

The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism

Volume II

Robert D. Preus



The Theology
of Post- Reformation
LUTHERANISM

God and His Creation

Volume II

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PREFACE



The present study is the continuation of what I began in a previous volume entitled *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*. That volume dealt with the origin and development of theological prolegomena and with the doctrine of Scripture as taught by the great Lutheran theologians of the Post-Reformation era. It also provided a certain amount of necessary historical introduction into the era. There is no need to repeat what was said there about the spirit and characteristics of the era and about the personalities who played formative roles in the formulation and presentation of Lutheran doctrine. But a few introductory remarks might be made about the period which I intend to cover.

The period spans more than a century, continuing from the time of the writing of the Formula of Concord in 1578 to the first quarter of the 18th century. This period has been called the era of Lutheran scholasticism, or the age of Lutheran orthodoxy. It was an age typified by strict adherence to the Lutheran Confessions, a deep interest in theology and concern for the truth, a piety and seriousness in worship and Christian life, a remarkable unity in doctrine, and an intolerance of any heterodoxy. The spirit and posture of the theology of this era does not differ greatly from that of the Reformation era. In fact, the Lutheran theologians who were active after the Formula of Concord made every effort to preserve the theology and spirit of the Reformers and the Lutheran Confessions and to remain faithful to their heritage. But much of the flush of discovery which marked the Reformation was not so apparent in this period of conservatism.

My specific purpose in this present study is to present as completely as possible the teaching of post-Reformation Lutheran dogmatics on two articles of faith, the doctrine of God and the doctrine of creation. In addition to presenting objectively the historic Lutheran teaching on

two important articles of faith, I hope to offer some insight into the dogmatic methodology of the era, and into the manner in which the old Lutheran teachers thought and organized their material. It is my hope also to provide some understanding of their dogmatic and exegetical procedure.

There are good reasons for choosing those two particular articles which in dogmatics are usually the first to be given special attention. There have previously been no studies made in the classical Lutheran doctrine of God or of creation. Perhaps it was thought that the Lutheran theology of the orthodox period had little that was new or significant to offer on these subjects. But this is only partly true, and it is my hope that this study will help to fill a lacuna in the history of Protestant doctrine. Furthermore, the study of classic post-Reformation Lutheran theology as it treats these articles will portray a fair picture of Lutheran theology as a whole during this era. Much of the theology of the day was developed in a definite polemical setting or from an almost servile dependence upon Luther and the Lutheran Symbols (for example, the articles of justification, Christology, and the Lord's Supper). This is much less true of the two articles which we have chosen for study. Here we may observe the Lutheran theologians of the post-Reformation era as they are compelled to work independently and for the most part dispassionately—without polemical motives. This does not mean that we will observe them at their best. Polemics does not always bring out the worst in a theologian, but sometimes the best. But we will, I believe, see the constructive side of Lutheran dogmatics, its strengths, and its weaknesses.

There are about one hundred Lutheran theologians whose works could have been consulted in a study such as this. I have tried to draw from as broad a representation of theologians as possible, but I have also thought it necessary to concentrate attention on those who were the dominant figures of their particular time and place: men such as Chemnitz, Selnecker, Gerhard and Mentzer, Calov and Quenstedt, and Dorsch and Sebastian Schmidt, and of course Hollaz, who is the last of the great orthodox dogmaticians. I have refrained from considering contributions of Lutherans like Calixt who were not confessional Lutherans in the strict sense. I have also not consulted the works of the Pietists of the late 17th century and early 18th century. But I have restricted my research rather to those theologians, almost all professors, from such centers as Jena, Tübingen, Leipzig, Wittenberg, Strasbourg, and Copenhagen, whose confessional loyalty was unquestioned. My

findings will reveal a remarkable doctrinal unity among the Lutherans from 1580 to 1715. But there are also differences to be noted, differences in emphasis and approach if not in doctrine, differences due as much to place (Strasbourg as opposed to Wittenberg) as to time. When one considers the tremendous literary output of such men as Chemnitz, Gerhard, Calov, and Schmidt, one will immediately realize that I have been forced to be highly selective in drawing from the sources; and I can only hope that I have succeeded in presenting a fair picture of the theology of the era.

One more word by way of introduction. One can only regret that in a study of this kind one cannot give more attention to the exegesis of the Lutheran teachers, for it is here that the strength and weakness of the old Lutheran theology often becomes most clearly apparent. But it is simply beyond the scope of this study to go deeply into the massive exegetical works of the old Lutherans. The best I could do was to draw from exegetical works when it seemed necessary for completing a true picture of the Lutheran doctrine on a given point. I have tried to compensate for this deficiency by citing hundreds of the Scripture passages as they are quoted by the dogmaticians themselves. In *every case* the passages I cite are those cited by the Lutheran theologians themselves. Such a procedure may seem a bit pedantic, for the reader can hardly be expected to check out all these passages. But if checked out, I believe the Lutheran teachers' choice of Biblical proof and their way of employing Biblical proof will be most revealing. In some cases the Biblical evidence presented for a certain position reveals a deep grasp of the whole of Scripture; in other cases one can only wonder whether there is any rationale at all in the way the old Lutherans cite Scripture, for they often shy away from what we would consider to be the real *sedes doctrinae* for an article of faith.

What I am saying at this point applies to all of the post-Reformation Lutheran dogmaticians to some extent. This inconsistency in their use of Biblical evidence in their dogmatics works is all the more curious in light of the fact that most of the Lutheran dogmaticians also did extensive work in exegesis and were well acquainted with the Scriptures, to say nothing of the usual *sedes doctrinae*. A partial explanation to this problem may be found in the fact that their work in dogmatics was sometimes hastily or even carelessly done; but such an explanation cannot be pressed, for a hasty worker would have simply followed the citations of his predecessors, and there is a noticeable lack of this kind of thing among the Lutheran dogmaticians.

In conclusion I would like to express my deep thanks to the staff of the Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg for the helpfulness shown me during my research into the sources which this library so richly possesses. And I state my deep appreciation to Prof. François Wendel of the Faculté de Théologie Protestante of Strasbourg University for his encouragement and many helpful suggestions on the improvement of my study.

