The study of Robert D. Preus

Doctrine is Life

The Essays of Robert D. Preus
on Scripture

Edited by Klemet I. Preus

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To my mother, Donna Preus—faithful companion
and wife of 48 years to Robert D. Preus

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Preface

In early autumn 2001, I had the privilege of sitting in the backyard of the Rev. Matthew Harrison in his suburban St. Louis home, drinking lemonade, admiring the fall colors, and talking theology with my host. Brother Harrison was basking in the short-lived adulation associated with his translation and editing of *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters of Hermann Sasse*, which Concordia Publishing House had just released. As he shared the intricacies of the translation task, the felicitous proactivity of Concordia Publishing House, and the justifiable sense of humility at having stood, as it were, on the shoulders of a giant, it occurred to us that something of the same could be done with the writings of Robert Preus.

I frankly don't remember if it was his brainchild or mine, but I went away from that relaxing afternoon confident that a book on the writings of Robert Preus was a great idea. It would require no translation for the English reader, which, with my paucity of language skills, uniquely qualified me for the task. I was fairly well-acquainted with the literature and was convinced that the new generation of pastors entering the Lutheran ministry, as well as serious systematic theologians and historians throughout the church, would be interested in such a work. Subsequently, Harrison's encouragement was equaled by that of the good people at Concordia, and I soon found myself joyfully immersed in Preus's writings.

As I read, it occurred to me that much of my own life had been shaped not only by the parenting predilections of Robert Preus and by his orthodox Lutheran theology but also by the often bizarre geographic quest for knowledge that he had undergone throughout his professional life, often with his growing brood of children in tow. In 1950 and 1951, when I was just a toddler, I lived for a year in Edinburgh, Scotland, with my parents and my older brother. I have no recollections of that time, but I am reliably informed that my first words were characterized by that lilting brogue that Americans find so charming. The reason for this overseas visit was my father's study at the university there. He subsequently earned his first doctorate, the thesis for which became the basis for his book *The Inspiration of Scripture*.

In the summer of 1963, Robert and Donna Preus packed up their nine children and moved for a year to Norway. There we lived on the island of Nesøya, which was part of the archipelago dotting the western Oslo Fjord. The island was connected to the mainland by a single bridge near the little town of Sandvika, about 20 miles south of Oslo. The house, as I recall, had one sink, which was in the kitchen and spurted water at a gushing speed that precluded anything such as hand washing, tooth brushing, or shaving. There were no bathtubs, showers, or indoor toilets. The downstairs featured a small kitchen and spacious living and dining rooms. Upstairs were two large bedrooms and a couple of rather large closets that also functioned as bedrooms. I was a child of 13 years at the time and was assigned a bed in the walk-through closet. The little home stood on the side of a hill that banked gently down toward the peaceful and temperate waters of the fjord, which afforded summer swimming, winter skating, and year-long beauty.

Six of the kids were enrolled in the Norwegian public schools. At the age of 13, I was directed to learn Norwegian, make friends, and take a shower after gym class every day—orders I gladly and pointedly obeyed. I was too young really to reflect upon the reasons why we were in such an idyllic setting. It was simply a twelve-month adventure the likes of which most children only dream. I still remember it vividly as one of the best years of my life. Later I learned that the Universitetsbibliotek at the University of Oslo provided my father the chance to do the research necessary for his second book, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, *Volume One*. I never asked my mother at the time how she felt.

Five years later my father was at it again. Mom and Dad, now with ten kids, moved to France for a year. We lived in two apartments on the sixth and tenth stories of a seventeen-story apartment building. The sixth-floor apartment was rented from Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, redoubtable scholar, Francophile, Christian apologist, and prolific author whose countless books were packed into his small library and throughout the flat, much like the many small German homes crowding the streets and avenues in the Alsatian town of Strasbourg that we called home that year. Four brothers occupied the sixth-floor dwelling, safely distant from the oversight of parents. It was a different kind of adventure but memorable nonetheless. I was 19 at the time, and with newfound European friends, I found myself exploring the various villages and towns of northwestern France, sampling the wine and generally soaking up the culture.

This time I understood why we were here. Dad was earning his second doctoral degree at the University of Strasbourg and doing the research that resulted in his third book, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism, Volume 2*. This time I was also aware, albeit somewhat distractedly, that my mother was a remarkably good sport to endure and even encourage her husband's scholarly pursuits. Apparently Robert Preus found that the writing of books was accomplished for him more easily in Europe than in the New World. Fortunately for his wife, if not for serious theology students, Robert Preus stopped writing books after the French experience.

Whether this hiatus in book writing was caused by the press of administrative duties or his inability to get his growing family to Europe is anyone's guess. Preus's production of scholarly journal writings continued unabated, however, until his death in 1995. These writings were effected largely in his study at home or at the lake in northeastern Minnesota, a veritable Eden, albeit with mosquitoes, whose distractions were resisted by Preus in deference to that higher calling that every pastor/theologian knows—the doing of theology. I can remember as a teenager listening to the endless clickety-clack of the circa-1930 typewriter on which my father would work, isolating himself for days at a time, it seemed, and emerging periodically from his work for nutritional sustenance or the pleasant company of his wife of 48 years, Donna.

While Preus's books are still readily available to the interested reader, his journal writings have not been so easily accessed. These volumes provide that easy access to the most notable of these many writings. They contain more than twenty-five articles produced over five decades and from a host of ecclesiastical and theological contexts. From these writings the reader will gain not only an appreciation of the keen theological mind of Robert Preus but a taste of the times in which he lived. Especially helpful are the lessons Preus provides on the manner in which theology is done in the heat of controversy. Throughout his writings, a spirit of devotion to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions is manifested that transcends European libraries, tranquil summer cottages, and even the times in which he lived. For his devotion and the theology that emanated from it the church can be thankful.

