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THE ECUMENICAL LUTHER

THE DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF HIS DOCTRINAL HERMENEUTIC

RICHARD P. BUCHER

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To my family, my joy in the Lord,
without whose encouragement
this book would not have come to be.—RPB

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FOREWORD

The title of this book, *The Ecumenical Luther*, initially appears to be an oxymoron or at least counter-intuitive. After all, Luther's thunderous "Nein" to various doctrinal positions of the papacy, as well as to Erasmus, Müntzer, Zwingli, and the Anabaptists—not to mention his attacks on Schwärmerei of every stripe—does not appear to be very ecumenical. Indeed, Luther's assertion—and Luther delighted in assertions![1]—that "we can be saved without love . . . but not without pure doctrine and faith" makes him a sticky wicket in ecumenical dialogues, especially when he continues with the claim that it is specious and the devil's argument that cautions against "offending against love and the harmony among the churches."[2] Such assertions by Luther, often complemented by assigning his opponents to the devil, as well as threats to break their necks with doctrine, make him an unlikely candidate for ecumenist of the year.

Our present religious culture still stands in the shadows of Pietism and its stepchildren, the church growth movement and the apparently unquenchable appetite for works on spirituality of dubious doctrinal content. The classical Pietists, such as Spener, certainly appreciated Luther's Reformation of doctrine, but they argued that doctrinal reform needed to be completed by reform of life, by regeneration. The ecumenism of Pietism, with its interiorization and individualization, was and continues to be the ecumenism of religious experience. The early ecumenical movement's motto that "creeds divide, but deeds unite" echoes the priority of life over doctrine. To such an ecumenical orientation Luther would reply, "The proper role of the gospel is not to make people pious, but rather only to make Christians. To be a Christian is quite simply to be pious."[3] The opposite pole of this orientation to unity on the basis of shared experience is the more recent effort to add this, that, or the other "theological" thing to approximate Luther and his tradition to Roman Catholic and/or Orthodox teaching. Thus some of Luther's heirs, too, have difficulty reconciling his emphasis on doctrine with their own concerns and agendas. But Luther's "issue was teaching the truth. By comparison, nothing else really mattered. . . . 'For I know—God be praised—what my position is and where I shall stay. . . . If they [his opponents] do not need my doctrine, I need their grace still less, and I will let them rage and rant in the name of all devils, while I laugh in the name of God.' "[4] Luther has never been accused of indifferentism!

This "stiff-necked" Luther is well known. What is not so well known is why and how Luther understood doctrine. Thus Richard Bucher renders a great service to both Luther studies and Luther's contribution to ecumenical dialogue with this study of Luther's definition and use of doctrine. Bucher goes beyond the usual Luther citations that highlight his emphasis on doctrine to explore Luther's doctrinal hermeneutic, how Luther defined doctrine and determined whether or not a particular church teaching must be believed by all Christians. The key "interpretive lenses," Bucher argues, through which Luther judged and defined a necessary doctrine are his scriptural and evangelical canons. The former is based "on the right Scripture rightly interpreted," and the latter posits "that only a teaching necessary for salvation could be an article of faith."

Furthermore, Bucher presents Luther's development of his doctrinal hermeneutic in the historical context of his early writings, his dialogue with the *Unitas Fratrum*, the controversy with Zwingli over the Lord's Supper that came to a head at the Marburg Colloquy, and his "testament" and preparation for a proposed ecumenical council in the Schmalkald Articles. Bucher thereby allows the reader to see Luther's development in context and to grasp what Luther perceived to be at stake. The question, then, of Luther's understanding and use of doctrine is significant for understanding church history and historical theology, as well as for suggesting models for contemporary ecumenical dialogue that steer between the Scylla of false irenicism and the Charybdis of false polemicism. Last, but by no means least, Bucher notes throughout his study that Luther's concern for doctrine was never a theological parlor game; rather, it was a drive to express a pastoral theology that liberates burdened consciences.

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PREFACE

In his masterful *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, Werner Elert observed that "[t]he early church was never in doubt that unity in doctrine is a prerequisite of altar fellowship. No one who taught false doctrine might receive Holy Communion in an orthodox congregation."[1] But this correct observation begs the question: Unity in which doctrine(s)? Or, "On what doctrines must Christians agree to be in fellowship with one another?" It is all well and good to insist that agreement in doctrine presupposes altar fellowship. This is meaningless, however, unless all parties know what that "doctrine" is. Is the "doctrine" that requires agreement every teaching of the canonical Scriptures? Is it every teaching that the *magisterium* of the church has called "doctrine"? Or is it only the doctrines included in the ecumenical creeds, in the *regula fidei* (rule of faith), or in the Lutheran Confessions? If so, why these particular doctrines? What is it about the doctrines of the creeds and the rule of faith that caused the ancient church to deem agreement on them necessary for unity? Did the doctrines of the creeds and the *regula fidei* share a common definition, or were they included because the exigencies of history forced the church to give them an inflated importance? It is not particularly helpful to say that only essential or fundamental doctrines (that is, dogma) need be commonly confessed and believed. The designation of some doctrines as "essential" inevitably leads to the same kinds of questions, namely, who or what decides that a particular doctrine is essential? How is this determined?

These are the questions that I pondered beginning with my formation at Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Indiana. These also are the questions that eventually led me to the doctoral program in theology at Boston University School of Theology under the tutelage and guidance of Dr. Carter Lindberg. Specifically, I wanted to know how Martin Luther might answer these questions. I wanted to know whether and, if so, how the great reformer defined essential or necessary doctrine—doctrine that is necessary for salvation and unity. This seemed an important point of departure because Luther's intensive interest in doctrine is well known. The result of this research was my doctrinal dissertation, out of which this book has grown.