PART ONE



The Doctrine of God

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE: MAN'S NATURAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

CHAPTER TWO: GOD'S EXISTENCE AND ESSENCE

CHAPTER THREE: GOD'S ATTRIBUTES

CHAPTER FOUR: THE TRIUNE GOD

INTRODUCTION



Following the ancient creeds and the Augsburg Confession, Lutheran orthodoxy begins dogmatics with the doctrine concerning God. With most theologians the treatment of this article represents an elaboration of the brief statement of the Augsburg Confession concerning God. Although Scripture as the source of theology has already been discussed in a prolegomenon or as a separate *locus*, the doctrine of God belongs properly as the first article of theology.¹ For God is the source of the existence of all things, including theology and Scripture, which contains His Word of revelation. Moreover, God is the center of the entire Scripture, the nucleus of all theology, and the goal of all our knowledge and desires. We have been created by God that we might know Him and serve and worship Him (Acts 17:27). And after man had fallen into sin and spiritual blindness, God, out of His immense goodness, came forth from the hidden abode of His majesty to reveal Himself. This He did for no other purpose than that man might know Him and have fellowship with Him (Ex. 29:43). God makes Himself known by gathering a church and by teaching sinful man about divine redemption from sin, about true worship, judgment, death, and eternal life.

This procedure of beginning dogmatics with the doctrine of God is by no means a mere submission to tradition. God is the starting point and the terminus of every article of faith and of all Christian confession. And all Christian theology has to do with God and leads to Him.² Likewise, the doctrine of the Trinity is the basis of all Christian doctrine; as Lutheran theology throughout the whole of dogmatics portrays the mighty *opera ad extra* of God, these are clearly seen to be the works of the triune God (*opera Trinitatis*) as are the *opera ad intra*. God's external acts can be summed up under the themes of creation, redemption (Christology), and soteriology.

Chemnitz, for instance, in one of his schemata for dogmatics³ lists the works of God as follows: creation, the preservation of the fallen creation, the restoration of fallen man, conversion of man, justification, sanctification, and glorification. These works which summarize the activity of the triune God constitute the themes under which the whole of Christian doctrine can be subsumed. As God seeks to establish fellowship with man and to save him, Chemnitz in another schema relates the following activities of God: He accuses and terrifies man by the Law, He comforts and lifts up the sinner by the Gospel, He saves the sinner through Christ, renews him through the Spirit, sanctifies him through Word and sacrament, tests and exercises his faith through crosses, and glorifies him by the resurrection of his flesh to eternal life.

Christian doctrine cannot be rightly understood or taught, neither can Law and Gospel be rightly divided, apart from the doctrine of the Trinity. If it is important for Lutheran theology to make the foundation of faith Christ, who has brought man forgiveness of sins and offers this in the Gospel, it is equally necessary to list as the first fundamental article of faith the doctrine of the triune God who is “the effective cause of our faith, of our righteousness, and our salvation.”⁴ To know God as triune God is to know Him as the creating, sustaining, saving God; and to know God as Creator and Savior is to know God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Although there is complete agreement on the doctrine of God among the evangelical Lutherans from Selnecker and Heerbrand to Hollaz, there is little uniformity in the order or mode of presentation. At the turn of the 17th century a new approach to the doctrine develops, and a rather marked difference in emphasis is discernible. We might say that Lutheranism as a whole covers four main points in dealing with the doctrine of God: (1) our knowledge of God and the ways He has made Himself known, (2) the description and nature of God, (3) the attributes of God, and (4) the Trinity. The earlier theologians: Heerbrand, Chemnitz, Aegidius Hunnius, and even Hutter, give only perfunctory attention to the natural and revealed knowledge of God, offer no discussions of the attributes of God, and devote their attention for the most part to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Gerhard, whose discussions more or less standardized the treatment of the doctrine of God among the later Lutherans, goes more deeply into the subject of how God is proved and makes Himself known; and following the medieval scholastics, he introduces detailed discussions

on the attributes of God. Such an innovation was bound to make its appearance sooner or later, for the attributes of God were given insufficient attention by the earlier Lutherans. But the innovation as it was handled by Gerhard was not always helpful, for it introduced much objectionable scholastic terminology and some really knotty problems relative to the classification of the attributes. In the case of the later dogmatists all four points were treated at length—but in the light of the rapidly changing philosophical and theological milieu of the 17th century, for example, the advent of Cartesianism, Socinianism, Quakerism, Deism, etc. All in all we must say that the doctrine of God as presented by evangelical orthodoxy is one of the least satisfactory. Among the earlier theologians the doctrine is not wholly presented, and the discussion in some cases is not sufficiently thought through. Among the later Lutherans there is greater balance, but their preoccupation with the attributes of God and classifications of these attributes tends at times to abstract God from His works.

If the Lutheran treatment of the doctrine of God seems inadequate, this is at least in part due to the inherent difficulty connected with the presentation of the *locus de Deo*: for everything that can be said in theology pertains to the doctrine of God, and the doctrine of God embraces every theological *locus*. Now for purely didactic reasons the article on God, of His nature and attributes, must be separated from His works which embraces the rest of Christian doctrine. Such a procedure which commences with a distinction between *Deus per se* and *Deus ad hominem* is at the very outset fraught with serious dangers. For strictly speaking there is no revelation of God *per se*. God's revelation, as was clearly taught by Lutheran orthodoxy, was in Law and Gospel.⁵ And Law and Gospel speak of God only in relation to His creatures. Furthermore, the distinction between *Deus per se* and *Deus ad hominem* is a distinction without a difference, God does not want us to think of Him in any other way than as He has revealed Himself (*omnino vult Deus ita cognosci & invocari, sicut se patefecit*); indeed, as He has revealed Himself, so is He.⁶ For instance, the Trinity is not a mere trinity of revelation (Schleiermacher), but is *Deus per se*, as Lutheran theology clearly perceives.⁷ What we are trying to say is that one cannot speak about God without at the same time speaking about His works. Thus, when the Lutheran theologians in their *locus de Deo* seek to speak of God apart from His works, they are attempting the impossible; and they are well aware of this and of the grotesque caricature which would

result if they were to be successful in their attempt. It is just that they feel that to speak first of God (and His works) and then of His works (and of God) is the only way open to them. The alternative which would try to give adequate attention to the works of God under the *locus* on God would extend the *locus* to the whole of dogmatics or reduce all dogmatics to one *locus*. And there is really no way out of this dilemma. When Hollaz⁸ says that the knowledge we have of God through revelation includes His existence, His essence and attributes, His trinity and His deeds, he is eminently correct, but he is compelled in the nature of the case to treat the works of God in subsequent *loci*.

¹ John Gerhard, *Loci Theologici* (Tübingen, 1762–81), III, 1. Cf. also Abraham Calov, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum* (Wittenberg, 1655–77), II, 2; also John George Dorsch, *Synopsis Theologiae Zacharianae* (Strasbourg, 1655), II, 139ff. John Conrad Dannhauer, *Hodosophia Christiana* (Strasbourg, 1649), is an exception, who treats the article on God after presenting the doctrine of the church, an excessive concession to the analytic method.

² In one of his schemata of *loci theologici*, Chemnitz represents all theology as dealing either with God or the deeds of God. Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici* (Wittenberg, 1653), I, 13.

³ Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, I, 13.