Robert Preus had a long and distinguished ministry. In 1948 as a pastor in North Dakota he commenced his ministry. Preus also served parishes in Boston and northwestern Minnesota before his teaching ministry began in 1957. For eighteen years Preus served as professor of philosophy, systematic theology, and the Lutheran Confessions at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. In 1974 Preus became president of Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield, Illinois. The seminary moved to Ft. Wayne, Indiana, in 1976. He served as professor and president of that institution until 1993. For almost forty years Preus taught hundreds of students at the seminaries in St. Louis and Ft. Wayne. His influence upon confessional Lutheranism within the LCMS was long and profound.

Acknowledgments

I need to thank some people who helped in the production of this book. My brother Daniel, former executive director at Concordia Historical Institute, and Martin Noland, who succeeded him, gave me free reign of that important facility. Robert Preus chose not to seal his files upon his death, and a treasury of important historical and theological data was made available to the public in the late 1990s through the institute.

At Concordia Publishing House, Laura Lane, who began the production process, was helpful in getting me started, while Dawn Weinstock, the indefatigable and always cheerful production editor of scholarly works at Concordia Publishing House, held my hand through the completion process. Mark Sell, senior editor of Academic, Professional, and Consumer Books at Concordia, championed the cause, while Fritz Baue and Paul McCain also offered helpful encouragement.

I want especially to acknowledge two women in my life whom I love. My wife, Janet, both motivated me and left me alone to work, despite her loving instincts to the contrary. Consequently, she enjoys my deepest admiration. And my mother, Donna Preus, to whom this book is dedicated, provided my father, Robert, the opportunity to learn and write. She was his soul mate of fifty years, and there is little doubt that the church owes her a tremendous debt of thanks for that which her husband has given.

Robert Preus summarized the convictions of his own ministry in the oft-repeated phrase, borrowed from an old Norwegian woman in northern Minnesota, "Doctrine is life." He taught and wrote over a forty-five-year career because he believed that the content of his teaching gave eternal life in Christ to those who believed it.

Introduction

Robert Preus and the Purpose of Theological Scholarship

Robert Preus was a scholar. He produced four books and nearly countless journal articles during his lifetime and had at least three in the hopper before his death. His erudition is also manifest from the articles contained in this volume. Preus's scholarly interests were somewhat vast within the broad confines of Lutheranism. He wrote extensively on the doctrine of the Scriptures—their inspiration, inerrancy, power, unity, authority, proper interpretation, and relevance for the church. He was an expert on the Lutheran Confessions and gave to the church systematic presentations of their subscription, hermeneutics, and relevance for today. His earliest writings betray his original interest in the article of conversion and the new birth. He was an avid defender of divine monergism, carefully walking the path "between Calvinism and synergism."[1] In the late 1960s, questions of Christian fellowship occupied his thoughts,[2] while in his latter years his monograph on "The Doctrine of the Call in the Confessions and Lutheran Orthodoxy"[3] enjoyed wide readership and posthumous

1 Robert Preus, "The Significance of Luther's Term Pure Passive as Quoted in Article II of the Formula of Concord," *Concordia Theological Monthly* XXIX, no. 8 (August 1958): 561.

2 Robert Preus, "To Join or Not to Join: A Study of Some of the Issues in the Question of Joining with the American Lutheran Church in Pulpit and Altar Fellowship," presented at the February 13–16, 1968, North Dakota District Convention at Grand Forks, North Dakota (published by the North Dakota District Office).

3 Robert Preus, "The Doctrine of the Call in the Confessions and Lutheran Orthodoxy," *Luther Academy Monograph* 1 (April 1991).

republication. He even wrote on the subject of "clergy burnout."[4] And, of course, his "preoccupation" with the article of justification permeated his writings from first until last. Through it all, he presented and applied the teachings of Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, the Lutheran Confessions, the orthodox Lutheran fathers, C. F. W. Walther, and, of course, the Scriptures. His scholarship is beyond question.

But what drove the man so tirelessly? No one studies this much on such a wide variety of subjects over four decades unless he is motivated by something more than mere knowledge of the subject matter. And few write so prolifically just because they want to add to the body of research. Preus was never content with knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Rather, he is an example of the most noble and worthy purposes of theological scholarship. "Doctrine is life," said Preus.[5] He simply wanted to teach the church the doctrine of Christ, hoping that others would learn of him who brings eternal life to those who believe.

Preus was first and foremost a teacher. "The burden of the ministry is to teach. Oversight, rule, ministry, preaching, pastoring, leading, the various duties inherent in the ministry are all realized through the teaching of the gospel."[6] In fact, claimed Preus, "preaching and teaching the Gospel: the two terms are interchangeable."[7] Whether he spoke in the classroom or wrote in his study, Preus always taught. The two activities were not different in substance. So his writings were, to him, no different than his lectures and no different than a pastor's sermons. In fact, his writings became sermons to the church on topics of importance. His writings took on a somewhat devotional tone as he hid poorly his own faith in both the objects and the conclusions of his scholarly pursuits. It was not uncommon for Preus to exhort his readers to faith precisely in his topics of discussion, whether it be the Word of God[8] or the chief article.[9] Preus would even

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4 Robert Preus, "Clergy Mental Health and the Doctrine of Justification," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 48, nos. 2–3 (April–June 1984): 113–22.

5 Robert Preus, *Preaching to Young Theologians* (St. Louis: Luther Academy, 1999), 66.

6 Preus, "Doctrine of the Call" (1991), 14.

7 Preus, "Doctrine of the Call" (1991), 15.

8 Robert Preus, "The Power of God's Word," *Concordia Theological Monthly* XXXIV, no. 8 (August 1963): 453–65. "[O]nly when we seize and are seized by the Word of God do we know the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe (Eph. 1:19). And only when our faith stands in God's power do we discover what the Word of God really is (1 Cor. 2:5)" (453).

