

Doing Ministry Between Law and Gospel

An address given to *The Society of the Holy Trinity*
at its General Retreat by
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STS General Retreat: September 27, 2006

I. Law/Gospel — a Personal Thing

"The chain of events in the period from May, 1839, to April, 1841, was unwittingly set into motion by Pastor Löber. In the early service held by the immigrants on Rogate Sunday, May 5, 1839, Löber preached what seems to have been a rather searching sermon. Allegedly as a result of Löber's message, two women... came to him at different hours on that same Sunday and made detailed confessions of improper relations with [Martin] Stephan."^[1]

So writes Walter Forster as he describes the start of a process that resulted in the dismissal of Bishop Martin Stephan and the eventual emergence of the younger of two Walther brothers as leader of a bedraggled bunch of religious refugees from Saxon Germany in the Missouri territory.

So also goes "ministry between Law and Gospel."^[2] It works like this: a sermon — a message — a Word is spoken. It is a Word that compels remorse — in the Spirit's mystery — and a Word that also — equally mysteriously — bids a person to admit to that remorse and trust that he or she will be forgiven.

I suppose it is not happenstance that an LCMS pastor is addressing this topic. There is a particular emphasis given to the hermeneutic of Law and Gospel in LCMS theological education. You are, of course, aware that it was the immediate forefather of the Missouri Synod (that same younger Walther, Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm to be precise) who provided what is certainly the most verbose and in-depth analysis of this theme. And, ultimately, it was the working of "ministry between Law and Gospel" as seen in the instance I quoted that led to the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other states.

Although there is this rather narrow — if not sectarian — connection of Law and Gospel with Missouri, I hope to make the case that the insight is inherently neither narrow, nor sectarian, and indeed deserves a place in any pastoral practice that is biblical or confessional, and that is to say, both evangelical and catholic.

Before we turn to those issues, however, we cannot leave the two women who came to Pastor Löber that Rogate Sunday evening some 160 years ago. They came — in so far as we know the story — for intensely personal reasons. They came because something had touched their hearts on the

deepest level. They came because words had moved them to come. Personal words. Not generalities about life. Not a philosophy. Not even dogma. Personal words moved those two women.

They came because they now had to speak personally — oh, so personally. Each woman came to speak of her *own* sin — though the greater sin — in a very real way — was not their own. Indeed, while we would be quick to point out that these young women were victims — victims of clergy sexual abuse — the historical record indicates that these two individuals came to confess their own sin, not another's.^[3]

Again, though there were two women, each came on her own, for each was there with a personal need. Though each held the same secret, each held it personally, confessed it personally, and required personal absolution and healing.

They came because of words they took personally. Words from a man's lips had been the Word of God that tore their hearts. And they came to hear another personal Word, asking it from a "man of God" (2 Tim 3:16-17) because only another *Word of God* could heal their hearts:

Come, let us return to the Lord;
for he has torn us, that he may heal us;
he has struck us down, and *he* will bind us up. (Hosea 6:1^[4]).

Law and Gospel — God's Words. Words to the entire world, yet words that are always thoroughly personal.

We can never adequately consider this theme unless we begin personally. That is, Law and Gospel will only be wooden categories until we become one of those women — personally torn, and personally healed by the Lord and his oh so personal words. Indeed, those two women are nothing less than paradigms of the whole Church. Remember Hosea's bride — the whore who becomes Lady Israel. Remember Paul's Lady Church in Romans 7 who is set free only after her first husband dies so that she can be married to Christ. Or his Lady Church of Ephesians 5 who is cleansed only by the washing of water with the Word to become a radiant Bride without stain or spot or blemish.

What is so for the whole Church is catholic. What is catholic must also then be individual and personal. Catholic: what is true for Christ's Lady Church. Individual and personal: so it was with Löber's ladies.

The spotless Lady Church, Christ's Bride, is finally made real by an individual woman dying from a Word of Law and rising by a Gospel Word; then another, always another — until it includes even you and me. Theories, general truths, firm philosophies — they don't do this. Words that are personal — cutting and healing hearts — they do. Words that have us echoing the confessions of countless mothers and fathers in faith, including the one who said:

...we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom 7:14-15, 24-25).

That we are pastors is a given for us. It's on our office doors. It's the name we are called more often than our Christian name. It's why we qualify as members of this Society. It's the title over our lives. We can hardly forget it.

That we are one with the women who heard Pastor Löber, we may easily forget. We are always, above all else, among those sinner-saints who have died by the Law and then died to the Law; those who have personally heard a Gospel Word that raises the dead.