⁴ David Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum* (Rostock and Leipzig, 1741). Prolog. II, q. 20 (I, 50–51). See Chapter II, p. 1.

⁵ F. Balduin, *Commentarius in Omnes Epistolas Pauli* (Frankfurt, 1664), pp.26–27.

⁶ Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, I, 24.

⁷ Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, I, 13.

⁸ *Examen*, P. I, C.1, Q.12 (233 ff.).

Man's Natural Knowledge of God

CHAPTER ONE



Lutheran dogmatics has a way of becoming expanded as time goes on. Old issues die slowly and new issues and problems arise with regularity. And quite naturally Lutheran theologians develop and build upon what their confessional forbears have taught. This is particularly so in respect to what has been taught concerning man's knowledge of God. The theologians of the 16th century give only cursory attention to this question in discussing the article concerning God. This does not imply, however, that the earlier dogmaticians felt the subject of man's knowledge of God to be of minor importance.

Chemnitz maintains that the summation of all theology is simply man's knowledge of God; and the knowledge of God is of such importance to man that eternal life is contingent upon it (John 17:3).¹ Man has been created and redeemed in order to know God and worship Him as His temple and image. Since God wishes to be known and worshiped (Ps. 118:17; 149:1), man's first concern is to teach the true doctrine concerning God. The knowledge of God is never a matter of academic concern to Lutheran theology but a matter of ultimate and eternal moment. God must be known.

"Without a knowledge of God," writes Giles Hunnius,² "no one can be saved. Indeed the knowledge of God is the hinge on which our salvation hangs, as Christ Himself testifies when He says, This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. Now, as I have said, this knowledge is imperfect

and partial in this life. But it will be made perfect in the life to come, where we will behold Him face to face and know Him even as we are known.”

But how is God known? Heerbrand, followed by Hafenreffer,³ poses this question in the following apologetic form: “How does one prove that God exists?” The answer is: by the book of nature and the book of Scripture. The entire universe, and man as a microcosm, give witness to a wise, powerful, and beneficent Architect who has created and who preserves and governs all things. “The work vouches for the artificer.” There can be no effect without a cause. The world comes from another source (*aliunde*) than itself; it is not the result of “a fortuitous collision of atoms.” And this is all Heerbrand says about our knowledge of God from nature; everything else that can be known about God, everything which pertains to our salvation, is drawn from the book of Scripture. Hafenreffer says little more, except to list Rom. 1:20 and 2:15 as proof of the fact that God is known from the book of nature.

Chemnitz wisely chooses not to speak about proving God, but refers rather to the natural and revealed knowledge of God. To him it is only because of the great corruption of human nature that man asks such questions as whether there is a God or whether there is Divine Providence. These are illegitimate questions which only indicate the darkness into which the human mind has fallen, a darkness which only God can penetrate with a special divine revelation (1 Cor. 1:21), with a wisdom which the world ridicules as fables, with a wisdom of the Gospel, made known in the Old Testament (Ps. 110) and revealed finally in His Son. Only one who has seen the Son sees the Father (John 14:9). And no Turk or Jew, but only one who honors the Son honors the Father. (John 5:23)

Chemnitz objects to the attempts to prove God’s existence because of the sinful concession to skepticism from which all such “proofs” proceed. But he also objects on the ground that our natural knowledge of God is only defective *notitia legalis* which leads to doubt and despair rather than to faith. Indeed the natural knowledge of God is *nothing*, he says, for the whole of philosophy knows nothing of the Son of God and His promise of forgiveness in the Gospel. Even as a true *notitia legalis* such knowledge is *imperfect*, relative only to the Second Table of the Law and often commingled with many absurdities. Finally the

natural knowledge of God is impotent and *sluggish (languida)*: although men know that God exists, their assent is not only feeble but often shaken with severe doubts.

It might strike us as strange that Lutheran theology would construct its whole doctrine of the natural knowledge of God on the basis of statements from Scripture, the source of the revealed knowledge of God. What is the reason for this surprising procedure? Why should one even bother to prove the natural knowledge of God from Scripture, if it is evident from nature? If the existence of something (for example, the sun) is known from nature, would anyone feel constrained to prove from some authority that one can know of the sun's existence from nature?

There is a reason for this procedure which is not apparent on the surface and unfortunately is never explained by the dogmaticians. Although from God's creation the evidence for His existence is as clear as daylight and is definite and true, the dogmaticians see no need as theologians for bothering with arguments from empirical data when the Biblical proof is so easy and available. Scripture not only tells us what is knowable about God (*quod de Deo cognosci debet*) from the things He has made (Rom. 1:20), but it offers God's interpretation of what nature tells us about Him. And whereas the natural man, as he contemplates God's handiwork, indulges in guesswork and arrives at all sorts of misconceptions, the witness of Scripture is clear and unassailable. "What is more definite," asks Calov,⁴ "more certain, less open to question, than what the clear testimony of Scripture presents concerning the natural knowledge of God (Rom. 1:19,20; Acts 14:25; 17:12; Job 12:7-10)? Of course the revealed knowledge of God is more complete than the natural knowledge, but it is no more firmly and certainly grounded in the testimonies of Scripture." Thus it is perfectly in order (according to the *sola Scriptura* principle) that the Lutherans appeal to Biblical evidence for the natural knowledge of God. Just as their doctrine of man as he exists *coram Deo* is not taken from empirical investigations but from Scripture alone, the same procedure is correct in establishing man's natural knowledge of God.

Following Melanchthon and Chemnitz, Gerhard and all the orthodox Lutherans subdivide the *natural* knowledge of God into innate knowledge (*notitia insita*) and acquired knowledge (*notitia acquisita*).⁵ For the most part their discussions repeat what they have already said in their treatment of natural and revealed theology. Innate knowledge

is defined by Gerhard in the following manner: “Innate knowledge has its origin in the common notions (κοινὰ ἔγνοια) which are more or less obscure vestiges of the lost divine image and traces of that lost light which shone in man’s mind before the Fall. By means of these notions which are like little sparks the common and accepted notion that there is a God is naturally rooted in the minds of all men.” The acquired knowledge is gained discursively by a contemplation of God’s handiwork. Just as many letters contribute to make up a book, God’s many creatures are letters, so to speak, written by God’s hand; and by reading them we can know something of God. If in every walk of life a great work gives knowledge of its master, only a fool would deny this in the case of the most illustrious works of creation.⁶ Innate knowledge was called subjective by the Lutheran teachers; acquired knowledge was called objective. The former was found in all men, even infants; the latter was not. The former was inherited; the latter was the result of teaching and investigation.