9 Robert Preus, "Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (July 1981): 163–84. Robert Preus, "The Doctrine of Justification in the Theology of Classical Lutheran Orthodoxy," *The Springfielder* XXIX, no. 1 (Spring 1965): 24–39.

pray,[10] quote hymns,[11] or begin with a Trinitarian invocation.[12] His "dogmatic bias" was no less defensible than that of the apostles, and he made no attempt to hide it:

> Of course [the apostles] have a dogmatic bias. Who would not when he had seen the risen Christ? Of course they were believing Christians and not merely objective historians. But faith and history do not oppose each other. How can one report a historical event if he does not believe it? And profound interpretation does not vitiate or cast doubt upon the reality and historicity of the event interpreted. A religious aim may well influence the presentation of facts, but this does not change the facts themselves. There is nothing wrong with facts being explained by one who has experienced them and been deeply affected by them.[13]

Having thus absolved himself of the charge of undue passion, Preus was free to teach the truth.

And teach he did, addressing himself to virtually every issue that confronted the church during the second half of the twentieth century. In the writings of Robert Preus, three didactic principles manifest themselves: the coherence principle, the correspondence principle, and the confessional principle.

Coherency

Throughout his writings, Preus demonstrated a relentless adamancy to present doctrine that was utterly consistent with itself. Truth must cohere. It must contain no inner contradictions or logical flaws. Truth is one. Preus's insistence on coherence within a theological system is seen in his understanding of both formal and material principles. Preus found the coherency principle in the Bible itself.

Scripture, the formal principle of theology, must have meaning that is inherent in the words of the Bible itself. If you have to provide clarity from somewhere else or through some principle besides *sola scriptura*, then your theology does not cohere. So, for example, Preus could never pit the

10 Robert Preus, "Confessional Lutheranism in Today's World," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 54, nos. 2–3 (April–June 1990): 113.

11 Preus, "Confessional Lutheranism in Today's World," 103.

12 Robert Preus, "Walther and the Scriptures," *Proceedings of the Thirty-eighth Convention of the Texas District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, Austin, Texas (April 3–7, 1961): 30–57.

13 Robert Preus, "Biblical Hermeneutics and the Lutheran Church Today," *Proceedings, Twentieth Convention of the Iowa District West of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (August 21–26, 1966): 47.

analogy of faith or the article of justification against the exegetical meaning of a text no matter how firmly he held to its centrality. Systematic theologian that he was, Preus could value and apply the analogy of faith, "analogical exegesis," as he called it, which was "tracing a theological theme or article of faith throughout the Scriptures."[14] After all, such tracing is precisely what systematicians do. And Preus himself engaged in tracing.[15] Conceding that an analogical approach to Scripture would never do violence to the meaning of a given text or pericope,[16] Preus never allowed for a type of "canon within the canon of Scripture." He even disagreed with the redoubtable Hermann Sasse for using the article on justification as a type of "norm within the norm" of the Holy Scriptures.[17] Preus didn't think it was necessary. The clear meaning of any scriptural text could not violate the central article. Lutheran theology is too coherent for that. Why protect the absolute authority of Scripture with a "canon within the canon" as if the Bible is only meaningful when justification remains central? Preus taught that justification was the central article of the faith not so he could understand the Bible but because the clear and understandable teaching of the Bible is that justification is central. Through his coherence principle, he avoided the inevitable circular reasoning of Sasse. (If the key to understanding the Bible is the doctrine of justification, and the Bible is unclear without this article, then from what clear and authoritative source did we get the article in the first place?) If Preus was respectful and deferential to Sasse, whom he knew and considered a friend, he was brusque and impatient with those who denied the coherency of Scripture by postulating that a biblical text could have different meanings at different times or that somehow the analogy of faith trumped the clear meaning of a text.[18] Such a view did not cohere.

Coherency of biblical meaning suggests coherency in our view of the power of the word as well. To Preus the notion that the Word of God in one form is somehow more powerful than the Word in another was not a consistent view. Preus was quick to assert the lack of coherence.

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14 Robert Preus, "How Is the Lutheran Church to Interpret and Use the Old and New Testaments?" paper delivered at the 1973 Reformation Lectures at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota.

15 Preus, "Power of God's Word," 453–55.

16 Preus, "How Is the Lutheran Church to Interpret," 9. See also Robert Preus, "The Unity of Scripture," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (January 1990): 17.

17 Robert Preus, "Luther and the Doctrine of Justification," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (January 1984): 14.

18 Preus, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 47–49. See also Robert Preus, "Can the Lutheran Confessions Have Any Meaning 450 Years Later?" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 44, nos. 2–3 (July 1980): 105; and Preus, "Unity of Scripture," 4–5.

This stress on the unity of the Word is necessary because of late a curious and subtle distinction has been made between the written Word of Scripture and the *kerygmatic* preaching of the church. According to this distinction, there is somehow more power in the preached Word, while Scripture, the written Word, remains in itself a dead letter. But Scripture knows no such distinction.[19]

Preus argues in two ways. First, he cites the Bible, which calls itself the Word of God and asserts its own power.[20] He also reasons somewhat syllogistically. The Word of God is powerful. Holy Scripture is the Word of God. Therefore Holy Scripture is powerful. It is a valid syllogism. It is, further, a syllogism whose logic is forced upon any theologian who aspires to Preus's belief in the coherence of Scripture.