After all, the women came to their pastor by means of listening. To listen isn't doing nothing or just a little something^[5] — it is the work of hearing a voice address us personally. In this instance, it is the work of the Spirit in the woman who hears God in a human voice — God addressing her personally. The women listened and they heard God that day. Like Israel at Mt. Sinai, they must have wanted God to speak no more — at least to them (Ex. 20:19), He had so torn their hearts as they listened to Him! Yet He did speak some more and — miracle of miracles! — the Word He spoke now gave them courage to confess their sins and to expect His forgiveness. By listening hearts were torn and then healed.

I should forget about being a pastor unless I have been torn like Löber's ladies. It is only a job without the Law's wounds.

I should forget about being a pastor unless I am healed of those wounds. It is a mere profession without the personal scars that mark the ministrations of the One wounded for us.

As Paul cries out in frustration about the good he cannot do and the evil he cannot *not* do, he is not only declaring the human condition. He is also declaring the believer's condition, and, finally, the pastor's condition. It is the condition from which and in which the dynamics of Law and Gospel alone can break through and begin the healing that starts in death and ends with life.

So it is there — in dying and rising with Christ — that "doing ministry between Law and Gospel" begins. It is, after all, a "doing," not a static contemplation, that we are discussing. So it is that we can "do" ministry between Law and Gospel only when Law and Gospel have done their work on us.

Ministry starts with having something done to us — something done by God through His Word. But there is more to doing ministry between Law and Gospel than *just* having had an experience. It will take some thought as well.

II. Thinking about Law/Gospel

A basic grounding is in order, first in understanding these words we use so easily and often. Law is part of life from anyone's perspective. Everybody deals with laws — criminal, civil, corporate, or the laws of success — everybody has them. So what if Lutherans and other Christians have them, too?

That everyone has laws is rather important to the theological understanding of law. It is the tradition of Christian theology that all law begins with "natural law" or, as many ancient theologians termed

it, "eternal law." In other words, all the other laws we speak of ultimately come from something inherent to humanity:

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. (Romans 2:14-16)

It is this pregnant passage that underlies 2000 years of Christian reasoning about law. So Irenaeus of Lyon (d. 202 AD), writing against the Gnostics in the second century, says:

At first God deemed it sufficient to inscribe the natural law, or the Decalogue, upon the hearts of men; but afterwards found it necessary to bridle, with the yoke of the Mosaic Law, the desires of the Jews who were abusing their liberty.[\[6\]](#)

That God had implanted such "natural precepts" in humanity is the reason that humans all exercise some sort of moral code — live by some set of laws. We devise and seek to implement laws because of this eternal law.

For this reason (and this alone!) Augustine (d. 430 AD) can praise Socrates and Plato: they corroborate the Biblical assertion of a law written on the human heart by their assertion of a single, just, supreme being and his laws of nature.[\[7\]](#)

Aquinas (d. 1274 AD), reasoning from God's law to understand all law, will later define law as "an ordinance of reason, for the general good, made by whoever has care of the community, and promulgated".[\[8\]](#) He then points out that God's law — His ordinance of reason that He promulgates for the general good of all creation — is simply another way to speak of God's will itself: "As to God's will, if by that we mean the will itself, identical with God, then it is not subject to the eternal law but is itself the law".[\[9\]](#)

So Luther, far from breaking from this core understanding of law, famously affirms it in his *Lectures on Galatians*:

Therefore there is one law which runs through all ages, is known to all men, is written in the hearts of all people, and leaves no one from beginning to end with an excuse, although for the Jews ceremonies were added and the other nations had their own laws, which were not binding upon the whole world, but only this one, which the Holy Spirit dictates unceasingly in the hearts of all.[\[10\]](#)

Though a significant segment of later Lutheran theologians would quibble over the terminology of "natural law" or "eternal law," even a foremost critic of natural law like Gustav Aulen would have to affirm the essence of it — the point Irenaeus had made so long before: "What we call 'law' is really nothing else than the divine will itself in operation."[\[11\]](#)

There is a law, said Luther, "which the Holy Spirit dictates unceasingly." It is God's law — it is His will — it is right — it is reasonable — and it is knowable. Such an assertion carries through

Christian theology, from early to medieval to Reformation and beyond. It is, after all, part of the catholic faith we hold.