The Biblical proof for the acquired knowledge of God was easily found by the Lutheran teachers in such passages as Rom. 1:17-20; Acts 14:17, and Acts 17:17-28. Corroboration was sometimes brought from Is. 40; Ps. 19:1; Job 12:7-25. In each case the intimation was that something was knowable about God from His works. Little exegesis was offered on the above passages, the dogmaticians apparently feeling quite confident of their position. It was another matter when they assembled Biblical evidence for the innate knowledge of God. In the case of the *notitia insita* the orthodox Lutherans were hard pressed to defend their position, and therefore they indulged in some rather extensive exegesis of the passages which they considered pertinent. For the most part two *sedes doctinae* were brought forth: Rom. 1:18-19 and 2:14-15 (also Acts 17:27; Chemnitz).

In the case of the first passage it was generally maintained by the Lutheran theologians⁷ that the κατ᾽ἰχόντων, “holding the truth in unrighteousness,” indicates that in the heathen there is “an innate practical knowledge” of God’s righteous judgment against them. The things knowable (τὸ γνωστόν) about God are manifest in them (ἐν αὐτοῖς), that is, in their hearts, “and known without any discursive operation.” The implication is that the τὸ γνωστόν includes the righteous rule of divine justice which is evidenced in the Law (Rom. 1:18,25). This knowledge is sufficient to render the heathen without excuse. It will be seen that this entire interpretation hinges on the understanding of ἐν

αὐτοῖς as “in them” rather than “to them.” The possibility of the latter rendering is not entertained. Calov simply says, “In those upon whom the wrath of God will be manifest a knowledge of God is manifest.”

More convincing is the exegesis of the second passage, Rom. 2:14, although here an inference is drawn from a knowledge of the Law to a knowledge of the Lawgiver. In this passage the apostle speaks of a Law which is not proclaimed or known by external manifestation or information, but by an inner perception. The Gentiles who do not have the external Law are nevertheless a law unto themselves. They show the work of the Law written in their own hearts. And he who knows by nature God’s law knows by nature that there is a God. The testimony of the conscience, then, gives evidence of an innate knowledge of God. Wherever man is, he is preoccupied with the Law, but there can be no law without a lawgiver. This is the burden of the Lutheran argument for an innate knowledge of God. It was also sometimes averred that man’s innate religiosity indicates an awareness in man that God exists.

According to Lutheran orthodoxy there was a definite but limited content to the knowledge of God provided in God’s creation, viz. His Godhead, power, wisdom, and goodness. And this knowledge is true, so far as it goes (Rom. 1:25). It is because men have stifled this “truth” that God’s wrath is revealed against their unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). This position was maintained by the orthodox Lutherans against Flacius and Daniel Hofmann, who, because of their peculiar anthropology and their extremely negative attitude toward philosophy, concluded that all “natural knowledge” of God is false. For the most part Lutheran theology countered pretty much as follows, in the words of Hollaz,⁸ “Although the true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not known by the natural knowledge of God, still something about the true God is grasped in that way, viz. His existence, His goodness, His wisdom, justice, etc.” This fact is seen in the case of the Jews and Mohammedans, who correctly but confusedly teach that God is powerful and wise, but utterly distort and restrict the Godhead by insisting that He is only one Person, thus worshipping an idol and figment of their own imagination. Put differently, the natural knowledge of God is true in itself (*per se*), but because of man’s imperfection and proclivity toward error such truth is *per accidens* annulled. (Rom. 1:18)

In the case of the so-called *notitia insita* the Lutheran theologians are much more cautious, and they never say that there is any specific content to this knowledge. What, then, is this “knowledge”? Again the

dogmaticians are quite cautious in their answer. It may be likened to an instinct, a tendency, a faculty, a disposition (*habitus*).

Calov⁹ grants that there is no notion in man by nature concerning God before the exercise of reason, no particular thought about God which man has actually known since birth, but there is a definite capacity, or disposition, for such thought. And this “habitual knowledge” may by the use of reason flower into an actual knowledge about God.¹⁰

Hollaz,¹¹ who is extremely careful to dissociate himself from Platonism and Descartes’ ontological proofs, exercises even greater caution in discussing the nature of the *notitia insita*. He says, “Although man does not have a knowledge of God before he exercises and makes use of the powers of reason, at least to the extent of having an express image or definite idea formed in the mind; still we feel that it cannot be denied that there is some disposition in man, something analogous to a *habitus*, namely some τελειωσις of intellectual capacity remaining in man after the Fall. With the benefit of this capacity man without a teacher can to a certain extent know God.”

With the reservations which the above statement implies, Hollaz is willing to go along with the “trite” axiom of Locke and the empiricists that there was nothing in the intellect that was not in the senses. The opinion that an innate idea or image of the essence of God was necessary before man could in any sense know God from nature is simply rejected as a “sweet dream of the Cartesians.” But Hollaz feels compelled to break with the other extreme position of the empiricists and the Socinians,¹² which on empirical grounds denied a *notitia insita* altogether. Adam was possessed of a concreated knowledge which was not limited to what he observed through the senses. And after the Fall there are remnants of this divine image and they do not depend upon the senses. “Wherefore that axiom must be taken as referring to simple intelligible ideas which since the Fall are not naturally implanted in the intellect, but hold true by virtue of abstractions. It does not pertain to concreated and innate tendencies (*habitus*) which inhere in the intellect prior to the process of forming ideas.” If there is little definite in what Hollaz asserts here—and he is following Calov—¹³ he must at least be given credit for trying to steer a middle course between the apriorism of Descartes and the strict empiricism which would restrict all knowledge to what is the result of sense perception. Both of these extremes are

exceedingly dangerous, and not merely because they conflict with the Biblical evidence concerning the natural knowledge of God; in the case of these two extremes a special divine historical revelation which conveys a saving knowledge is either unnecessary or impossible.

It was pointed out¹⁴ that the Lutheran doctrine concerning the natural knowledge of God virtually denied the possibility of a theoretical atheist, i.e., one who honestly could not believe in God. To be sure, Scripture speaks of the fool who says there is no God (Ps. 14:1), but the psalmist here is not speaking of one who does not know God, but of the fool who maliciously wishes there were no God. In like manner, when Paul says (1 Cor, 1:21) that the world does not know God, he is not speaking of an absolute ignorance of God (Gal. 4:8) but is saying that the world did not know God as Savior. In this sense the heathen are called atheists. (Eph. 2:12)

Of course there are practical atheists who deny God by their lives. Specifically the question of theoretical atheism and its relation to *notitia insita* is answered as follows: No man is a speculative atheist by nature; it is rather that unrepentant men have been justly abandoned by God and blinded by the devil, and then they deny God's existence. The *habitus*, the innate religiosity, has not been eradicated but stifled.

Concerning the atheist, Hollaz says, "Because such a person will not submit to the law of nature, a fixed and firm belief clings to him that there is no God. But although the mind of the godless man slumbers away in its morbid drowsiness and does not consider God, still there can be no one whose conscience does not assert itself and accuse him, especially when he faces death, of ignoring God."