Thanks and gratitude is owed to several people for their support, encouragement, and guidance during the writing of this book. First and

foremost, I wish to thank my wife, Amy, and our children, Amanda and Samuel, for their patience and encouragement, which never wavered during the long process of research and writing. I also am deeply in the debt of my *Doktor-Vater*, Carter Lindberg, who throughout my acquaintance with him has personified a rich balance of academic brilliance with gracious wit and constant encouragement. I chose Boston University as the site of my graduate work because of him, and I wasn't disappointed. I also wish to thank my editors at Concordia Publishing House, Mark Sell and Dawn Weinstock. Their many suggestions to this novice author proved invaluable and improved the manuscript considerably. Finally, a word of gratitude is owed to my former congregation, Trinity Lutheran Church, Clinton, Massachusetts. If not for the willingness of this people of God to "share" me with my doctoral studies, this book would not exist. To God alone be the glory and praise.

1

INTRODUCTION

"The significance of doctrine for Luther can scarcely be overestimated."[1] So said the dean of Luther scholars Bernhard Lohse in his magisterial *Martin Luther's Theology*. Lohse highlighted what has often been observed about Martin Luther: Doctrine, rather than ethics or morality, was the focus of his life's work.[2] Indeed, this was Luther's self-evaluation. In the autumn of 1533, as he looked back on what he had accomplished, Luther remarked that he considered his emphasis on doctrine to be his life's work.

> Doctrine and life must be distinguished. Life is bad among us, as it is among the papists, but we don't fight about life and condemn the papists on that account. Wycliffe and Huss didn't know this and attacked [the papacy] for its life. I don't scold myself into becoming good, but I fight over the Word and whether our adversaries teach it in its purity. That doctrine should be attacked—this has never before happened. This is my calling. Others have censured only life, but to treat doctrine is to strike at the most sensitive point . . . .
>
> . . . When the Word remains pure, then the life (even if there is something lacking in it) can be molded properly. Everything depends on the Word, and the pope has abolished the Word and created another one. With this I have won, and I have won nothing else than that I teach aright. Although we are better morally, this isn't anything to fight about. It's the teaching that breaks the pope's neck.[3]

According to Luther, fighting over doctrine was his calling. But what did Luther mean by *doctrine*? How did he define it?

The ecumenical movement has resulted in a renewed focus on the definition and nature of Christian doctrine. For example, Gerhard Ebeling made the astute observation that questions of doctrinal differences inevitably lead to questions of the meaning of doctrine. Ebeling stated: "The doctrinal differences that divide the church can at least amount, and perhaps indeed ultimately always do amount, to differences concerning the real meaning of the concept 'doctrine' as such."[4] According to Ebeling, a criterion that would determine which doctrines were divisive and why was needed.[5] In the same spirit, Eeva Martikainen has written that churches should be asking questions about

> the nature of doctrine and its significance for unity. Doctrine is not just a formal legal entity: it is organically related to the gospel. For this reason we need to ask what the essence, structure, and content of doctrine is, and what its significance is for faith, the life of the church and for spirituality and church unity. Without basic research into the nature of doctrine, the suitability and acceptability of various ecumenical models for the perspectives of the different churches will not be properly assessed.[6]

Thus defining doctrine and striving for unity have gone hand in hand.

So it was with Luther. His interest was not merely doctrine but the definition of doctrine. Luther gradually developed a method to determine whether a church teaching was a necessary doctrine, that is, an article of faith, a doctrine that must be believed by all Christians. As Luther conversed with the tradition he had inherited, as he pondered and taught the Bible, and as he reacted to his literary opponents, his method of defining necessary doctrines came into focus. I call this method Luther's *doctrinal hermeneutic*. In this method, *hermeneutic* takes on its basic sense of "definition" or "interpretation," which is the meaning of *hermeneuo* and its cognates.[7]

Luther's doctrinal hermeneutic was composed of two interpretive canons that he applied to the teaching in question to determine whether it was an article of faith: a scriptural canon and an evangelical canon. In its most basic sense, the scriptural canon stated that a necessary doctrine must be based only on Scripture, not on human words. The evangelical canon in its basic form posited that only a teaching necessary for salvation could be an article of faith. As his doctrinal hermeneutic developed, Luther nuanced each canon in important ways. For example, when his opponents based their teachings on suspect Bible passages or on suspect interpretations, Luther emphasized that necessary doctrine must be based not only on Scripture but also on the right Scripture rightly interpreted. Sometimes Luther applied the canons separately; at other times he applied them concurrently. In short, the scriptural and evangelical canons became interpretive lenses through which the reformer judged and defined whether a doctrine was one that must be believed.

As it does today, Luther's efforts to define doctrine often occurred within the context of dialogues for unity. Luther used his doctrinal hermeneutic not only to indicate what was necessary for salvation but also what was necessary for unity. Through an examination of three ecumenical[8] dialogues in which the reformer participated, we will see how Luther applied his doctrinal hermeneutic. These dialogues are (1) the dialogue with the *Unitas Fratrum* in the 1520s, (2) the dialogue with the Swiss and South Germans at the 1529 Marburg Colloquy, and (3) the dialogue with the Roman church via the 1537 Schmalkald Articles.