The power of the Word is questionable neither because of its form nor because of its speaker. So Preus viewed that the ministerial actions of laypeople are equally as valid as those performed by the pastor. Preus even allows the validity of the "ministerial" acts of women "pastors," whom he considered "private persons,"[21] while denying that any women actually held the office of pastor. The political climate of the church in the 1990s, with its ongoing debate about lay ministers and "women pastors," would certainly have tempted Preus to question or deny the validity of actions performed by laypeople. But the coherence principle would not allow it. Certainly he opposed both the practice of lay preachers and the placing of women into the office of pastor. Anyone, however, who hears or reads the Word—whether a pastor, layperson, or personally—can "have joy and comfort to know that God Himself is present speaking to you and mediating to you His Son, His Holy Spirit, His forgiveness and all the riches of His grace."[22]

If coherence applied to the formal principle, Scripture, then even more so did Preus require consistency when presenting the article upon which the church stands or falls. One example will do. Consider Preus's discussion of the expression *per fidem* ("through faith"). In the article of justification, faith is always passive. It only receives the acquittal from God. Only by holding the role of faith in our justification "as pure receptivity"[23] can "the sinner . . . ever be certain of his own forgiveness and salvation."[24] More cosmically, according to Preus, by holding to the *per fidem*, "the

19 Preus, "Power of God's Word," 455.

20 Preus, "Power of God's Word," 454.

21 Preus, "Confessional Lutheranism in Today's World," 116.

22 Preus, "Walther and the Scriptures," 48.

23 Preus, "Perennial Problems," 171.

24 Preus, "Doctrine of Justification," 36.

SCRIPTURE: The Formal Principle of Theology

Robert Preus wrote *The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the Seventeenth-Century Lutheran Dogmaticians* in 1955. Through this work, he established himself as a rising young academician and also an expert on the doctrine of Scripture. From this early writing flowed much of what later became the corpus of Preus's thinking on the doctrine of Holy Writ.

The Word of God in the Theology of Karl Barth[1]

"The Word of God in the Theology of Karl Barth," "Prolegomena according to Karl Barth," and "The Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation in the Theology of Karl Barth" are three articles that appeared in successive issues of *Concordia Theological Monthly* in February, March, and April 1960. One of the few Missouri Synod theologians who studied under Barth, through these articles Preus demonstrated not only his conviction regarding the Scriptures but also was able to analyze and critique one of the great religious thinkers of his day.

The purpose of this series of articles is to acquaint the reader with the theology of the leading Protestant theologian of our day, Karl Barth.[2] It is often more rewarding to examine one theologian of real stature rather than dissipate our limited space upon a more sketchy overview of the ideas

1 All references to Barth's writings, unless otherwise designated, are to his *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936–). Vol. I, 1 was translated by Prof. G. T. Thomson in 1936. Beginning in 1956, under the editorship of T. F. Torrance, all the other volumes except the latest, IV, 3, and part of III have been translated. I have refrained from quoting from Barth's earlier works because in his *Church Dogmatics* he has departed from much that he said previously. In 1927 Barth began a dogmatics entitled *Christliche Dogmatik* which never got beyond the first volume. He became dissatisfied with what he wrote there and, rather than revise the material, began anew, putting out in 1932 the first half of Vol. I of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. It is this *Church Dogmatics* of Barth's which offers his mature views on prolegomena, the Word, reconciliation, and most theological issues.

2 Hugh Mackintosh. *Types of Modern Theology* (London: Nisbet and Co., 1937), p. 263: Karl Barth is the "greatest figure in Christian theology that has appeared for decades." Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. H. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), Ch. 1.

of two or three well-known theologians. And Barth is the man whom we must still choose today. Certainly Bultmann and Tillich, whose theologies are philosophically oriented and structured, will have far less to offer the Christian Church. Brunner, who really never left the ground of liberalism, is no longer taken seriously by many today. Barth, however, whose works are now coming out rapidly in translation, is still a theologian to be reckoned with. Only lately a rash of books has appeared, commenting on his theology.

Not Barth's entire theology can come within our purview. Therefore, I have chosen to represent and evaluate his position in three articles on the following important themes: "The Word," "Prolegomena," "Justification and Reconciliation." On the first theme Barth has made his greatest impact. On the other two he has much to offer; he is at his best.

The Word

A word must be said on how we propose to assess Barth. We can really judge his theological contribution only by two standards. First, we must judge him according to his background—what he came out of and what he is speaking against—and this is not historic Christianity and orthodoxy but Modernism and liberalism. And we must judge him in comparison with his contemporaries. Here we shall often find reason to be thankful to him and for him. For he speaks out against humanism for a living God and a God who has spoken, and he speaks out against liberalism for a doctrine of sin, of God's wrath, and God's reconciliation through Christ. Listen to the eulogy which Mackintosh offers (p. 317):

> With a volcanic vehemence—feeling that passion alone is suited to the occasion—he is endeavouring to draw the Christian mind of his generation back to the truth in which all other truth that counts is embraced, viz., that in the Bible God has uttered His absolute and ineffably gracious will. There is an objective revelation, which puts every religious idea of man at its bar. . . . He exposes all attempts to think of God simply in terms of man, to climb to a knowledge of God by the resolute exercise of reason or the technique of mysticism, to conceive God as a compound of the best things in our own nature, or to say genially that the presence of God in Jesus and in ourselves is of much the same kind. It is plain that one who has learned from Scripture the illimitable difference between God and man will have much that is overwhelming to say concerning fashionable modern ideas of immanence, of evolution as an all-embracing category of reflection, of inevitable progress—above all, of Pelagian notions of sin.