The old Lutheran doctrine of the natural knowledge of God has sometimes been censured for being too intellectual and rationalistic, as though the dogmatists made too much of man's ability to prove God, as though there were in their view only a short step from the natural knowledge of God to the revealed knowledge of God, or as though there was little left for revelation to supply after the natural knowledge of God had been established.¹⁵ Such criticism seems strange in the light of what has been shown above.

The Lutheran teachers were really only trying to be faithful to the Biblical data in presenting their doctrine of the natural knowledge of God. They were convinced that Scripture taught a natural knowledge of God. And they exercised extreme caution against making extravagant claims concerning the extent or benefit of the natural knowledge of

CHAPTER TWO



It might seem strange that a discussion of the revealed knowledge of God is not included by the Lutheran theologians in their *locus* on God, especially since they have said at least something about man's natural knowledge of God.¹ There are two reasons for this omission. First, in the case of some theologians (for instance, Calov² and Hollaz) the idea of revelation and revealed theology was discussed at great length in their prolegomena, and any lengthy consideration of man's revealed knowledge of God within the very next *locus* on God would be redundant. Second, and more important, man's revealed knowledge of God is actually treated in everything which follows the discussion of the natural knowledge of God: the whole of Christian doctrine is the summation of the knowledge of God which man has by revelation.

This is clearly the thinking of Gerhard in his *Loci Theologici*. In his first two volumes he affirms the fact of divine revelation and defends the principle that Scripture, which is God's revelation in writing, is the source of our knowledge of God (*principium cognoscendi*). He then begins his *locus* on God with a discussion of man's natural knowledge of God, but he is careful to make it clear that only through the Gospel does man learn to know who God is and to know Him as Savior.³ The implication is that everything which follows in his dogmatics concerning God, Trinity, creation, sin, redemption, etc., is known only by revelation. And in fact Gerhard never returns to the subject of the natural knowledge of God but attempts to support everything he says from Scripture alone.

Before proceeding, however, to a consideration of the attributes of God and the doctrine of the Trinity as revealed in Scripture, the Lutheran dogmatians feel obliged to face a few preliminary questions which pertain to the existence and essence of God.

1. THE APOLOGETIC PROBLEM

Are there formal proofs, totally apart from any historic revelation, for the existence of God? This question, as we have seen (p. 20), was already posed within the discussion of man's natural knowledge of God. And the answer was that God's existence was shown by His creation and His activity in history.

Heerbrand,⁴ for instance, offers a very brief discussion, dropped by the later Lutherans, of the question, "How the sacred Scriptures testify that there is a God." In six ways, says Heerbrand: (1) From His works, from the marvels of His creation. (2) From His marvelous deliverance of His people at the Red Sea. (3) From the many special miracles which accompany His deliverances, e. g. manna, resurrections, the sun standing still. (4) From frequent apparitions (theophanies). (5) From His prophecies and promises which He always keeps. (6) From the promise to send Christ who came and revealed God. What Heerbrand speaks of here, however, is a far cry from what we might call formal proofs.

Nicolaus Selnecker,⁵ writing at the same time as Heerbrand, is even more conservative as he speaks on the same subject. He offers no less than nine arguments drawn from the Psalms and Romans 1, arguments of an a posteriori nature, which point to God's existence and power and justice. But these arguments, he says, only indicate the weakness of the human mind. The universal knowledge of God, that which is knowable about Him, to which these arguments testify, only renders all men without excuse before God. And the contemplation of such arguments does not lead one to the true God, but only to shadows, and it shows the need of a special revelation. Only the Gospel can teach that all religions are not equal and that only through Christ is salvation to be found. In short, only the Gospel can tell us who and what God is and save us from the "infinite opinions" of heathen speculation. Having said this, Selnecker launches into a polemic against the overweening opinions of heathen philosophies.⁶

It is with John Gerhard⁷ that formal a posteriori proofs for God's existence begin to take shape in Lutheran dogmatics. In a rather perfunctory manner, and leaning quite obviously on the arguments of Thomas Aquinas,⁸ Gerhard lists five observations from experience to show that there is sufficient empirical proof for belief in God's existence. (1) The orderly succession of moving objects leads to one first mover. (2) The chain of efficient causes which we observe in the ordered world leads to a first efficient cause "which we all call God." Like Thomas Aquinas, Gerhard assumes at this point that an infinite regress cannot be accepted logically (cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, II, 6). (3) One may argue from sufficient reason: there must be a sufficient reason for all possible things being what they are, and the only sufficient reason which would not be merely another possibility is God, who is per se necessary. This proof, which again discounts the possibility of an infinite regress, is a slight variation of Thomas' argument from contingency and bears a similarity to Leibniz' argument from sufficient reason.⁹ (4) We observe reason, care, wisdom, and teleology in the process of all things. This could hardly be due to accident, but is rather according to the intention and direction of an intellect. (5) There is a natural inclination in man, when he is in extreme difficulties and without help, to call upon God in prayer.

These five arguments make up Gerhard's entire effort to go the empirical route in proving God's existence. And it might be added that the existence (τὸ ὄν) of God is all he attempts to prove—not any particular attribute.

But why does he bother to do this? Why does he attempt to prove empirically what the Christian already believes? It is significant that the later Lutheran teachers do not usually trouble themselves with such proofs, although they sometimes go to rather great lengths to show that people of all nations and cultures have some conception, vague as it is, of God.¹⁰ They return rather to the less ambitious program of Chemnitz and restrict themselves to a discussion of the natural knowledge of God.

Gerhard feels that there is some justification for proceeding as he does. Although the existence of God remains an article of faith, and not a mere preamble to the articles of faith, as Thomas has said (*Summa Theologies* P. I, Q. 2, a. 3), there appear nevertheless to be three justifiable reasons for offering such proofs for God's existence. (1) Not all believe in God, and certainly not all behave as if they do. Proofs for God's

existence serve as a refutation of such theoretical and practical atheism. Gerhard does not tell us at this point whether such refutation is done for the sake of the unbeliever as a sort of law preachment, or for the sake of the church. He does mention, however, that Scripture itself does not bother with any such proof but rather establishes the fundamental article of God's existence for the comfort of God's people by pointing to God's works and in particular to His creation. (2) Since all men in times of extremity and temptation tend to become either Stoics or Epicureans, proofs for God's existence may serve at times to bolster their faith. If such an assertion seems at first blush to be utterly rationalistic, we must bear in mind that it is never Gerhard's intention to establish the existence of God only or even primarily from such formal proofs as he now offers, but from Scripture which "supplies more numerous and more certain proofs (*fundamenta*) for God's existence and thus makes our knowledge which is based upon divine revelation more full and firm." (3) The knowledge of God which we possess from nature will be enhanced by these arguments. That is to say, these proofs will enable us better to see and appreciate God's workings in nature. Gerhard, like the other Lutheran dogmaticians,¹¹ envisages the pursuit of natural theology as the legitimate activity of the Christian as he applies the doctrine of creation.