To speak of "natural precepts," "natural law," or "eternal law," then, is to begin to understand the theme we are addressing. But it is only to begin. *In these basic thoughts, so critical to speaking of the Law in Law/Gospel, it is also important to note not only a vital concept, but also a foundational implication.*

For that implication, let us go back to Paul and Romans 1 and 2. Paul was not engaged in a treatise on the natural knowledge of God. No, this is far more urgent than any intellectual discovery. He had experienced a terrible revelation: "Now the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom. 1:18). Underlying that horrible revelation was the awful truth about its cause: that "what can be known about God is plain" (1:19 ESV), but man did not retain it. More horrible yet, "the truth of God" was exchanged for a lie (Rom 1:25 NIV) and "the knowledge of God" discarded (Rom 1:28 NIV).

Consider deeply the phrases, "what can be known about God" (v. 19) or "the knowledge of God" (v. 28). The latter is the NIV translation of verse 28. NRSV says: "they did not see fit to acknowledge God." The Greek is: οὐκ εδοκίμασαν τὸν θεὸν εἶναι ἐῴγνωσται. Literally: "they did not deem it worthy to have God in knowledge." There are things we can know about God — there are things that have been made plain: God's things. Indeed, the phrase in verse 19, τὸ γνωστον τοῦ θεοῦ, may be taken either as an objective or subjective genitive — either as knowing things about God or what God Himself knows. In this case, both interpretations are true, and either way we end in the same place. Humanity, says Paul, has God in our knowledge, for we know there is good and bad, right and wrong. We know such things — such things as God Himself knows, and so we know what the mind can know about God. Our laws prove it.

But, Paul goes on, since we have discarded such knowledge — not deeming it worthy to retain "God in knowledge" — God gives us over to those things which we preferred to Him: "debased minds and things that should not be done" (NRSV). That is the horrible truth. *It is not theory for Paul. It is tragedy!*

It is here that law becomes Law — capital L, upper case, proper noun, personal! Law is no longer simply idea, important concept, theoretical construct. It is personal tragedy. It is as personal as God, as God in all His wrath, as God personally engaged with Man, and enraged by human denial, betrayal, and spite. There is an eternal truth, and we've denied it! There is eternal righteousness, and we have despised it. There is a law "unceasingly dictated" into our hearts, and we have scorned it. There is a God, and we have spurned Him. And we are surprised by God's personal affront? By God's wrath against this? Such obtuseness is nothing less than what Melancthon identifies in the *Apology*: "Ungodly and smug people do not say [I have sinned] seriously, for they neither see nor read the sentence of the law written in their hearts."^[12]

So it is when we speak of Law, we must finally speak personally, personally to men and women, and personally about God. It is not enough to articulate dogma or to assert propositional information — such is absolutely necessary, but it is not enough. Indeed, if that is all we do, we are part of the very problem Romans identifies. We are suppressing the truth about God and we are repressing the personhood of God. No, to do a ministry of the Law is to make plain *this* truth: we have despised

God, and He is enraged! Luther: "the manifestation of wrath is the law when it is acknowledged and felt".^[13]

There is something ultimately frustrating in all this. We start with something utterly beautiful — an eternal law by which we know a righteous and holy God, and the goodness of God that has been written into the human heart. It is something to be known — the very *γνώστω του θεου* has been given to the human heart. It is so beautiful that we can understand why Augustine marvels as he lauds Platonism for clearly articulating a natural law and an absolutely good God behind it:

For if man has been so created as to attain, through that which is most excellent in him, to that which excels all things – that is, to the one true and absolutely good God, without whom no nature exists, no doctrine instructs, no exercise profits – let Him be sought in whom all things are secure to us, let Him be discovered in whom all truth becomes certain to us, let Him be loved in whom all becomes right to us.^[14]

Yes! Let Him be sought. Yes! Let Him be discovered. Yes! Let Him be loved. That is the beautiful beginning that the eternal law, inscribed on our hearts, holds before our eyes. "Look, there is a God — righteous, and holy, and beautiful. Come, let us seek Him, discover Him, love Him." That is the invitation, but the hard reality of the Law is that those who seek to know God in such a way discover that the One they would know is more righteous, more holy, more austere, more other than they can handle. There is the frustration. The Law says, rightly, "Here is your God." But He is far too much God for us to know, and He is impossible for us to love.

So it goes with knowing God philosophically. In the end, having praised Platonism for its recognition of an eternal law and an eternal, holy Law-giver, Augustine must then assert "That the Excellency of the Christian Religion Is Above all the Science of Philosophers."^[15] Indeed, that the *simplest* Christian has something unattainable by "all the science of philosophers." Luther explains why:

The substance of the matter is this: When all the commandments have been put together, when their message receives every particle of praise to which it is entitled, it is still a mere letter. That is, teaching not put into practice.^[16]

That's the frustration. In the end, the Law is always playing Laban's game^[17] with us — work and think and worry for seven years or seventy or seven hundred, but in the end, you wake up to Someone other than you expected.