Yes, in Barth's theology is much we can be thankful for. But in addition to his verbosity and abstruseness there is much that is most insidious. And here is where our second standard of judgment must be applied: we must assess him by what we already know, by our understanding of theology (acquired through our own study of Scripture), by Luther, the Symbols and classical Lutheranism. And we really cannot do otherwise. Only when we assess him in just such a way do we really know where we are with him. And it is both our duty and our right to do just this as Lutherans. The very nature of dogmatics as it was first worked out by Melanchthon and Chemnitz was to formulate, on the basis of clear Scripture passages and sound exegesis, a certain *summa doctrinae coelestis* (Chemnitz) or *praecipui loci* (Melanchthon, Leyser) which were then to be helpful and normative in judging all theology. Barth himself agrees with this practice.

The task of a dogmatician consists in combining the disciplines of exegesis and church history, in the interest of pure doctrine and clear testimony in the church. Barth says that dogmatics stands between exegesis and practical theology (I, 2, 769, 771). In a sense dogmatics has no essence of its own but correlates the results of exegesis with the experience of the church for the purpose of a coherent, systematic, and timely presentation of Christian doctrine. If this is true, Barth qualifies today as a theologian. Brunner does not, for he uses history only for his own immediate needs, and he does not do serious exegesis. Aulén does not, for he operates with a motif methodology which cannot show that his theology is drawn from Scripture. Prenter has such a weak position on Scripture as the *principium cognoscendi* that exegesis rarely shows up as the basis of his assertions. Of all modern theologians (with the exception of Elert and conservative Lutheran and Reformed theologians) only Barth qualifies as a dogmatician in this sense. He is instructive because he actually engages in exegesis [cf. his study of John 3:16 and 2 Cor. 5 (IV, 1, 70 ff.) and his discussion of the *pro nobis* (IV, 1, 273)] and because he has seriously acquainted himself with the theology not only of Luther and Calvin but also of the older church fathers and of orthodoxy. And if he disagrees with orthodoxy he at least offers a tolerably complete and sympathetic account of orthodoxy's position on various *loci*, something that Brunner and Prenter have not seen fit to do. Barth appreciates the fact that the old orthodox dogmaticians were first-rate dogmaticians, which is seen by the fact that he quotes them almost as often as Pieper does. Barth's historical surveys which run through his dogmatics are real gems, always showing a vast knowledge and keen insight.

One further introductory remark at the outset: to assess Barth's theology accurately is a chore, for his work has been done over a long period of time, and he often contradicts himself. Moreover, his style is difficult. It has been called spiral. This means that he introduces a point and approaches it from many different angles until he has finally exhausted the subject and oftentimes the reader as well. A statement of T. F. Torrance in his introduction to Vol. I, 2 may be instructive here.

> By directing relentless questions to the subject of inquiry Barth seeks to let the truth declare itself clearly and positively, and then he seeks to express the truth in its own wholeness without breaking it up into parts and thus dissolving its essential nature by unreal distinctions. It is this disciplined purpose which governs his style throughout and greatly lengthens the exposition. At every point he probes ruthlessly into the subject from all angles to make it declare itself, and then in long balanced sentences he sets the truth forth surrounded with careful clarifications and exact delimitations in subordinate clauses, and yet in such a way that by means of these *Abgrenzungen*, as he calls them, the whole truth is made to appear in its own manifoldness and in its native force.

These words tell us that we must read Barth thoroughly to understand him, and if we read him in the right spirit we shall be rewarded. With these brief propaedeutics to Barth I now pass over to the consideration of the doctrine of the Word in Barth's theology.

A. "The Theology of the Word"

We begin with a treatment of Barth's theology of the Word rather than his prolegomena because his doctrine of the Word is found within the framework of his prolegomena. Inasmuch as his prolegomena consider primarily how the church should listen to the Word and then declare that Word—for Barth like older orthodoxy insists that Scripture is the *principium cognoscendi*—we must know what he means by the Word of God and what he means by Scripture before we can consider what he means by theology and dogmatics.

"The Theology of the Word" is probably the best description of Barth's theology.[3] The great question is this: Has God spoken? Barth says yes. Therefore we seek and find God only in His Word. Modernism has by-passed the entire conception of the Word of God. And the trouble with most modern theology for Barth is that it has made it the test of religion to understand rather than listen, obey, and set forth the Word of God. The concentration in Modernism as in Rome has been on the church rather than on the Word. But the church stands under the authority and judgment of the Word.

3 Mackintosh, p. 268.

The Power of God's Word

"The Power of God's Word" is the closest thing to an exegetical presentation produced by Preus. It traces and systematically analyzes the phrase "Word of God," with its various nuances and meanings, through both Testaments. It then presents the several ways in which the Scriptures speak of the power of the Gospel, of the Sacraments, and of the Scriptures themselves. Finally, it offers a brief, almost devotional answer to the question of the source of the Gospel's power. It was published by *Concordia Theological Monthly* in 1963.

If there is anything our generation of Christians needs to ponder and experience anew it is the power of God's Word. For only when we seize and are seized by the Word of God do we know the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe (Eph. 1:19). And only when our faith stands in God's power do we discover what the Word of God really is (1 Cor. 2:5). Many theologians recognize the pressing necessity of speaking on this theme.

But there is one fatal flaw in all they have said on this vital matter. After writing countless words concerning the Word and the power of God, modern theologians have consistently failed to tell us what the Word of God is, or rather, where it is. They have not pointed to this Word. They have not located the Word of God, so that we can say: "There it is; what I am now reading, what I am now saying to you is truly and without qualification God's Word." This great weakness of modern theology in speaking of God's Word has become so patent that even a recent article in the *Christian Century* has brought attention to the fact.[1] It is not enough to

1 H. Daniel Friberg, "The Locus of God's Speaking," *Christian Century*, Vol. LXXIX, No. 15 (April 11, 1962), pp. 455–457.

speak tautologically as Karl Barth and say: The Word of God is God speaking; " 'God's Word' means 'God speaks.' "[2] We must have access to this Word. We must be able to repair to it. We must have it at hand. A transcendent word—what our old theologians called the *verbum* ἐνδιάθετον, the word in God—or a sporadic word which only now and then unpredictably enters our world in space and time will never become our daily spiritual meat and drink, our shepherd's staff, a lamp to our feet. Jesus has promised that if anyone keeps and treasures (τηρήσῃ) His Word he shall never see death (John 8:51). But that nebulous and distant word of which modern theology speaks, that word which cannot be found or objectified or even repeated,[3] cannot be kept and treasured in our hearts; we cannot even get hold of it to cling to it.