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Luther's Doctrinal Hermeneutic as Found in His 1518 to 1525 Writings

During the years 1518 to 1525, Martin Luther developed a method of determining whether a doctrine was necessary to be believed. At the heart of this method of judging doctrine were two canons—one scriptural, the other evangelical—that formed the basis of Luther's doctrinal criteriology. As Luther developed his method, each canon was further nuanced to become the interpretive lenses through which the reformer judged whether a particular doctrine must or may be believed. This is Luther's doctrinal hermeneutic.

Documents written by Luther between 1518 and 1525 reveal that such a doctrinal hermeneutic existed at various stages of development. This assertion must be made with a certain degree of caution, lest one falls prey to a kind of textual eisegesis. To a certain extent, one can agree with Norman Cantor that "[w]e tend to discover the past we set out to find."[1] It is temptingly easy to choose selectively from the vast literature of history so one may superimpose personal cultural or theological agendas on the sources and have history say what one wants it to say. Such a temptation is especially alluring in Luther research.[2] Thus before the evidence is brought forth, this chapter must deal briefly with a method of locating and evaluating the evidence.

To argue that Luther developed a definition of what makes a doctrine necessary to be believed depends on being conversant with the terminology that he used to describe such a doctrine. What words or phrases did Luther use when he wanted to indicate that he was speaking of essential doctrine? Because Luther was a child of the late Middle Ages, one needs to be familiar with the vocabulary used by Luther's predecessors. If it can be reasonably proven that the high and late Middle Ages used certain words and phrases to describe doctrine that must be believed, then it is justifiable to assume that the same words and phrases identify discussion of necessary doctrine in Luther's writings.

Of course, Luther did not develop his doctrinal hermeneutic in isolation. He did not arrive at this complex of ideas in the calm, detached environs of his study. Instead, what is true about Luther's theological development in general also holds true for his doctrinal hermeneutic: Two sources combined in its formation. Luther developed his doctrinal hermeneutic from his study of Scripture and, especially, the gospel of justification by grace through faith. He also developed it in reaction to literary and political opponents who repeatedly accused him of heresy and unbelief and threatened Luther with excommunication because of the doctrines he put in writing. This led the reformer to think through the whole question of necessary doctrine because voices within the tradition he had inherited had declared that only those who persistently disobeyed the most important doctrines were guilty of heresy. The most prominent group of Luther's opponents in this period (1518 to 1525) were the Catholic controversialists. Their chief accusations and condemnations of Luther, therefore, are briefly explored to identify what precipitated Luther's reaction.

The first part of this chapter briefly examines the vocabulary of doctrine in vogue in the late Middle Ages before turning to an exploration of the language that Luther used. Part two demonstrates and describes Luther's doctrinal hermeneutic, locating the evidence within the social and theological context, especially the context of Catholic controversialist critique.

THE VOCABULARY OF NECESSARY DOCTRINE

THE VOCABULARY OF DOCTRINE IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

Since the Roman Catholic Council of Vatican I, *dogma* has been the word most often associated with doctrine that all Christians are to believe,[3] though in recent years Roman Catholic scholarship has tended to discard or reinterpret the word so it is less juridical.[4] Was a similar word used in the late Middle Ages? If not, what words or phrases did theologians of that period employ to designate a necessary doctrine?

As Albert Lange has shown, though *dogma* was occasionally used in the Middle Ages, the most common term was *articulus fidei*.[5] To what kind of doctrines did "articles of faith" refer? Jaroslav Pelikan has provided a succinct answer.

> The basic truth of theology consisted in the articles of faith. . . . The term "article of faith" could refer to a particular catholic truth stated explicitly in the creed or added to the creed by the authority of the church over the course of centuries; or it could be "the sum total of all catholic truth," which was complete and integral already and brooked

> no addition by anyone. The articles of faith included those truths that were expressly taught in Scripture and such truths as could be necessarily inferred from Scripture: on this everyone agreed, but not on the question whether there were also some articles of faith not contained in Scripture but transmitted apart from Scripture through authentic tradition. In addition to the articles of faith of whatever sort, however, there were teachings that the church permitted as belonging to "the piety of faith" but did not require, as, for example, various pious beliefs about the Virgin Mary. Even among the articles of faith, not all were of equal importance with the fundamental doctrines of the Trinity and the person of Christ.[6]

Thus the expression *articulus fidei* was the terminology used when the church required belief, as contrasted with "pious beliefs" or "opinions" that had not yet reached the status of articles of faith. However, because some imprecision existed about the definition of *articulus fidei*, confusion was inevitable.[7]

The opposite of an article of faith was a heresy. Thus William of Ockham could write that a "catholic truth" was one "held to be catholic by all Christian and catholic peoples." A heresy was "something contrary to divine Scripture or to the doctrine of the universal church." Such a heresy had to be held pertinaciously.[8] In addition to defining heresy, William also mentioned in passing that "catholic truth" and "the doctrine of the universal church" were still other ways that theologians of this period signaled a teaching that must be believed.

THE VOCABULARY THAT LUTHER USED TO IDENTIFY NECESSARY DOCTRINE

What words or phrases did Luther employ to define doctrine that was required? Not surprisingly, Luther wrote like a medieval man when he spoke of doctrine—but he didn't always use the terms in conventional ways.

