development of prolegomena in Lutheran dogmatics has been long and gradual, becoming with each generation increasingly comprehensive and complex. In the first flush of theological literature by Lutherans after the Reformation there were no formal prolegomena to dogmatic

works, and prolegomenous matter can be called only from the practice of these presuppositions and principles in the body of the dogmatic writings. By the close of the 17th century very large books were written that pertained solely to the introduction to theology. We shall now trace the origin and development of prolegomena in Lutheran theology, a long development covering roughly the period of Lutheran orthodoxy.

The subject and consideration of prolegomena are not new with the theologians of the Reformation. Among the scholastic theologians during the late Middle Ages, subjects such as the nature and purpose of theology, revelation, Scripture, and principles of theological knowledge were considered as prolegomena to the actual working out of any theological system or summa. Thomas' treatment of such prolegomena is brief but most useful. Scotus is far more lengthy. Thus it is not surprising to find Luther expressing himself on the subject of what makes a theologian,<sup>1</sup> on the opposition of theology to philosophy and reason,<sup>2</sup> on the source of theology, and on other matters that could be called prolegomena—but as we might expect with Luther, only in passing. The first edition of the first Protestant dogmatics, Melanchthon's *Loci Communes*, has no prolegomena, and whatever presuppositions Melanchthon had must be garnered from the various *loci*. Melanchthon no doubt thought that such subjects as revelation, Scripture as the source of theology, and theology in relation to philosophy were not necessary to consider in a brief work such as this.

### 1. Erasmus

It is a small book by Erasmus, appearing a year before the first edition of Melanchthon's dogmatics, that first dealt with the study of theology. It therefore merits our attention as the first new contribution to theological prolegomena by one who had broken with the old scholastic tradition. The book, entitled *Ratio seu Methodus Compendio Perueniendi ad Ueram Theologiam*, was printed in Basel in 1520, just 4 years after Erasmus' edition of the New Testament, and was designed as a help in the study of theology, specifically of the New Testament. It no doubt served somewhat as a justification for his great interest in the Greek New Testament.

Herein Erasmus points out that the narratives of the New Testament are more than mere philosophy; they are prophecy, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Therefore the believer ought to prepare his heart for the study of this Word that he might merit being called θεοδίδακτος. The eye of faith must be focused on heavenly things, for theology requires a thirsting soul that thirsts for nothing but the water of life. The theologian seeks

nothing for himself. He works with a simple, adoring faith and does not become involved with vain curiosity. The function (*scopus*) of theology, then, is passive; it is to be moved, to be transformed, to be seized by the subject that is studied. In all his advice here Erasmus is quite sane and sound, and some of his pious thoughts are carried over into later introductions by Protestants. He naturally advises a simple, undogmatic approach that avoids contention but retains modesty, peacefulness, and open-mindedness.

The importance of the study of languages for the theologian, especially Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, is dwelt on at great length, a theme also emphasized by most of the later theologians. Translations of the Bible are not sufficient, for Jerome and others have erred, and newer and better manuscripts are being discovered. Besides the languages other subjects ought to be studied—dialectics, geography, history. Erasmus goes on to illustrate at great length the importance of these areas of study for the understanding and interpreting of Scripture. His program for dogmatics is quite simple: “My feeling in this matter is that our young beginner should be offered teachings *{dogmata}* which have been brought together into a summa or compendium, and that this compendium be drawn primarily from the Gospel fountains and secondly from the letters of the apostles, so that the beginner might have definite objectives *{scopos}* to which he correlates those things which he reads.” Such a program is significant because, with the exception of the author’s partiality toward the gospels over the epistles, it was followed and carried out by Melancthon, Chemnitz, and the later Lutheran teachers.

The great bulk of Erasmus’ book dwells on the type of person a Christian is and on the fundamental (to Erasmus) teachings of Christianity. The Christian is simple, untouched by the world, humble, modest, loving, yet also in his own way wise, rich, noble, and powerful. Here, then, we have the objectives of theology; “these are the new teachings of our author [Jesus Christ],” says Erasmus, “teachings which no family of philosophers ever propounded.” There is little solid doctrine in Erasmus’ summa or compendium; it is rather in values, in ethics, that Christianity differs primarily from all human wisdom; that is, we have better and more lasting precepts than Aristotle or Plato or Epicurus.