We need something more, but we cannot find it.

And that leads us — finally — to the other word: Gospel.

The Gospel, too, requires some thoughtful attention. Indeed, it requires far more attention than the Law. The Law, after all, is already there inscribed inside us, however smudged the script. But the Gospel is not. There is no Gospel written on our hearts. There is no intuitional knowledge of *this* Word of God for us to fall back on. So Augustine, can give only faint praise to Platonism for all its efforts in knowing something of God and His law, while he saves his standing ovation for the fact

that the simplest Christian knows the fullness of God in Christ, not as intellectual achievement, but revealed gift.

If law can easily be seen summarized in the Ten Commandments, then the Creed is the Gospel corollary to that. But, while both Commandments and Creed are the very core of Christian catechesis, it is necessary to see their two most essential differences.

The first has to do with revelation, the second, content.^[18] The Commandments are really not new. From Paul to Irenaeus to Augustine to Aquinas to Luther to Walther to John Paul,^[19] Christian teachers have uniformly pointed out that the eternal law lies beneath all other law, including the commands of God in the Decalogue. That is to say, the law of God is reasonable and intuitive. (This includes, by the way, even the first table commandments about God.^[20])

But the Gospel is not like that. It is new — something unknown to man and woman. The Creed, beyond a very stripped down first article, is neither an example of reasoned nor intuitive truth. Its revelation is entirely from without, by the express saving acts of God, most especially the Incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord. Secondly, to note that is to realize that the content of the one is entirely different than the other. *Law, simply put, is what God wills for us to do. Gospel, however, is what God has willed to do for us.* Law is demand. Gospel is promise. Law requires obedience. Gospel inspires faith.

Luther summarizes this simply and beautifully in the *Large Catechism*:

From this you see that the Creed is a very different teaching than the Ten Commandments. For the latter teach us what we ought to do, but the Creed tells us what God does for us and gives to us. The Ten Commandments, moreover, are written in the hearts of all people, but no human wisdom is able to comprehend the Creed; it must be taught by the Holy Spirit alone. Therefore the Ten Commandments do not succeed in making us Christians, for God's wrath and displeasure still remain upon us because we cannot fulfill what God demands of us. But the Creed brings pure grace and makes us righteous and acceptable to God. Through this knowledge we come to love and delight in all the commandments of God because we see here in the Creed how God gives himself completely to us, with all his gifts and power, to help us keep the Ten Commandments: the Father gives us all creation, Christ all his works, the Holy Spirit all his gifts.^[21]

Or, again, note Luther's summation of the Gospel in his sermon, "The Twofold Use of the Law and Gospel: Letter & Spirit":

What mortal has ever discovered or fathomed the truth that the three persons in the eternal divine essence are one God; that the second person, the Son of God, was obliged to become man, born of a virgin; and that no way of life could be opened for us, save through his crucifixion? Such truth never would have been heard nor preached, would never in all eternity have been published, learned and believed, had not God himself revealed it.^[22]

This supra-rational understanding of the Gospel has its unshakable Biblical foundation in Paul's happy recovery of the counter-intuitive sense of the phrase, "the righteousness of God" (Romans 1:17; 3:21). The meaning of that phrase captures the second essential difference between Law and Gospel — their content. By "righteousness of God" Paul does *not* mean what we would assume or suppose, that is, God's perfect, holy, inherently righteous character. Rather, Paul means us to take the genitive subjectively: this is God's righteousness that He shares with us, that He gifts to us, that He reveals to us. The righteousness that is both revealed and worked by the incarnation, holy obedience, atoning death, and impossibly real resurrection of God the Son is the righteousness by which God justifies the unrighteous, declaring us righteous for Jesus' sake.^[23]

Now this is something utterly from without, this Gospel. It comes to us who are dead, and like a divine cardio-shock, it starts a new heart beating within us full of faith. It is a Word that creates anew, that raises the dead, that does what it says — a performative Word. In no way is this Gospel something we can reason or intuit. It is a Word that breaks open our whole reality.

For these reasons, as much as we can and must laud the law of God for its truth and its eternal goodness, we can only damn it with faint praise in comparison to the Gospel that shocks us alive and stuns us righteous. This amazing Word from without, this utterly astounding "good news" that our sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake (the very sins the Law compels us to admit) — this Gospel Word cannot be over-appreciated.

And neither can it be overly reasoned. Its words are not irrational or a mantra or just so much sacred gibberish. They are clear statements, articulations of truth. They are words, finally, with the same clarity as "I love you." But if that truth is bigger than our minds, then the Gospel is bigger still. Its Spirit-revealed truth bursts all the bounds of reason and can only be apprehended by a Spirit-given, trusting faith.