In Gerhard's five proofs for God's existence we have the most developed presentation of such apologetics to be found in Lutheran theology. But actually his approach is rather modest when compared with the elaborate arguments of the philosophers of the day. Whereas Descartes and Spinoza and Leibniz start *de novo*, as it were, using variations of the ontological proof or, in the case of Leibniz, a posteriori proofs as well, Gerhard starts from the point of the natural knowledge of God acquired (*acquisita*) from the contemplation of His creation. Unlike the philosophers of the day, he and Lutheranism as a whole begin from a definite and frank Christian perspective, from the point of view of faith.¹²

By the existence of God, Lutheran theology, whether using rational arguments or proofs from Scripture, means simply that God is.¹³ Gerhard's formal proofs are brought forth to show this. But such proofs can never bring forth faith in God's existence. Faith can only be wrought by the Word of God.

Against Thomas Aquinas, who denied that God's existence was an article of faith but said it was only a presupposition for all the articles

of faith (*Summa Theologica*, P.I, Q.2, a.2), Calov contends that the very chief article of faith is that God is.¹⁴ True, philosophers have spoken of God's existence and attributes apart from any Christian revelation. But faith in God can only be wrought by the Word of God. Calov assumes a complete distinction between the theory or opinion of a philosopher and the faith of a Christian. In spite of the fact that they speak of the same thing, faith and philosophy remain in two completely different and distinct categories. Calov is thinking of faith in the sense of personal trust. Philosophy, proofs, reason cannot produce such faith. Faith, even in things which seem clear and true to the natural man, is always based upon a special word or revelation of God. Whatever views one may entertain about God apart from revelation are mere opinions; they may be called knowledge, but they are not faith. Here in Calov we observe a strenuous rejection of natural religion as being in a class with Christianity. To Calov it is important that we learn both who God is and that He is by faith from His Word—and not from philosophy. This is in keeping with Heb. 11:6: "He that cometh to God must believe that He is."¹⁵

Of course, simple existence in itself is never comprehensible. Therefore Scripture, in attesting God's existence, always tells us also something about Him and His works. This is done when Scripture ascribes names to God and rehearses oracles of God and manifestations such as theophanies and appearances. God's miracles tell of His majesty and power, His gifts tell of His grace and mercy, His acts of judgment tell of His infallibility and omniscience, and His creation and preservation of all things tell of His wisdom and goodness.¹⁶ In the light of such an approach of Calov's we can see how very limited formal proofs for God's existence really are in Lutheran theology. For faith and salvation depend upon our learning to know of God's existence and works from His revelation in Scripture.¹⁷

2. THE SEMANTIC PROBLEM

Can we talk cognitively and with meaning about God who is utterly transcendent? Can terms be ascribed to God and created things (such as men and angels) meaningfully and without denying God's transcendence? These questions, which were considered by the medieval scho-

lastics and are discussed today with renewed vigor and interest by theologians and linguistic analysts, were reintroduced by the Lutheran theologians of the 17th century.

The most thorough answers to the questions are offered by Quenstedt and Hollaz.¹⁸ Their position is that terms such as Spirit, substance, essence, and the like (it makes no difference to their argument whether the terms are Biblical or not) can be predicated of both God and creatures. The terms, however, are not to be predicated univocally or equivocally, but analogically, according to the analogy of intrinsic attributes. Both theologians follow closely the conclusions of Jacob Martini,¹⁹ who had offered a long and detailed study of the formal logico-semantic aspects of analogical predication.

According to Martini the concept “being” (*ens*) can be employed only analogically when ascribed to God and creatures. If the term were used equivocally we could know nothing and say nothing cognitive about God; God’s entire revelation of Himself would thus be undermined. If the term were used univocally the priority of God’s being would be threatened; theologically this would tend to deny the infinite distinction between God and His creatures. Therefore to speak cognitively about God without denying His transcendence we must speak by analogy. But what sort of analogy do we employ? For there are many kinds of analogies.

Martini distinguished between an *analogia proportionis* and an *analogia attributionis*.²⁰ The former is the analogy which is represented by any relationship between things, an analogy which is always somewhat metaphorical and inexact, for example, the analogy between a laughing man and a blooming meadow. The *analogia attributionis* obtains when certain terms are predicated of many objects because of some order or relationship they have in respect to one to whom these terms can be attributed in the original or primary sense (*ex primaria constitutione*). Thus certain attributes of man are analogous to the same attributes in God, and being is predicated of man and God; but always principally of God as the *ens primum*. For the creature always depends upon God and derives his being from God, and not vice versa.²¹

The position of Quenstedt and Hollaz is that there is a formal justification for analogical predication in addition and in contrast to equivocal and univocal predication. And in the case of language which applies to both God and rational creatures they argue for more than a

CHAPTER THREE



The doctrine of God is the most difficult *locus* in Christian dogmatics. This fact is brought out clearly as we study the history and development of Lutheran dogmatics after the Reformation. How does one approach this article and speak adequately and systematically about the transcendent God? One cannot. There is complete agreement in Lutheran theology on this point. One can speak only inadequately of Him who is absolutely sublime, and of the Eternal One who has no beginning or end, no past or future, one can speak only according to an arbitrary, conceptual, human order and arrangement. The fact that God in His grace has emerged, as it were, from the inner abode of His majesty and made Himself known through cognitive words and through the Word made flesh makes, of course, the doctrine of God a possibility. But God's revelation has not been total—we do not see Him face to face—but only fragmentarily and piecemeal; and so our doctrine of God can present only a partial, incomplete, imperfect, and paradoxical picture of Him.

How does one begin methodologically to present the doctrine of God? Four possible starting points presented themselves to the old Lutheran theologians. One could begin with the names of God, and Gerhard and others began their presentation with fruitful studies of the divine names. One could begin with the attributes of God, and this is the real starting point of most of the later dogmaticians. One could begin with the works of God. This possibility, which is the most Biblical, presented itself to the Lutheran teachers, and some gave brief attention to the works of God in their *locus de Deo*. But they all preferred to treat

such an all-embracing theme as the works of God under the following *loci*: Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, etc. Finally one could begin like the ancient creeds and the *Augsburg Confession* with the doctrine of the Trinity. This was the approach of Chemnitz, as it had been for Melancthon, Selnecker, Heerbrand, Hafenreffer, and all the Lutheran dogmaticians until Gerhard.¹ In a sense this made all dogmatics a sort of commentary on the creeds. None of these earlier theologians offer any discussion of the attributes of God, except in passing, as they expound their Trinitarian description of God.