## 2. Melancthon

Discussions such as this by Erasmus started theologians thinking in terms of prolegomena. Melancthon too, with his interest in philosophy, would naturally study and think along such lines, for dialectics and

rhetoric, which were a part of philosophy, would be of great use in theology. It was also incumbent on the Lutherans at the very outset of the Reformation to express themselves on the relation of philosophy (not dialectics) to theology and the Gospel, and Melanchthon would be the natural one to undertake this task in a systematic way. Melanchthon's chief contribution in philosophy, *Erotemata Dialectica*, was composed as early as 1520.<sup>3</sup> We must examine some of his contributions in this book, for it had an effect on his *Loci Communes* of the following year—not on the doctrinal content but on the method and arrangement he employed in presenting Christian doctrine.

To the question, What is dialectics? Melanchthon answers: "Dialectics is the art or method of teaching correctly, in an orderly way, and with clarity. This is carried out by rightly explaining, arranging, and connecting the valid evidence, and by unravelling and refuting badly connected and false arguments." Such a definition makes dialectics most useful for dogmatics, and we see Melanchthon taking this fact for granted in the introduction to the 1559 edition of his *Loci Praecipui Theologici*. Chemnitz and the later Lutherans also apply such dialectics in working out their *methodus* of presenting theology in *loci theologici*. To the next question, on the purpose of dialectics, Melanchthon has this to say:

The purpose of dialectics is to teach correctly, in an orderly manner, and with clarity. Let us then consider the great usefulness and value of this activity. Inasmuch as man has been fashioned in such a way that he might know God, that he might understand the functions of virtues, and that he might explore nature, it is obvious that the work of teaching man concerning such important matters is of special distinction. The parts of this activity or office are four: to define, to distinguish (*dividere*), to connect the arguments properly, and finally to refute poorly and falsely connected arguments, and, by making the reason for such error plain, to lead the student away from error to the standards of certainty that we call criteria.

Does all this apply to theology? Melanchthon would reply that dialectics deals with all questions wherein the learning operation takes place, not merely in arithmetic but also in theology. For here too distinctions must be made lest everything be confused and confounded. "One must know that God is one thing, His creatures something else; substances are one thing, accidents something else; God is one thing, the devil who is God's enemy is something else again." And so here too dialectics is the *ars artium*, not because of what it is in itself but because it serves all the arts and sciences.

Melanchthon then goes into the techniques of definition, division, etc., and into the many philosophical distinctions such as universals, species, indivisible entities, genus, difference, attribute, accident, quality, number, etc. In most of this he merely follows Aristotle or sometimes Plato, and he treats the subject as purely analytic. But theological interests are never forgotten by Melanchthon. Thus in speaking on the subject of certain knowledge, he mentions *scientia*, *ars*, *prudentia*, and *fides*, such faith being a *noticia* of certain propositions that are embraced with a firm assent because of the statement of a truthful and credible witness. Hence we believe that Alexander was king of Macedon because this information was transmitted by reliable witnesses. Here Melanchthon is treating faith as a *habitus intellectus*. However, faith may also be considered a *habitus voluntatis*, which we would identify with the Christian idea of faith. This is his definition of the latter kind of faith: "Faith is that knowledge by which we embrace with a firm assent all the doctrine which God has vouchsafed to His church, and in this doctrine faith embraces also the promise of reconciliation. As we apprehend this promise with trust in the Son of God we receive the remission of sins; and as with this trust we find our rest in the Son of God, we approach unto God and pray to Him, convinced that we are received and heard."

It is significant that Melanchthon speaks of these two kinds of faith also in his *Loci Communes* of 1539. First there is what the sophists call *assensus*, "assent to those things that are set forth in Scripture,"<sup>4</sup> what Melanchthon calls "an inactive quality of the mind." This corresponds to the *habitus intellectus* above. But then there is the faith that is nothing else than *fiducia misericordiae*, "trust in the mercy promised in Christ," which puts the heart at peace and causes one to give thanks to God for such mercy and to obey the Law joyfully and willingly.<sup>5</sup> And this corresponds to the *habitus voluntatis* outlined above. A parallel to the above illustration is found also in the *Loci Communes* of 1521 where Melanchthon discusses man. Here he states that man has two capacities: first, understanding (*vis cognoscendi*), by which he thinks and understands, reasons things, compares them, and draws conclusions; second, will (*voluntas*), which contains the passions and affections.<sup>6</sup> From such an anthropology we see how Melanchthon could envision a faith as a *habitus intellectus* and a faith as a *habitus voluntatis*. The point is that the distinctions made in philosophy and the philosophic description of faith as a *habitus* have been brought into dogmatics. Melanchthon is quite hard on both Aristotle and Plato in his writings, especially his *Loci Communes*, and he complains that the