Articles of Faith

Like his medieval forebears, when Luther wanted to speak of doctrines that all Christians must believe, he most often used the phrase "article(s) of faith."[9] At times, Luther clearly used this terminology to refer to one of the statements of the Apostles' Creed, such as in "Discussion on How Confession Should Be Made," in which the reformer gave the following advice: "The man about to make confession (who is celebrated far and wide) should do away completely with the confusion of distinctions such as these: . . . [sins] against the seven sacraments, against the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, against the eight Beatitudes, against the nine alien sins, against the twelve articles of faith."[10] Similar to this was Luther's reference in "Bondage of the Will" to the statement "I believe . . . in the

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LUTHER'S DIALOGUE WITH THE *UNITAS FRATRUM*

In fall 1994, a Consultation in Geneva (Prague IV) was held to discuss the topic "Towards a Renewed Dialogue between the First and Second Reformations."[1] Heirs of the "first reformation"[2] (Waldensian, Czechoslovak Hussite Church, Czech Brethren, etc.) met with heirs of the "second Reformation" (Lutheran and Reformed) to discuss, in part, whether a better understanding of each reformation could be a worthwhile contribution to today's ecumenical movement. In reviewing the period 1522 to 1524, some participants touched on the dialogue held between Martin Luther and such sixteenth-century Hussite bodies as the Utraquists and the Unity of Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*). The sense that somewhere in the relations between Luther and the Hussites lies an ecumenical plumb line to guide us is not new.[3]

Chapter 2 demonstrated that an intentionally nuanced doctrinal hermeneutic can be traced in Luther's writings from 1518 to 1525. He used this hermeneutic to determine which Christian teachings were necessary for all Christians to believe. But were such articles of faith necessary for unity as well as for salvation? Did Luther apply his doctrinal hermeneutic to unity discussions in which he participated, which would mean he based unity among Christian groups only on necessary doctrines?

This chapter demonstrates that Luther did seek to achieve unity with the Brethren during the period 1522 to 1524 on the basis of his doctrinal hermeneutic. Why choose the Brethren as a test case? Because they are an excellent example of another fellowship actively seeking unity with Luther and vice versa. The focus of discussion in this chapter is Luther's 1523 treatise "The Adoration of the Sacrament," which was the reformer's primary written contribution to the dialogue with the Brethren.[4] As defined by his doctrinal hermeneutic, the teachings Luther insisted on for unity in this treatise are necessary ones. The first part of this chapter will sketch the Brethren's beginnings, theology, and first contacts with Luther. The second part will focus on Luther's treatise "Adoration of the Sacrament."

UNITY OF BRETHREN: BEGINNINGS, THEOLOGY, AND CONTACTS WITH LUTHER[5]

By the early 1520s, the Unity of Brethren had existed as a separate body for approximately 50 years.[6] They had grown out of the various renewal movements that were prevalent in Bohemia and Moravia after the martyrdom of Jan Hus.[7] The Brethren were one of several small groups that had become dissatisfied with the Hussite Utraquist[8] church, led by archbishop Jan Rokycana (ca. 1390–1471). The Hussites, loosely united under the 1420 "Four Articles of Prague," had successfully steered the passage of the *Compacta* through the Council of Basle in 1436. The *Compacta*, a restricted version of the "Four Articles of Prague," gave the Utraquists the right to (1) freely preach God's Word; (2) administer the Lord's Supper in both kinds; (3) prohibit secular authority to priests and monks; and (4) call for repentance at all levels of Christian society and for the punishment of mortal sins. However, contrary to the Hussites' hope that the *Compacta* would be valid for all Christendom, the council ruled that the "Four Articles" were valid only for Christians in Bohemia who were willing to be governed by the agreement. This effectively created a special Czech Utraquist Church alongside the Czech Roman Catholic Church. Led by Rokycana, the Utraquist Church struck the Hussite middle course. The Utraquists attempted to be broad-minded enough to allow room for the many Hussite factions in Bohemia, but there was widespread dissatisfaction with this course. Thus many small lay groups began to form, groups that were seeking "a surer salvation" than the one offered by the Utraquists.

One of these groups, led by Rehor (Gregory), formed a congregation in the village of Kunvald in late 1457, and into it flowed various Hussite groups. Their actual break with the Utraquists and the Church of Rome came ten years later when they created a new priestly order, largely through the direction of Rehor. On March 26, 1467, they chose three priests from among themselves by lot. With this act, the Unity of Brethren became an officially separate entity. Later, for the sake of the weak in faith among the Brethren, the three priests were ordained by both a Roman and a Waldensian ordination.

The formation of unity and theology among the Brethren was influenced by Petr Chelcicky[9] (ca. 1380–?), an outstanding lay preacher whose writings they had enthusiastically read. In general, the theology of the Brethren stressed Communion in both kinds, encouraged a strict biblicism, opposed all authorities and writings that contradicted God's Law, observed the seven sacraments, rejected transubstantiation and a figurative conception of the Sacrament,[10] and showed a readiness to follow completely the teachings of Christ, especially as they were found in the Ser-

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Implications of Luther's Doctrinal Hermeneutic for the Church

The focus of this book has been a methodological pattern observed in Luther's writings and ecumenical dialogues, a pattern defined in this study as Luther's doctrinal hermeneutic. This doctrinal hermeneutic was the reformer's method of judging which church teachings were articles of faith that all Christians were obligated to believe. Luther developed this method as he pondered the nature of Scripture and the Gospel and as he reacted to competing definitions of doctrine. What resulted was a rigorous pair of interpretive canons—one scriptural and the other evangelical—that the reformer consistently used to assess whether a teaching was necessary for salvation. Far from being a mere historical curiosity, Luther's doctrinal hermeneutic has far-reaching implications for the contemporary church, implications both pastoral and ecumenical.