I. What Is the Word of God?

What then is the Word of God? We must answer this question, we must mark out and denote this Word, before we can speak meaningfully about its power.

In the broad, Biblical sense God's Word is His every communication to man, His *dabar*. Such a definition, however, does not get us anywhere until we learn *how* God has communicated to us. Scripture tells us that God has spoken, i.e., made Himself known to us, in many and various ways (πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως, Heb.1:1).

1. He has first of all spoken audibly. This communication was carried out directly when God walked and talked with the patriarchs. Later God speaks to His chosen prophets and they in turn are to speak to God's people. The man of God speaks in the Word of the Lord (בִּדְבַר יְהוָה) and His word comes true (1 Kings 13:32). Thus we have the frequent refrain, "Hear therefore the Word of the Lord" (1 Kings 22:19; 1 Sam. 9:27; 1 Kings 12:24; Ps. 81:8). Hearing means heeding, but also giving ear to something audible (Ps. 85:8; Num. 22:38; 24:4, 16; Is. 22:14).

2. Again the Word of God is communicated visibly in the form of a dream or a vision (Is. 6:1; Ezek. 1). Micah (1:1) speaks of seeing (חָזָה) the Word of the Lord. In the prophets there is often an intimate connection between picture (vision) and audible words (cf. Obad. 1; Amos 7:1). The prophets referred to in the above citations were all writing prophets. This fact indicates how closely the visible and audible Word corresponds to the

2 *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), I, 1, 159.

3 Barth, ibid., p. 160; Brunner, *The Divine-Human Encounter* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), p. 84ff. Heinecken, "The Authority of the Word of God," *The Voice* (St. Paul: Luther Theological Seminary, 1958), p. 45.

written Word. Speaking of the earlier prophets Procksch remarks: "Here one can still observe the close inner relationship between picture and word in the earliest prophecy."[4]

3. That these visions and oral words were recorded in writing and that this was commanded to be done constitutes a third manner in which God speaks to man. The constant recurrence of the נְאֻם יְהוָה, "Thus saith the Lord," "The word of the Lord came . . ." (דְּבַר־יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הָיָה אֶל: Hos. 1:1; Zeph. 1:1; Mal. 1:1; Jer. 47:1; Ezek. 14:2), "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken" (Is. 1:20; 40:5; 45:23; 58:14. Cf. also Matt. 4:4; 1 Cor. 14:27; 2 Tim. 3:16), "Hear the Word of the Lord"—these phrases, now in written form, indicate that God commonly spoke to His people through the writings of His prophets and apostles.

4. God communicates Himself to us through His actions, and His mighty acts of judgment and redemption are indeed a word. Moses speaks to Pharaoh (Ex. 9:5): "The Lord appointed a set time, saying, tomorrow the Lord shall do this thing (הַדָּבָר) in the land." Often God's acts are called His words, and these word-acts are spoken of in the manner of a personification or hypostatization. Isaiah says (9:8), "The Lord hath sent a word (דָּבָר שָׁלַח) to Jacob and it lighted upon Israel." Then follows an account of the disasters which befell Israel. Again God speaks through the prophet Jeremiah: "Behold, I will bring My words (דְּבָרַי) upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be accomplished in that day before thee" (Jer. 39:16; cf. also Is. 45:23; 55:10ff.). In all these cases of hypostatization (suggestive of the Logos doctrine which was articulated later) we observe that the Word of the Lord is an act of revelation which infallibly achieves its purpose. (Jer. 20:7ff.; Ps. 107:20)

5. The final Word of God to man, His communication κατ' ἐξοχήν, is ἐν υἱῷ, through a Son (Heb. 1:1). He is the personal Word who is with God and is God and who alone reveals God to us (John 1:18). God therefore directs us to hear Him (Matt. 17:5). And we hear Him when we hear His apostles, whose word is His Word (John 17:14). He has sent them into the world to continue His prophetic office (John 20:21). Their word is the continuation of His Word (John 17:8, 18; 1 Cor. 1:10), their witnessing is the witnessing of the Spirit Himself. (John 15:26, 27; 16:13; 14:26)

Now when we consider these various ways in which God speaks to us, we find that there is a marvelous unity in the Word of God. There is no difference between God's direct speaking, His speaking through the mouth of a prophet or apostle, and the formulation of this speech in writing. Scripture quite simply calls the words of God's servants and penmen the

4 *T[heologisches] W[örterbuch] [zum] N[euen] T[estament]*, IV, 92.

How Is the Lutheran Church to Interpret and Use the Old and New Testaments?

"How Is the Lutheran Church to Interpret and Use the Old and New Testaments?" was delivered in Mankato Minnesota at the 1973 Reformation Lectures of Bethany Lutheran College and Seminary. It was published later that year in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, the theological journal of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. (Permission is granted to reproduce this article in this collection.) Incidentally, this is the synod in which Preus spent his entire pastoral ministry (1947–1957). In this important presentation, Preus builds upon his Iowa lectures, develops six principles of biblical hermeneutics, then applies them to the use of the historical-critical method, a method of interpreting the Bible that was becoming increasingly popular in the academic circles of the Missouri Synod.