church of late had preferred Aristotle to Christ. Yet here, as in many other cases, he is quite in agreement with Aristotle regarding the two parts of the soul.<sup>7</sup> We would expect Melanchthon to say that the intellect serves the will, and he does. Melanchthon will follow Aristotle, often uncritically, wherever he can; but he intends to break with Aristotle the moment the latter conflicts with divine revelation.

In the second book of the *Erotemata* Melanchthon speaks about language (*propositiones*) in which people must speak to be understood and in terms of which people think. Scripture too observes the rules of language. Melanchthon maintains that a proposition is an indicative statement that is one and open in meaning, a statement signifying either truth or falsehood without ambiguity of words, as, e. g., *The sun moves*.

This is the way we are accustomed to speak and write so that we do not pour forth ambiguities to others in our speech and writing; but we guide our speech along the lines of certain definite propositions and clear statements. From such a viewpoint we also read not only the profane writers but also the writings of the apostles and prophets and we do this with the intention of investigating the statements in these writings just as we might investigate the decisions of judges; we consider what they actually say, and we do not attach diverse interpretations to the single verses, as many have done with the psalms and with Paul.

Melanchthon next analyzes propositions, taking his examples from Scripture. Actually he is here simply working out rules of good grammar.

From the foregoing we see that Melanchthon is not inclined to impose any philosophy or foreign system on dogmatics, but merely to make use of dialectics wherever they can be of help. It is of great significance that Luther has only favorable comments to make on the work of Melanchthon's that we have been considering. Melanchthon has done something here that no one can surpass, Luther contends, and Luther himself proceeds to repeat verbatim the rules and observations of his colleague.<sup>8</sup>

All through his life Melanchthon conscientiously tried to keep his theology free of all philosophical presuppositions and doctrines.<sup>9</sup> Thus in his *Disputatio de Discrimine Evangelii et Philosophiae*, written after Luther's death,<sup>10</sup> he insists that philosophy deals only with the art of speaking, with science, and with civil ethics. As such it is God's gift and is a necessary concern of our bodily and social life, just as food, drink, and public laws. But philosophy teaches only those things that are subject to reason and knows nothing of the Gospel. Hence the Gospel is not a

## CHAPTER THREE



The development of dogmatic prolegomena and the development of an article on Sacred Scripture go hand in hand. As Lutheran theology seeks to spell out its presuppositions and basic approach to the study of theology, it is compelled to deal with such themes as the authority, power, divine origin, and perfection of Scripture. Indeed a treatment of Scripture becomes the chief interest of theological prolegomena. Some prolegomena are really little more than an attempt to establish the place of Scripture in the life of the church and the theologians approach to Scripture. This was true in the case of Hyperius and Chytraeus and is even more evident in the instance of Nikolaus Selnecker.<sup>1</sup> After praising theology as the fountain of all other knowledge, as the *prima philosophia*, which ought to permeate our whole life and all our activity, Selnecker structures his entire *Notatio de Studio Sacrae Theologiae* around Scripture as the source of theology, and the theologian's proper attitude toward Scripture and use of it. This book, which was designed to help the theologian in his study of theology, indicates the trend that was taking place, for it includes two sections that with increasing frequency find their way into Lutheran dogmatics: first, Scripture as the source of theology, and second, the divine origin of Scripture and its properties—authority, truthfulness, clarity, and power. Discussions on the authenticity of Scripture, the versions, and the interpretation of Scripture are also included.