Luther's doctrinal hermeneutic has profoundly relevant implications for pastoral care because of its emphasis on Christian freedom. It was the overarching question of salvation—"What must I do to be saved?"—that drove Luther to apply his canons to the church teachings of his day. Excoriated as heretic and threatened with excommunication because he questioned and rejected certain church teachings, Luther personally knew the angst of a wrongly burdened conscience. Did one's salvation really depend on belief in and obedience to every church teaching, as certain of Luther's contemporaries were claiming? If every teaching did not need to be believed, then which ones were necessary? Luther's doctrinal hermeneutic provided the answer to these salvific questions: Only those teachings that are based on the right Scripture rightly interpreted and that are necessary for salvation—connected to the gospel of justification—can be necessary articles of faith. If believing a particular doctrine did not make one a Christian, then disbelieving it did not make one a non-Christian. Thus Luther's doctrinal hermeneutic liberated the conscience by demonstrating that one's salvation depended only on believing necessary articles of faith. Unfortunately, the full unfolding of the implications this has for pastoral care will have to wait for a more complete treatment.

It is what Luther's doctrinal hermeneutic contributes to the contemporary Ecumenical Movement, however, that is the subject of this chapter. Because Luther's doctrinal hermeneutic served him well in several ecumenical dialogues in the sixteenth century, it has much to recommend it now. Obviously, Luther's ecumenical context was quite different from that of the present day. His efforts were aimed at preserving or salvaging unity among groups in the Western church threatened with disunity. By contrast, the efforts of the current Ecumenical Movement focus on restoring unity among hundreds of (in most cases) long-separated denominations. That caveat aside, the remainder of the chapter will show that Luther's doctrinal hermeneutic is a much-needed reforming word for the Ecumenical Movement.

THE MODERN ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

Unity in the holy Christian church is a given, both in the sense that it already exists and in the sense that it is a gift of God, given in Christ. This inner or spiritual unity in the *Una Sancta* consists in faith that trusts in Christ alone as Savior. Such inner unity exists among all who have this faith in Christ, wherever they may be throughout the world (John 10:16; 17:20–21; Eph. 4:4–6; Rom. 12:4–5; 1 Corinthians 12–14).

Just as the one church can be considered inwardly or outwardly,[1] so also can church unity. There exists not only an inner unity but also an outer or external unity. This external unity or church fellowship consists in fellowship in Word and Sacraments. Its basis is agreement in doctrine and a common confession of faith. Unlike inner unity, which cannot fail, outer unity can be divided and often has been. It is the will of God that Christians strive to preserve or restore external unity in the visible church, thereby manifesting the unity in the *Una Sancta* (Rom. 15:5–6; 1 Cor. 1:10–12; Eph. 4:1–3). This bears repeating: Such striving for and preserving of external unity is not optional but is commanded by God. It is this external unity that is the domain of ecumenism[2] (the work of uniting the external church) and the Ecumenical Movement.

The birthplace of the modern Ecumenical Movement is usually said to have been the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. This conference, chaired by John R. Mott, had gathered to plan mission strategy to avoid the scandal of the competing claims of different churches.[3] Because discussing doctrinal differences was forbidden at the Edinburgh Conference, attendee Episcopal Bishop Charles H. Brent decided to work toward an organization that would examine the causes of the divisions among the churches. It was largely through his efforts that the first Faith and Order Conference was held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1927 to discuss these matters.[4] Two years earlier, under the leadership of Nathan

ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Augsburg Confession
ARG	*Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*
BSLK	*Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-utherischen Kirche*. 11th ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992.
CCath	Corpus Catholicorum. Münster: Aschendorff, 1919–.
CR	Corpus Reformatorum. Vols. 1–28. Halle: C. A. Schwetschke, 1834–60.
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
ECUSA	Episcopal Church in the United States of America
K-W	Kolb, Robert, and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord*. Translated by Charles Arand et al. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000.
LCMS	The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
LQ	*Lutheran Quarterly*
LW	Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works*. American Edition. General editors Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann. 56 vols. St. Louis: Concordia, and Philadelphia: Muhlenberg and Fortress, 1955–86.
SA	Schmalkald Articles
StL	Luther, Martin. *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften*. 2d ed. 23 vols. in 24. Edited by Johann Georg Walch. St. Louis: Concordia, 1881–1910.
UuA	Volz, Hans, and Heinrich Ulbrich, eds. *Urkunden und Aktenstücke zur Geschichte von Martin Luthers Scmalkaldischen Artikeln (1536–1574)*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1957.
WA	Luther, Martin. *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausabe. Schriften*. 68 vols. Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883–1999.
WABr	Luther, Martin. *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausabe. Briefwechsel*. 18 vols. Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1930–85.

WATr Luther, Martin. *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausabe. Tischreden*. 6 vols. Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1912–21. Reprinted in 2000.

WCC World Council of Churches

Z Zwingli. Ulrich. *Huldreich Zwinglis sämtliche Werke*. Edited by Emil Egli and Georg Finsler. Corpus Reformatorum, vols. 88–101 (I–XIV). Reprint, Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 1983.

ZKG *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*

NOTES

FOREWORD

1. See Harding Meyer, " 'Delectari assertionibus' On the Issue of the Authority of Christian Testimony," in *Piety, Politics, and Ethics: Reformation Studies in Honor of George W. Forell*, ed. Carter Lindberg, Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies 3 (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1984), 1–14.
2. LW 27:41f. (= WA 40/2:51.13ff.).
3. WA 10/1.2:430.30–32.
4. James Kittelson, "Luther on Being 'Lutheran,' " *Lutheran Quarterly* 12:1 (Spring 2003): 99–110, here 106 with citation from "Luther's Warning to His Dear German People" (LW 47:27–28, 30).