It remained for John Gerhard,² the innovator, to offer the first extended and detailed discourse on the divine attributes in Lutheran dogmatics. This had to be done sooner or later. The systematic theology of the Lutherans had left a real gap at this point, and it had to be filled. But there is a real risk in what Gerhard attempts to do. Can the attributes of God be considered prior to (and apart from) His works? Does not all of Scripture and experience teach us that God is known a posteriori through His works of judgment and grace? And surely the doctrine of the Trinity, which introduces God as Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter, should precede and lead to an enumeration and discussion of the divine attributes? Unquestionably aware of these and other objections to his procedure, Gerhard nevertheless elects to begin his discussion of God with the divine attributes. Why? He offers no reason. It is probably due to his concern for logical order.

Quenstedt,³ however, defends Gerhard's procedure, which he and all the later dogmaticians follow. He begins with a distinction: God can be viewed in an absolute sense according to His essence without regard to the Three Persons, or relatively as being Three Persons. Viewed in the first manner we speak of God's essence and essential attributes; we speak of what He is. Viewed relatively we consider the essence of God according to the Trinity of Persons and the characteristics of the divine Persons; we consider who God is. Quenstedt is arguing against Chemnitz's⁴ more direct and simple procedure.

To Chemnitz all articles of faith center in this article of the Trinity. We know what God is by knowing who He is. And in his discussion Chemnitz chose to distinguish only between God's essence (His unity and trinity) and His will as it works its way out in creation, preservation, and particularly in all His gifts to the church. According to this procedure any discussion of divine attributes is subsumed under the *locus* on

the Trinity or the works of God, which include the whole of dogmatics. To Chemnitz revealed theology should begin with the doctrine of the Trinity, which tells us who the true God is and leads directly to what God has done.

Quenstedt disagrees with this method of procedure⁵ and says that although the doctrine of the Trinity is fundamental and necessary to know for salvation, it is also a matter of revelation that God is good, wise, just, etc. This is true, but Quenstedt has hardly proved thereby that his method is preferable; and as a matter of fact Chemnitz's approach gets to the subject of the works of God (redemption, the Gospel) much sooner than Quenstedt's. Quenstedt's approach is unquestionably more logical and allows for more discussion of the attributes which had not been given sufficient attention by the earlier teachers. But it is based on a questionable distinction and tends to abstract God from His works which are always the works of the triune God. It is interesting and rather ironic that Quenstedt as a matter of fact gives rather perfunctory attention to the divine attributes when he finally gets down to it—much less than Gerhard had done.

What are divine attributes? What is their function? What is the relation of the divine attributes to the essence of God? Are the divine attributes real? Perhaps the best beginning answer to these several questions is supplied by Quenstedt.⁶ "Attributes," he says, "are nothing else than inadequate⁷ conceptions of the divine essence Since our finite intellect cannot adequately conceive of the infinite and absolutely simple essence of God by a single adequate conception, it therefore apprehends the same by distinct and inadequate conceptions which represent only inadequately the divine essence. These inadequate conceptions are called the properties and attributes of God, properties because they have to do with the divine essence and denote it, attributes because they are attributed to the same by our intellect." It is clear that Quenstedt's point of departure for this statement lies in the absolute unity and simplicity of God, that God is *ohne Stücke, Deus impartibilis*, as the Augsburg Confession, Art. I, had put it. This fact must never be overlooked. And yet God has attributes which we can grasp with our understanding and to which we can cling with our faith.

But how can a number of different attributes be reconciled with the infinite and undivided essence of God? The attributes of God, although they are considered separately, are actually all one with the divine

essence. In this way the immutability of God is safeguarded.⁸ Since there is neither composition nor accidents in God, this must be the case: the attributes cannot actually (*realiter*) differ from the divine essence, but are distinguished from God's essence only according to our way of thinking.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that, because the divine attributes are one with the divine essence, they are therefore only phenomenal or nominal or illusory. The attributes are real and they are in God prior to any conceptualization of ours.⁹

It would be a further mistake to assume that the attributes which are all one in God are therefore confused and not to be distinguished from each other. Such a mistake would conflict with all that Scripture says about God and would caricature God utterly.¹⁰ For instance, it is necessary to say that God's love redeems and His wrath condemns. But is it possible not to confuse the divine attributes when they are all identified with God Himself and therefore cannot be distinguished from each other *realiter*?¹¹ How can we speak of different divine attributes, if they are all identical with the same thing?

Hollaz attempts to extricate us from this apparent contradiction. He says,¹² "When we assert that the mercy and justice, the wisdom and goodness of God do not differ *realiter* in the Creator in the same way as they do in His creatures, but differ only formally, the foundation of our assertion lies in the supreme simplicity of God and His perfection according to which the divine attributes cannot be distinguished ontologically from the divine essence or even from each other. For although certain attributes actually produce distinct operations and perform different effects, still these attributes themselves remain simply one." Hollaz is saying that the attributes can and must be distinguished by their effects, which are quite different. And he means to say that, although they are all one with the divine nature, there is a foundation within the divine nature for the distinctions we make on the basis of Scripture.

Quenstedt¹³ attacks the same problem with his usual meticulousness and perhaps helps us a bit to understand better the Lutheran solution. He points out that we often think of properties as being distinct from their subjects. And this is perfectly in order. Not so in the case of God, however. There are no divine properties or perfections which in reality are distinct from God Himself. What happens is that we are forced to

conceptualize God in terms of properties. But strictly speaking God has no properties (*proprietas*) but is an absolutely undivided essence which is without diversity or composition of any kind. We, however, are incapable of taking in the essence of God in one sweep, as it were, we cannot get at this undivided essence with any one adequate conception.

“Therefore,” says Quenstedt, “we apprehend it with conceptions which are inadequate and distinct from each other, conceptions which only inadequately represent the divine essence. These inadequate conceptions, which are identified with the reality of the divine essence itself, are apprehended by us in terms of properties which we call attributes. And so with our intellect we distinguish things which in reality are not distinct, and we conceive of the divine essence at one time as a transcendent Spirit, at another time as omnipotent, at still another time as all knowing, etc.” The divine attributes do not denote anything superadded to the divine essence, Quenstedt says, but are only inadequate conceptions of the infinitely perfect essence. The essence itself is like a vast ocean of all infinite divine perfections. We cannot exhaust this ocean with any unitary conception, and so by means of various conceptions we draw drop by drop something, as it were, from that infinity.

But if God’s essence is free of all composition, if each attribute (such as infinity, omnipotence, eternity) is said to be the very essence of God apprehended differently by us,¹⁴ and if therefore the distinction between the attributes is only conceptual and not real,¹⁵ have we any right to ascribe attributes to God at all? And have we the right to ascribe any reality to the attributes? This is the nagging question which haunts the old Lutherans as they struggle to affirm both the reality of God’s attributes and the total perfection of the divine essence.