We have chosen deliberately to review the article *de Scriptura* dogmatically, taking the orthodox Lutherans as belonging to one single theological stream or school. The reason for this is obvious; if the doctrine

of Selnecker or Chemnitz is not as articulate as that of Calov or Quenstedt, it is nevertheless the same doctrine (in a less developed form) on every major point, as will become evident in the course of the discussions. The Lutheran doctrine of Scripture is definitely not something that emerged, either suddenly or gradually, in the 17th century. It would be a mistake, therefore, to attempt to trace *historically* a development of the *doctrine* of Scripture, as a number of historians have tried to do, each arriving at a different conclusion. It is, however, possible to trace a definite development in *terminology* that was brought on by the swiftly changing theological climate of those days, and this we shall do.

### SCRIPTURE, THE SOURCE OF THEOLOGY (“SOLA SCRIPTURA”)

The doctrine of Scripture is generally the first article to be considered in Lutheran dogmatics. The reason for this arrangement is a purely practical one; the orthodox Lutherans felt that they ought to establish the source of theology before they engaged in theology. In most of the earlier dogmatics the treatment of the article on Scripture centered in clarifying and bolstering the Lutheran position that Scripture alone was the source and norm of all Christian theology. As time went on, rather long discussions of the divine origin and the attributes of Scripture became common. This development took place not because of any new and advanced interest in the doctrine of inspiration per se but because it became increasingly apparent to Lutheran theologians that the authority of Scripture as the source of theology cannot be maintained in the church unless the divine origin of Sacred Scripture is confessed and upheld. Actually in their entire treatment of Scripture the orthodox Lutherans, like Luther himself, really have only two basic concerns. First, they desire to maintain the principle of *sola Scriptura*: only Sacred Scripture can establish articles of faith; all theology is to be drawn from the written Word of God alone. Second, they are intent on emphasizing the power and efficacy of Scripture as God’s Word of Law and Gospel; Scripture possesses the power of very God, the power to judge and to save, to kill and to make alive. All the orthodox dogmatists’ concentration and insistence on the divine inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, even their occupation with the sufficiency and clarity and interpretation of Scripture, are directed to support these two principles, what we might call in the words of the dogmatists themselves the *normative* and *causative* authority of the Scriptures.

## 1. *Its Normative Authority*

What then is this normative authority of Scripture? Precisely what is meant by the principle of *sola Scriptura*? The principle simply means “that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged,” as the writers of the Formula of Concord say (Epitome I, 1); all other teachers and writers must be subordinated to the Holy Scriptures. Scripture is the one source (*principium cognoscendi*) of theology; that is to say, the only way we know God and His will and the only source and norm for our speaking about Him is His own revelation, which is contained in Scripture. “We can know nothing of the mysteries concerning God except through the divine revelation that is contained in the sacred writings.”<sup>2</sup> This is a unique way of gaining knowledge, and no other way is open for knowing God and divine things. But it is a sure source of knowledge, more sure and certain than heaven and earth and all empirical evidence. Any other basis for teaching or preaching concerning Christ will only lead to error. “The norm and standard for portraying [Christ],” says Dannhauer, “is the divine Word. If one departs from this, he portrays not Christ but his own dreams.”<sup>3</sup> To be sure, there is a natural theology whose source is not supernatural revelation but God’s creation; but nature and reason can tell us nothing of the Gospel, and they offer only a fragmentary knowledge of God’s existence and the Law. For a knowledge of the Gospel a special revelation was required. And for us today that revelation is the written Word of God, the Sacred Scriptures. In the Old Testament and at the time of Christ and the apostles the *viva voce* utterance of an inspired spokesman of God could establish articles of faith and was authoritative, but since the completion of the canon, God’s evangelical revelation, that is, His revelation viewed objectively as that which has been revealed, is to be sought only in Scripture. Gerhard says: “We conclude that the correct and exclusive source of supernatural theology is divine revelation, which does not exist today except as found in the Holy Scriptures, that is, the books of the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles. Therefore we say that the written Word of God, or in other words the Holy Scripture, is the one and only source of theology.”<sup>4</sup>

Scripture is only an organic, or instrumental, source of our theology and faith. Theology has its origin in God as the One who reveals Himself; He is the cause, the so-called *principium essendi*, of all theology, all language about Himself. It is most important to distinguish between the