PREFACE

1. Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, trans. N. E. Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia, 1966), 109.

CHAPTER 1

1. Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, trans. and ed. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 9.
2. See, for example, Carter Lindberg, "Luther's Critique of the Ecumenical Assumption That Doctrine Divides but Service Unites," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 27 (Fall 1990): 679–96.
3. LW 54:110 (= WATr 1:294–95, no. 624).
4. Gerhard Ebeling, "The Significance of Doctrinal Differences for the Division of the Church," in *Word and Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 164.
5. Ebeling, "Significance of Doctrinal Differences," 166. It was this same observation that motivated George Lindbeck to formulate his "cultural-linguistic" definition of doctrine. "It has become apparent to me, during twenty-five years of involvement in ecumenical discussions and in teaching about the history and present status of doctrines, that those of us who are engaged in these activities lack adequate categories for conceptualizing the problems that arise. We are often unable, for example, to specify the criteria we implicitly employ when we say that some changes are faithful to a doctrinal tradition and others unfaithful, or some doctrinal differences are church-dividing and others not" (George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984], 7).
6. Eeva Martikainen, "Future Emphases in Ecumenical Research," *Lutheran World Federation Documentation* 32 (March 1993): 102–3.
7. I have chosen to use *hermeneutic* in this simple sense, despite the fact that the word has a long history with varied usage and has been employed by both theologians and philosophers. In theology, *hermeneutic* has been applied to both the meaning of Scripture and doctrine. In philosophy, it has been applied to questions of epistemological method. For a summary of the various ways *hermeneutic* has been used in theology and philosophy, see Thomas B. Ommen, *The Hermeneutic of Dogma*, AAR Dissertation 11 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975), 1–60, 105–65.

8. To call the dialogues in which Luther was involved "ecumenical" is, admittedly, anachronistic. Neither Luther nor the other participants in the dialogues used the late nineteenth-century word *ecumenical* to describe their discussions. Furthermore, Luther's method of dialoguing was a far cry from the ecumenical dialogues of the late twentieth century, which involved face-to-face meetings among representatives of organizationally distinct church bodies. Despite this disclaimer, Luther's dialogues were ecumenical in the sense that they were conversations (either in person or in writing) for the purpose of achieving unity among Christians.
9. An exception to this silence is Martin Brecht's definitive three-volume biography of Luther. Brecht does not articulate Luther's view of doctrine in a substantial manner, but he does occasionally call attention to writings of Luther in which the reformer takes up the topic of doctrine. See Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483–1521*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985); *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521–1532*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); and *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 1532–1546*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).
10. Julius Köstlin, *The Theology of Luther in Its Historical Development and Inner Harmony*, trans. Charles E. Hay (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1897), 2:270–73.
11. Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 68, 172.
12. Gerhard Ebeling, "Doctrine and the Word of God," in *Word and Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 173–81.
13. Philip S. Watson, *Let God Be God!* (London: Epworth, 1947), 9–15.
14. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 3–8, 224–25.
15. Gerhard O. Forde, *Where God Meets Man* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1973), 120–23.
16. Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970), 1:138–39.
17. Kurt E. Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, ed. Robert Preus, vol. 9 of Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics (Ft. Wayne, Ind.: International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990), 50–77.
18. Eugene F. A. Klug, *Church and Ministry* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1993), 123–30.
19. Robert D. Preus, *Justification and Rome* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1997), 15–20, citing LW 54:157. Gritsch and Jenson have also called attention to the hermeneutical role of justification when they referred to it as having "metalinguistic character" that defines what "kind of talking" is properly "proclamation and word of the church" (Eric W. Gritsch and Robert W. Jenson, *Lutheranism* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976]).
20. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951), 2:512–16.
21. Eeva Martikainen, *Doctrina* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft, 1992), 29–44, 45–50, 65–71, 83–88.
22. Carl S. Meyer, ed., *Luther for an Ecumenical Age* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1967).
23. Mark Edwards and George Tavard, *Luther, Reformer for the Churches* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).
24. Peter Manns, Harding Meyer, Carter Lindberg, and Harry McSorley, eds., *Luther's Ecumenical Significance* (Philadelphia: Fortress, and New York: Paulist, 1984).

25. Two writings in particular have been popular with Luther scholars: Luther's remarks on Gal. 5:9 in his 1531 Galatians commentary (LW 27:35–39) and Luther's statement concerning justification in the 1537 Schmalkald Articles (SA II, 1, 1–4). Bold statements in the scholarly literature about Luther's understanding of doctrine are often based on only one or two quotes from either of these writings. Why the obsession with these two writings? Probably because they are among the best known of Luther's writings. The Galatians commentary has long been cherished as devotional literature by generations of Christians. The Schmalkald Articles became one of the confessional documents of the Lutheran Church and is especially important because of its treatment of the doctrine of justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith.
26. The primary source of Luther's writings is the Weimar Edition of Luther's Works, but references also are made to the American Edition of Luther's Works. Literature that contributes to an understanding of Luther's use of concepts such as "doctrine" or "article of faith" is also explored. Finally, secondary sources that specifically treat Luther's ecumenical contributions are evaluated.
27. See, for example, William R. Russell, *Luther's Theological Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). Russell's thesis is that the Schmalkald Articles was primarily Luther's last will and testament.