Lecture I: The Divine Origin and Unity Principles

There is no more pressing and appropriate study for the Lutheran Church today than the assignment you have given me for the lectures during the Festival of the Reformation, 1973. Throughout her history the Church of the Reformation has been threatened by attacks from without and within against the principles of *sola gratia* (salvation by grace alone) and *sola fide* (justification by faith alone without the works of the Law). These attacks came from Rome, the enthusiasts, the Reformed and even by Lutherans. Today the third great principle of the Lutheran Reformation is under attack, the principle of *Sola Scriptura*. The principle is articulated as follows in our Confessions: "We pledge ourselves to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true norm (*die einige Regel und Richtschnur*) according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged." (FC SD, Rule and Norm, 3; Cf. FC Epit., Rule and Norm, 7). These assaults against the Reformation principle of Scripture as the only source and norm of Christian theology are not new. For over two hundred years, since the time of the Enlightenment these assaults have been carried on. And the germs of such rationalism were already found among the Jesuits and Socinians of the Reformation era. But today the threat is greater because the denial of the authority of Scripture is now found in almost all the larger Protestant denominations, including those that were formerly conservative and biblically based.

The attack against biblical authority is today, however, less overt than two and three generations ago. There is less of the brazen rationalistic rejection of miracles and fundamental articles of faith. Today the attack is more subtile [*sic*], directed against the interpretation of Scripture which is the heritage of Lutheranism, against the exegetical conclusions of Luther and our Confessions, against the most basic rules of interpretation commonly assumed to be correct and necessary by evangelical and confessional Lutherans. In short, the entire Christian faith is attacked or questioned by means of a rejection of biblical and Lutheran hermeneutics. This is no exaggeration. Today Lutheran practitioners of the so-called historical critical method of interpreting Scripture have by the use of their method questioned every article of the Christian faith: the historical facts underlying our redemption (e.g. virgin birth, resurrection) are said to be unauthentic or improbable and the facts underlying our doctrine are reduced to mere myths, parables, value judgments, theological constructs or metaphors.

This is how serious the situation is today. A few years ago Rev. Kurt Marquart said during his Reformation Lectures at Bethany Lutheran College, "It seems to be appropriate to refer to the present total war (in theology) as the Prolegomenistic Controversy. It clamours to be settled by a new Formula of Concord! The real issue at bottom is of course the authority of Holy Scripture, that which the Reformation expressed in the battle-cry: 'Sola Scriptura'."[1] Marquart is right! The battle centers in the authority of Scripture. But even more precisely it centers in hermeneutics,

1 Kurt Marquart, *Truth and/or Consequences*, essay delivered at Bethany Lutheran College, 1967.

i.e. in our approach and interpretation of Scripture and in how this impinges upon biblical authority.

And so to answer the question posed in this essay we must do two things. 1) We must re-examine our Lutheran hermeneutics and reaffirm its total sway among us. 2) We must seek to understand, analyze, and assess what is going on today in biblical studies, and compare all this with the evangelical Lutheran interpretation of Scripture. These two things I hope to do in these lectures. The results of such studies will reveal a great gulf between two definite forces at work in the church today; the one a Lutheran, evangelical and eminently biblical exegesis of Scripture, and the other a sub-Christian, naturalistic, pagan approach to Scripture and exegesis.

A. The Lutheran Interpretation and Use of the Scriptures

1. Introduction

The Question, "How is the Lutheran Church to Interpret and Use the Old and New Testaments?" can only be answered by consulting the one normative standard for what is Lutheran, the Lutheran Confessions. The Lutheran Reformation represents a clear and definite evangelical hermeneutic or approach to Scripture. This is true also of the Lutheran Confessions which, like the ecumenical Creeds, see themselves as expositions or at least summaries of sacred Scripture.[2] How often does our Book of Concord claim that what is taught in the churches is "based solidly on the divine Scriptures" (Tappert, p. 3), is "the pure doctrine of God's Word" (*ibid.*, p. 4), "the unalterable truth of the divine Word" (*ibid.*, p. 5) and "not

2 This has been the firm conclusion of the most competent students of the Lutheran Confessions. Holsten Fagerberg, *Die Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften von 1529 bis 1537*. Tr. by Gerhard Klose. Göttingen Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965. p. 14ff. Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*. Tr. by Paul F. Koeneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961. p. vff. Ralph Bohlmann, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968. This is also the conviction of the older commentaries on the Confessions. For instance, George Mylius insisted that the authority of the Confessions is directly dependent upon their being scriptural, and it is only out of this conviction that Lutherans subscribe them and identify with their doctrinal content. See *Augustanae confessionis quae ecclesiarum evangelicarum novissimi temporis augustissimum symbolum, & doctrinae lutheranae lapis vere Lydius est: explicatio*. Jena, 1596. p. A3. Cf. John George Walch, *Introductio in libros ecclesiae lutheranae symbolicos observationibus historicis et theologicis illustrata*. Jena, 1732. p. 754. Abraham Calov, *Commentarius apodictico-elenchticus in augustanam confessionem*. Leipzig, 1646. pp. 14–16.

The Unity of Scripture

> "The Unity of Scripture," originally published in the *Lutheran Theological Journal*, is perhaps Preus's most prolonged application of his coherency principle upon the doctrine of Holy Scriptures. Furthering his thinking in the Iowa and Bethany lectures and growing out of the reductionistic controversy of the 1970s, "Unity" is an analysis of the relationship between the normative authority of the Bible and the unity of the Bible, whether that unity be described as the analogy of faith, Scripture's Christocentricity, or other less salutary appellations. "Unity" was published in 1990 by *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (which has granted permission for reproduction in this collection).