One who reveals the truth, who is God, and the truth that is revealed, which is Scripture. The former, says Quenstedt,<sup>5</sup> is the *principium essendi*, the foundation of all theology, for theology has its being from God; the latter is the *principium cognoscendi*, for theology is known and understood from Scripture.<sup>6</sup> Therefore Scripture as the source of theology is a directive principle, nothing more than that by which we judge in doctrinal matters.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the Biblical support for the Lutheran principle of *sola Scriptura* is provided within the later discussion of the authority of Scripture as God's Word. Therefore little more is offered to prove the *sola Scriptura* principle early in Lutheran dogmatics than the allusion to the practice of Christ and the apostles, who drew all their theology and judged all doctrine from Scripture. On all points Christ teaches the doctrine of the Old Testament Scriptures. He neither alters the Law nor changes the doctrine of the Old Testament in the slightest but rather draws from the Scriptures for all His teaching, and He cites Scripture as authoritative.<sup>8</sup> And we as His disciples can do no better than to follow His example. Furthermore, since Scripture claims to contain all that is necessary to know for salvation, no other source of theology is necessary.

## 2. *The Abuse of Tradition*

It is against two extremely serious aberrations that the Scripture principle assumes such importance in Lutheran theology. First, the principle is turned against the Roman Catholic doctrine that unwritten tradition and the decrees of popes and church councils were revelation along with Scripture, and therefore a source of doctrine. Lutheran theology unanimously teaches that Scripture must stand alone as the source of theology.<sup>9</sup> To establish other sources of Christian doctrine beside Scripture vitiates *eo ipso* the Scripture principle entirely. Scripture as a principium of theology must stand alone and independent, or it ceases to be a principium. When the papists say that Scripture is imperfect and obscure, a waxen nose and a frequent cause of strife and controversy in the church, they forsake the Scriptures as the norm of truth, and they do so in the interest of promoting the authority of the church. The same is true when they subject Scripture to the interpretation of the church and of the pope. In effect this places the church and the pope above Scripture, and it enhances the importance of unwritten traditions in the church.

What is the position of unwritten traditions in the church? Unwritten traditions as such are to be neither totally rejected nor totally accepted.

There are, of course, many ways in which we can speak of tradition.<sup>10</sup> We may speak of the Old Testament as containing a tradition or of the apostolic teaching as a tradition. We can even speak of the books of Scripture themselves as a tradition. We can speak of the continuation of the apostolic message as a tradition. The rites that go back to apostolic times may be called traditions. The principle of *sola Scriptura*, however, conflicts with the so-called unwritten traditions of the Roman Church. These traditions pertain to cultus and life; they are alleged to be apostolic and are considered necessary for the church. Such traditions are the sacrifice of the mass, the invocation of the saints, consecrating the water of baptism, private confession including the enumeration of all mortal sins, satisfactions, and the like. They may include also many innocuous customs that in themselves are not wrong and need not be rejected. But bad or good, these traditions cannot be placed beside Scripture as a necessary part of worship or Christian faith. Christ Himself rejects traditions of such a kind as a source of theology and urges people to return to the clear fountain of Scripture (Luke 16:29; 24:27). Unwritten traditions are not infallible like Scripture. They are in fact often contradictory, and their origin is usually obscure. Therefore, even when they do not conflict with Scripture, they cannot be considered binding or authoritative in the church.

It follows that the decrees of popes and church councils cannot be considered sources of Christian doctrine. Calov points out that the Roman claim concerning the authority of the pope and of church councils also sets aside the Scripture principle.<sup>11</sup> For *de facto* this claim also places the authority of pope and church above Scripture. For the pope alone is said to be the infallible interpreter of Scripture; his pronouncements, definitions, and public utterances are said to be inerrant, and when he speaks *ex cathedra* he does so with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Sacred Scripture becomes subject to the authority and whim of the pope as its interpreter, and no one can appeal to Scripture against the pope. Calov argues that the pope must either make his pronouncements in accordance with Scripture or against Scripture. If he speaks against Scripture, he comes under God's curse. If he speaks in agreement with Scripture, he differs in no way from any other minister of God's Word. Actually the countless instances of popes who have fallen into pernicious error and heresy ought to show the absurdity of such extravagant claims. And what is said of unwritten traditions and the pope may be brought with equal force against the allegation that church councils may establish doctrine.

Church councils are subject to the authority of Scripture; their testimony is only human, and no human testimony can be a source in matters of divine truth.