CHAPTER 2

1. Norman Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 367.
2. For example, James Kittelson complains about motif scholars who "drag Luther into the twentieth century with scarcely a bow toward the world in which he actually worked" and end up constructing "an arguably artificial or at least highly derivative version of 'a' theology that may in fact never have existed save at particular places and particular times" (Kittelson, "Luther the Theologian," in *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research II*, ed. William S. Maltby [St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1992], 3:26, 27). Heiko Oberman also warns against Luther's interpreters who, "intent on mining his riches, have been given to present him as 'relevant' and hence 'modern.' Thus they have been inclined to bypass or remove medieval 'remnants.' " For Oberman, "the Reformer can only be understood as a late medieval man" (Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989], xv).
3. Vatican I defined *dogma* in these words: "Morever, by divine and Catholic faith are to be believed all those things which are contained in the written or handed-on word of God and which are also put forth by the Church, whether by her solemn declaration or by her ordinary and universal teaching authority, to be believed as divinely revealed" (as quoted in Karl Rahner and Karl Lehmann, *Kerygma and Dogma*, Mysterium salutis [New York: Herder & Herder, 1969], 38). The original statement is in H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer, eds., *Enchiridion Symbolorum definitionum et Declarationuim de rebus fidei et morum* (Freiberg: Herder, 1965), 3011. The word *dogma* apparently was used for the first time in the Vatican I sense in the 1792 polemical tract *Regulus fidei catholicae* by P. N. Chrisman, who used *dogma* to distinguish formal church doctrine from theological opinion. See Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 8–9.
4. For example, Thomas Ommen reinterprets the Vatican I notion of dogma in reaction to the critique of Gerhard Ebeling. See Ommen, *The Hermeneutic of Dogma*, AAR Dissertation 11 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975). Gerald O'Collins summarizes the recent infallibility debate among Roman Catholic theologians and suggests that the concept of dogma will remain valid only if limited and

reinterpreted. See O'Collins, *The Case against Dogma* (New York: Paulist, 1975). See also Rahner and Lehmann, *Kerygma and Dogma*.

5. Albert Lange, "Der Bedeutungswandel der Begriffen 'fides' und 'hairesis' und die dogmatische Wertungen der Konzilentscheidungen von Vienne und Trient," *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 4 (1953): 133–46. See also Rahner, who writes: "[M]edieval theology uses in a far more fundamental sense the word 'articulus' when it wants to refer to what we today generally call 'dogma' " (Rahner and Lehmann, *Kerygma and Dogma*, 28–29).
6. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma 1300–1700*, vol. 4 of *The Christian Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 60–61.
7. Alister McGrath has made a similar observation: "Many, on both sides of the Reformation debates of the first three decades of the sixteenth century, found themselves unable to ascertain what doctrines were officially acknowledged and recognized by the church, and which were merely the private, if publicly expressed, views of theologians" (McGrath, *Genesis of Doctrine*, 8).
8. William of Ockham, *Treatise against Pope Benedict XII*, cited in Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 61.
9. In addition to using the Latin *articulus*, Luther routinely employed several German words to indicate articles of faith: *Artikel*, *Stück*, *Heubstuck*, and *Hauptartikel*. Ultimately, the context must decide whether Luther was using these words in the sense of "articles of faith."
10. "A Discussion on How Confession Should Be Made, 1520," LW 39:36 (= WA 6:163). The phrase "the twelve articles of faith" referenced the Apostles' Creed, which had long been divided into twelve articles, legend having it that each of the twelve disciples contributed an article. The creed was occasionally referred to as "the faith."
11. "The Bondage of the Will, 1525," LW 33:105 (= WA 18:663).
12. "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate, 1520," LW 44:199 (= WA 6:456).
13. "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, 1520," LW 36:111 (= WA 6:562–63).
14. "Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments, 1525," LW 40:83–84 (= WA 18:66–67).
15. "The Freedom of a Christian, 1520," LW 31:335 (= WA 7:43–44).
16. "Concerning the Answer of the Goat in Leipzig, 1521," LW 39:130 (= WA 7:278–79).
17. On the life and writings of Thomas Müntzer (ca. 1489–1525), see Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993); Michael G. Baylor, ed. and trans., *The Radical Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Peter Blickle, *Communal Reformation* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1992); and Tom Scott and Bob Scribner, eds., *The German Peasants' War* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1990). For a summary, see Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), 143–68.
18. "Letter to the Princes of Saxony Concerning the Rebellious Spirit, 1524," LW 40:57 (= WA 15:218).
19. "We start with the churchyard. It is preaching or teaching [doctrine] which is concerned only with outward works which are bound up with time and place. These matters are the ceremonies, the outward performances and techniques in matters of dress or food . . ." ("A Sermon on the Three Kinds of Good Life for the Instruction of Consciences, 1521," LW 44:235 [= WA 7:795]). Significantly, later in the sermon Luther contrasted churchyard doctrine with "sanctuary" doctrine, which was the Gospel. Of this sanctuary doctrine, Luther said, "Look! Here is really sound doctrine! . . . This is the road to heaven. No

man remains wicked; on the contrary, all become righteous" (LW 44:242 [= WA 7:801]).