No adequate reply can be given the question except to say that Scripture, which is God’s revelation of Himself, speaks of His perfect Godhead and of His attributes, and does so not just metaphorically but literally. Quenstedt also warns us not to create difficulties unnecessarily. That God is without composition does not imply that He is without attributes. And the simplicity of God is quite compatible with His being one and true and good. Quenstedt also says,¹⁶ “Although the divine attributes are considered to be in God according to our mode of thinking, this mode of thinking is not without all foundation in reality. Nor are the attributes predicated of God only loosely and anthropathi-

cally. But they truly and actually correspond to Him. Thus, when God is said to have life in Himself (John 5:26), what can be more certain than that God truly has life, and this means life not according to some anthropopathism, but truly and actually.”

One might wonder if the intricate and scholastic discussions of Hollaz and Quenstedt concerning the essence and attributes of God have really helped us to know God better. Perhaps a more Biblical approach such as one finds in the earlier dogmaticians would be preferable—certainly more winsome. But we must in all fairness to these two scholastic theologians recognize that they were speaking to a problem which was very real in their day and has not gone away to this day.¹⁷ As evangelical Christians they thought it possible and incumbent upon them to speak cognitively of the absolutely transcendent God, to affirm His uniqueness and *simplicitas*, but also to mention the other attributes which seemed to conflict with His transcendence and *simplicitas*. What they tried to do was to penetrate (inadequately of course) and give a description (inadequate) of the transcendent and simple Deity in the light of the Biblical attributes. This seemed the only possible course open to them, a course which could end in mystery and paradox, but also in knowledge and true worship.

If there is difficulty in reconciling the attributes of God with His perfect essence, there is equal difficulty reconciling the divine attributes with each other. In what order does a theologian arrange the divine attributes? How many attributes are there? How does one classify them? Since the attributes are not distinguishable from the divine essence *realiter*, there can be no order among them; one attribute does not precede or follow the other except conceptually.¹⁸ Therefore all the questions above are really quite open. And in fact there is almost no agreement among the Lutheran dogmaticians as they go about the arbitrary business of arranging, numbering, and classifying the attributes.

Concerning the number of attributes Baier lists 15, Gerhard 19, Hollaz 24, and Quenstedt no less than 31. Calov treats 10 attributes (a perfect number) in his *Apodixis Articulorum Fidei*¹⁹; in his *Systema*²⁰ he gives consideration to 22, ranked within four different classifications. This great diversity in the number of attributes was due to three obvious factors. (1) In the nature of the case the numbering and listing of divine attributes is an arbitrary business. The dogmaticians all recognize this and, for the most part, spend little time defending their particular list

and order. (2) There is not always agreement on which were actually divine attributes. None of the old Lutherans thought of the Trinity as an attribute of God. Gerhard does not include unity as an attribute either, but treats the theme prior to his discussion of attributes. The same is done by him with respect to the life of God. All the later teachers consider unity and life to be attributes of God. (3) It is always possible to subsume one or two or three attributes under one basic theme. For instance, Quenstedt and Hollaz list incomprehensibility as a divine attribute, Gerhard and Baier do not, obviously subsuming this concept under such other attributes as infinity and simplicity. Again Gerhard and Quenstedt consider perfection as an attribute of God; Hollaz subsumes the idea under other attributes which he treats. Quenstedt includes the will and the freedom of God as attributes; Hollaz only the will. But Baier does not consider the divine will an attribute, but an act of the divine intellect and power.²¹ Examples of such differences could be multiplied.

In the matter of classification of attributes the Lutherans realized that they were again dealing with an open question, and for this reason we find no unanimity among them. By far the most complex list of classifications is presented by Gerhard.²² He begins with the usual warning that the attributes are all one with the divine essence and that there is no disagreement (*contrarietas*) between them, since there is no opposition in the divine essence itself.

No doubt feeling the difficulty of the problem, Gerhard lists no less than nine different classifications. (1) Certain attributes are predicated of both God and man. However, they are only accidents [unessential qualities, predicates] in men, whereas they are essential in God (for example, God is good and wise). Other attributes can be ascribed only to God (eternity, infinity). (2) Certain things are said of God absolutely without relation to His creation (for example, God is eternal and immense). Other things are said of God relative to His creation (example, God is Creator, King, Judge). (3) Some things are said of God only in a negative way (He is invisible, immortal, incorporeal). Other things are said of God affirmatively (He is good, righteous). (4) Some attributes are predicated of God in a strict sense: He is good, wise, etc. Other things are said of God in a loose or figurative sense, as when by anthropathism human feelings and members are attributed to Him. (5) Some things are said of God in the abstract (God is life, truth, goodness). They are also said of God concretely (God is living, true,

good). (6) Certain attributes are ascribed simply to the Divinity apart from any external operations (God is a spiritual essence, invisible, eternal, immutable, immortal, and infinite). Other attributes are ascribed to God as He deals with His creatures (God is powerful, good, righteous, wise, free, true). Perfection, majesty, glory, and goodness are ascribed to God in both cases. (7) Some attributes are internal, such as infinity and eternity. Others are external, such as omnipotence and omnipresence. Only some of the external attributes are imitable, such as goodness and righteousness. (8) Some attributes apply to God from all eternity (God is infinite, immense). Other attributes apply to God in time as the Creator and Conservator of all things. (9) A distinction is made between attributes which are common to the entire Trinity and those which are characteristic only of the individual Persons such as the fatherhood of the Father, the eternal generation of the Son.

One can perhaps find justification for each of these classifications listed by Gerhard. And they all serve to illustrate the variety of ways in which the attributes may be viewed—and incidentally the arbitrariness of the whole enterprise. Gerhard is clearly intent upon presenting as complete a picture of God as possible by his discussion of the divine attributes. And with this prime interest of his in mind we note that he felt compelled to treat the names and works of God along with his discussion of the attributes.

But the structure of Gerhard's system of classification was too complicated, too cumbersome to follow. And so almost without exception²³ the later dogmaticians treat the divine attributes according to a very general twofold classification which can be traced back to Gerhard. They distinguish between absolute, sometimes called negative or immanent attributes (ἀνεύγητα), and relative, sometimes called positive or external attributes (ἐνευγητικά).

With such a twofold classification they ordinarily begin with such attributes as unity, immutability, eternity, and infinity, and conclude with the goodness of God. The first set of attributes seeks to describe God as He is in Himself apart from His creation. The second are *extra se* and seek to describe God as He acts in relation to creation and especially to men. The distinction is, of course, not in any sense to be considered ontological, but is only in respect to our way of thinking, "since all things are the same in the divine essence, and nothing is in God which is not God Himself."²⁴