Few theological concepts have been more confused, unclear, and undeveloped throughout the course of the church's history than the concept of the unity of Scripture. The term was not used in the early church, nor by the reformers, nor even in the post-Reformation era. The terms most closely approximating the idea to be found during that vast span of church history were *kanōn pisteōs* and *regula fidei*, *hēpistis* (a common term for creeds in the early church), and *analogia pisteōs*, or *analogia fidei*, terms with different meanings derived from Romans 12:7 and sometimes 2 Timothy 1:13. Whether the idea expressed by these terms constitutes simply a summation of Scripture or a hermeneutical norm as well is not always clear, but it usually includes both. And the actual meaning of these terms as to what they affirm about the nature of Scripture is not uniform and not even always clear. What do these phrases say in reference to the nature of biblical unity? Usually they simply assume an organic doctrinal unity within the entire Scriptures and offer a summation of that body of doctrine. The authority and truthfulness of the Bible and its doctrine are clearly presupposed, since such divine properties underlie the divine doctrinal content of Scripture. Also the unity between the two testaments in simple terms of prophecy and fulfillment is explicitly affirmed, and emphatically so, by the church fathers, although not explicitly always by the aforementioned terms.[1]

During the Reformation and during the period of orthodoxy almost to the eighteenth century the idea of the unity of Scripture was expressed in many ways. And the aforementioned terms prevalent in the early and medieval church suggestive of the unity of Scripture were used freely in contexts much the same as in the early church. Thus, commentaries on the earlier creeds and new creeds and symbols were written as summaries of the biblical *corpus doctrinae* and adhered to, often with avidity by subscription to such documents. That the theology (doctrine) of Scripture was an organic unity (so Luther; the following terms connoting an organic unity of biblical theology were commonly used: *corpus doctrinae*, *articuli fidei*, *caput*, *pars*, *locus*, etc.) or a coherent system (so perhaps Calvinism) of doctrine was assumed and affirmed in the dogmatic and exegetical writers of the day. Furthermore, all the reformers believed and asserted in their writings a unity of the Old and New Testaments in terms of prophecy and fulfillment; that is to say, verbal and cognitive predictive assertions of the Old Testament had a corresponding fulfillment in the words and deeds of Christ and other events recorded accurately in the New Testament. Coupled with this basic idea of unity was the conviction, held by all the reformers (and even Socinians and Roman Catholics with certain modifications) in one form or another that all of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, was Christocentric; that is, the main theme running through all of Scripture and cognitively set forth there is the person *and work* of Christ.

Thus, in the Reformation and post-Reformation era, as in the early church, there are many complementary ideas and convictions, all or any of which might give rise to a total integrated concept of the unity of Scripture. And yet the term "unity of Scripture" was not yet in vogue, nor was there any attempt to bring together the various convictions and ideas into a coordinated synthesis expressing the concept of biblical unity. Nor, I might add, was it always clear whether these firmly held views concerning (a) the divine origin and authority of all Scripture (the one God is the *autor primarius*), (b) the agreement between the testaments in terms of prophecy and fulfillment, (c) the Christocentricity of all of Scripture, and (d) the total doctrinal agreement of all Scripture were considered to be simply conclusions drawn from Scripture and thus part of the *corpus doctri-*

1 See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1958), pp. 64–69.

nae, or in addition heremeneutical principles drawn from Scripture and necessary for the correct and evangelical explication and application of Scripture. Of course, all the four principles mentioned above were held by the reformers and to varying degrees became underlying working principles of hermeneutics as they plied their exegetical trade, as it were. Luther might have employed the principle of Christocentricity with more consistency and vigor, Calvin the principle of doctrinal unity, although I am not sure about this.[2] We must remember, of course, that in the early years of the Reformation no thorough studies on hermeneutics were written until the *Clavis Scripturae* of Matthias Flacius in 1567, although Andrew Hyperius as early as 1556, after Luther's death, had taken up many hermeneutical concerns (spiritual, academic and theological) in his *De Theolgo, seu de Ratione Studii Theologici Libri IIII*. Even so, a full-blown and conscious treatment of the unity of Scripture incorporating the four basic principles enunciated above just did not appear, and it is only in recent times that the term "unity of Scripture" has been employed and that one or more of the above principles have been included in the definition of the term.[3]

It is my contention that the concept of unity adumbrated clearly by Luther and the reformers and structured on the four pillars of (a) divine authorship of Scripture, (b) agreement between prophecy in the Old Testament and fulfillment in the New, (c) Christocentricity, and (d) doctrinal agreement throughout Scripture is biblical; that is, each pillar of the construct is based squarely upon the exegesis of Scripture. Since the time of the Enlightment and the advent of the historical-critical method initiated by Semler, this Reformation view of the unity of Scripture has not been considered viable as a doctrine or hermeneutical principle. However, the theologians of the Enlightenment, the higher critics, the Romantics, the mythophiles, the classical Liberals, and even the Deists all conjectured

2 Luther's Christological principle, "was Christum treibet," is based upon the conviction that Scripture agrees doctrinally with itself. James must agree with Paul if the book is to be considered apostolic, i.e., Scripture.

3 In his fine discussion of the "Unity of the Bible" John J. Davis lists four "kinds," or apsects, of biblical unity which correspond to the four principles mentioned above: thematic unity (doctrinal unity), historical unity, prophecy and fulfillment, and Christocentricity. He assumes throughout his study the divine origin of Scripture. The best definition of the traditional doctrine of the unity of Scripture I have found is by Ralph Bohlmann, "Confessional Biblical Interpretation: Some Basic Principles," in *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, ed. John Reumann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 205: "Because the same God speaks the same message of Christ and his salvation throughout the Scriptures present an organic unity of doctrine both within and between the Old and New Testaments. The unity of authorship, content, and purpose is reflected in the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture, whether applied to individual passages or articles of faith."

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