20. *Exsurge Domine* was issued by Pope Leo X on June 15, 1520, and published in Germany in September 1520. This bull condemned forty-one theses taken from Luther's writings and gave him sixty days to recant or face excommunication.
21. "Defense and Explanation of All the Articles, 1521," LW 32:80 (= WA 7:429).
22. "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg, 1523," LW 53:34 (= WA 12:216).
23. Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, trans. and ed. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 9.
24. "Catholic controversialists" is the most common name in modern Reformation scholarship assigned to the defenders of the Catholic faith. They referred to themselves most frequently as *docti*; Luther called them *Rominstae* and *papistae*. Although the phrase is anachronistic because members of the Church of Rome were not called "Roman Catholic" until after the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the phrases "Catholic controversialists" and "Roman polemicists" are used in this book. On the controversialists, see David V. N. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); P. Fraenkel, "John Eck's Enchiridion of 1525 and Luther's Earliest Arguments against Papal Primacy," *Studia theologica* 21 (1967): 110–63; P. Fraenkel, "An der Grenze vor Luthers Einfluss," *ZKG* 89 (1978): 21–30; Mark U. Edwards Jr., "Catholic Controversialist Literature, 1518–1555," *ARG* 79 (1988): 189–204; and J. M. Headley, "The Reformation as Crisis in the Understanding of Tradition," *ARG* 78 (1987): 5–22.
25. This was understood by at least some of Luther's contemporaries. Only months before the publication of the "Ninety-five Theses," Cardinal Cajetan had prepared a memorandum for Rome in which he insisted that there was a need for a clearer definition of indulgences. In May 1518, the theological faculty at the Sorbonne took issue with relating the release of a soul in purgatory with the payment of money. See Heiko Oberman, *Werden und Wertung der Reformation*, Spätscholastik und Reformation 2 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1979), 192 n. 90. That the two papal bulls had not decided the question of indulgences in a binding way is also recognized by modern Roman Catholic scholars. For example, Nicolaus Paulus, *Geschichte des Ablasses im Mittelalter vom Ursprunge bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Paderbon: F. Schöningh, 1923), 3:88.
26. The Dominican Tetzel, in addition to being the indulgence salesman that drew Luther's ire, held the office of inquisitor of heretical depravity for the province of Saxony. Cajetan appointed Tetzel to this position in 1509. It was in this capacity that Tetzel published against Luther. See Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 22.
27. Silvestro Mazzolini, usually called Prierias (he was from Prierio), was also a Dominican. He was the master of the sacred palace, and the pope had appointed Prierias to the Roman commission tasked with introducing canonical proceedings against Luther.
28. Eck served as professor of theology in Ingolstadt from 1510 to 1543. Until Eck died, he was a vigorous opponent of Luther.
29. Konrad Wimpina, also a Dominican, was rector of the University of Frankfurt an der Oder.
30. In Thesis 105 (against Luther's Thesis 78); see CCath 41:337.
31. WA 1:243–46.
32. Valentin Gröne, *Tetzel und Luther*, 2d ed. (Soest: Nasse, 1860), 234–37, cited in Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483–1521*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985), 209.
33. The 50 theses (*Subscriptas positiones*) are found in V. E. Löscher, ed., *Vollständige*

Reformations—Acta und Documenta, 3 vols. (Leipzig: J. G. Erben, 1720–1729), 1:517–22.

34. "Obelisks," along with "Asterisks," Luther's written reply to Eck, can be found in WA 1:281–314.
35. See Brecht, *Road to Reformation*, 211.
36. See Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 26–35, 79–85.
37. LW 31:5–16 (= WA 1:221–28).
38. WA 1:294, 302, cited in Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 32.
39. CCath 41:33–107.
40. CCath 41:54.
41. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 80, 81.
42. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 82.
43. This is exactly what Prierias had maintained in the fourth *fundamentum* of his *Dialogue*: "The Roman Church can decide on faith and custom as much by deeds as by words. And there is no difference between them save that words are more convenient for this purpose than are deeds. Custom attains the force of law. Consequently, as he is a heretic who dissents from the authority of Scripture, so also is he a heretic who dissents from the teaching and practice of the Church in respect of faith and morals." This led to the *Corollary*: "Whoever says of indulgences that the Roman Church cannot do what it has *de facto* already done is a heretic" (cited in Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 28; original text in CCath 41:55–56). In other words, according to Prierias, the rule of faith included whatever practices the church had adopted through custom.
44. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 84–85.
45. "Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses, 1518," LW 31:83 (= WA 1:529–30).
46. "Explanations," LW 31:94 (= WA 1:536–37).
47. "Letter to Elector Frederick, January 13?, 1519," LW 48:105 (= WABr 1:307).
48. "Explanations," LW 31:83 (= WA 1:530).
49. One scholar has argued that these four men frequently misrepresented Thomas Aquinas in this controversy. See D. R. Janz, *Luther on Thomas Aquinas*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für europaïsche Geschichte Mainz 140 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1989), 32–45.
50. Antoninus (1389–1459), archbishop of Florence and a Dominican scholar, wrote *Summary of Moral Theology*; Peter de Palude (1275?–1342), a teacher in Paris, wrote a commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*; Augustine of Ancona (d. 1328), an Augustinian Eremite, wrote *Summary of the Power of the Church*; and John Capreolus (d. 1444), a Dominican scholar, was considered one of the greatest students of Thomas Aquinas in the fifteenth century.
51. "Explanations," LW 31:146, 147 (= WA 1:568).
52. In 1483, on pain of excommunication, Pope Sixtus IV forbade the Dominicans (who rejected it) and the Franciscans (who affirmed it) from accusing each other of heresy over the question of the immaculate conception of Mary because "it has not yet been decided by the Roman Church or the apostolic see." See Carl Mirbt, *Quellen zur Geschichte des Papsttums und des römischen Katholizismus*, 4th ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1924), 243. The immaculate conception was proclaimed dogma by Pope Pius IX in 1854.
53. "Explanations," LW 31:172 (= WA 1:582–83).
54. "Explanations," LW 31:172 (= WA 1:582–83).
55. "Explanations," LW 31:108 (= WA 1:545). Luther is commenting on Thesis 8: "The penitential canons are imposed only on the living, and according to the