But is not the Lutheran Church with its subscription to symbols and its normative exegesis of *sedes doctrinae* guilty of traditionalism and a violation of the Scripture principle? This charge was often brought against Lutheran theology by Roman theologians. Quenstedt feels that there is no conflict in Lutheran theology at this point. When Lutheran teachers profess their adherence to the *sola Scriptura* principle, they do not view Scripture merely as a list of words in a certain order—one need not support every article of faith with an explicit statement from Scripture—but they have in mind also the content of Scripture and everything that can legitimately be elicited from Scripture. The sense of Scripture and everything that can be rightly drawn from Scripture are considered to be Scripture. Quenstedt states the Lutheran position as follows:

When the Protestants say that our faith must be taken from Scripture alone, they never understand the sayings of Scripture in such a way that all judgment is limited to the reading of just the syllables, letters, and words and no more. Neither do the terms *alone* and *only* rule out valid inferences drawn from Scripture or interpretations of Scripture, rather they exclude foreign and outside sources and ways of knowing theology that are not drawn from Scripture but from some other sources. Sources of this kind are unwritten traditions, decrees of councils, definitions of popes, the authority of the fathers, judgments of reason, new revelations, and the like, all of which the heterodox join with Scripture as sources of theology.<sup>12</sup>

It is apparent from the foregoing that to Quenstedt the Scripture principle does not operate as a straitjacket on sound Biblical interpretation but rather supports a free and intelligent reading of Scripture and is the greatest possible deterrent to either atomistic or fanciful exegesis. It is also clear that the principle can only be applied by one who has some grasp of the use of language and of elementary Biblical hermeneutics. That by adopting the Scripture principle, one rules out traditions, reason, and all extra-Biblical sources as norms for judging Christian doctrine does not immediately guarantee one's orthodoxy. One must also be able to distinguish between Law and Gospel, and apply the analogy of faith and other basic rules of interpretation—rules, however, that are not imposed on Scripture but drawn from it. Of all this we have heard before when the orthodox theologians spoke of the necessary prerequisites for the study of Scripture.

### 3. *The Abuse of Reason*

The second common aberration against which the Scripture principle was directed was the inordinate use of reason in judging matters of doctrine. As an instrument reason is necessary for understanding the Gospel and the message of Scripture. Theology is not presented to brutes but to rational human beings, who are expected to think and use their reason. As that which is employed with organic principles, such as logic and language, reason is necessary for the intelligent application of the Scripture principle. But a *ratio magisterialis* that presumes to sit in judgment over the doctrine of Scripture is to be condemned. Reason and faith belong to two entirely different spheres. Reason is therefore incompetent to assess or judge God's revelation, which can only be believed; and according to its own principles, reason must refrain from passing judgment in spiritual matters. Furthermore, the reason of the natural man is utterly corrupt. Corrupt reason regards the things of God as foolishness (1 Cor. 2:14), and nothing of God's revelation would remain if reason were to have her way. Ironically, reason acts most irrationally in opposing the things of God; and yet this must be: "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7), "unable not to oppose God in the most hostile fashion."

<sup>13</sup> When reason *in concreto*, as we see it behaving in real life, only despises God and His wisdom and truth, how can it be considered a source of theology? No, if a Christian is to retain the Gospel and his own faith, he must not trust his reason, which as Luther says, is a liar; but like Abraham and Naaman, he must cling to God's Word of promise.

Even the reason of the regenerate man cannot bolster or serve as any material aid to the Scripture principle. In fact, there would be no sense in making regenerate reason a source of Christian knowledge subordinate to Scripture, for regenerate reason in the nature of the case operates with the Scripture principle. But even the reason of a Christian is tainted with sin and inclined to reject the mysteries of God. Consequently the believer must constantly be wary of it and take it captive in obedience to Christ; for even though the Christian with his reason bows to the authority of Scripture, his reason is never fully enlightened and sanctified. Against those who would make the regenerate reason a source of theology subordinate to Scripture Dannhauer says: "This argument would be valid if man's reason had remained incorrupt and if a stream still polluted with sin had not flowed into it. But the water has been disturbed, like pure water that is suspected of being poisonous, since every imagination of the human heart is only evil continually. And was not Sarah born again? And