So Luther, once more:

Now, as opposed to "the letter," there is another doctrine or message, which [*Paul*] terms the "ministration of a New Covenant" and "of the Spirit." This doctrine does not teach what works are required of man, for that man has already heard; but it makes known to him what God would do for him and bestow upon him, indeed what he has already done: he has given his Son Christ for us; because, for our disobedience to the Law, which no man fulfils, we were under God's wrath and condemnation. Christ made satisfaction for our sins, effected a reconciliation with God and gave to us his own righteousness.^[24]

These conceptual differences between Law and Gospel are essential to maintain the Biblical doctrine of salvation. If salvation is the goal of all Christian preaching and teaching, then the right understanding of how God's Law and His Gospel intersect with salvation is of incalculable importance. It is why the confessions of our churches declare that the doctrine of justification by grace through faith is the doctrine on which the Church stands or fall.

Yet, having the doctrine of salvation right is not, finally, what is most significant about Law and Gospel. The issue is what God's people, and particularly what ministers of the Gospel, will do with these twin truths.

III. Doing Ministry Between Law and Gospel

In the *Apology*, Melanchthon expresses Luther's clarity on Law and Gospel as he responds to the *Confutation's* objections to the doctrine of justification.^[25] The *Formula of Concord* similarly echoes these themes.^[26] And, of course, we have C.F.W. Walther's vehement lectures on this topic. For Luther, for Melanchthon, for the *Formula*, and — most certainly for Walther — there is a clear polemical note in their adumbrations of the Law/Gospel distinction. But why? If one may most simply identify the Decalogue with the Law of God, and the Creed with the Gospel, then why the polemics? Where is the controversy?

Commandments and Creed are about as central a part of the Christian ecumenical consensus as anything one could imagine. Yet, Law and Gospel, and an insistence upon its right division, sadly, is not. Indeed, these are matters that, at best, are frequently viewed as either curious traits of "the Lutheran tradition" or as marks of the Lutheran error.

Walther, in reply, thunders that "Only he is an orthodox teacher who not only presents all the articles of faith in accordance with Scripture, but also rightly distinguishes from each other the Law and the Gospel."^[27] There you have it: it is the distinguishing, finally, where "the rubber meets the road." From that comes the bald assertion that any teacher who fails in this task of rightly distinguishing Law and Gospel in practice has lapsed into heterodoxy. This is where Walther and other Lutheran teachers before him, right down to Luther and even mild Melanchthon, get pugnacious.

Is such insistence necessary or one of many aspects of our tradition that may easily lead us into sectarianism? Does it make us less catholic — setting us apart from the *Una Sancta*?

One can certainly make the case for that. I expect that nearly anyone from this generation who reads Walther will find himself frequently cringing. Walther's angry characterizations of "Papists" on the one side and the Reformed on the other are no doubt upsetting to our modern sensibilities. More importantly, they seem sometimes to be less than accurate assessments of even pre-Vatican II Rome or the polemical Protestants of the 19th Century.

Nonetheless, apart from *how* Walther sometimes makes his case, I believe the case he makes is valid, and also crucial for our day. Indeed, there is something supremely ironic about Walther. More than any other individual, Walther bequeathed to 19th Century Lutheranism the absolute significance of purity of doctrine ("*Die reine Lehre*"), something he held so important and recognized so clearly in Lutheran teaching, that he could vociferously defend the proposition that the confessional Lutheran churches are the only true visible churches on earth.^[28] Yet, this is also the man who condemns any doctrine that posits salvation only within this "true visible church" and just as clearly shows that purity of doctrine alone does not, finally, define the Church — that is, the *Una Sancta*. No, it is also what you do with doctrine that counts.

This very Lutheran emphasis is one that has to do above all else with the pastoral care of souls. That pastoral care will be rightly defined only when it flows from a consistent apprehension of the twin messages of Scripture: Law and Gospel. It is because of the consistency of these two themes that

right pastoral care seems to display an inconsistency, giving hell to one and whispering nothing but the "sweet Something" of the Gospel's affirmation to another.

The irony in Walther or Luther before him or any truly Lutheran pastor is definitional to the message they pronounce. The twin message of God is one of seeming inconsistency: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2). "I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake" (1 John 2:12). This is the beautiful Scriptural tension of Law and Gospel — unflinching Demand and unconditional Promise.

That tension *must* be mirrored in authentic pastoral practice. Without such tension, the pastoral care is not only not Lutheran. It is not Christian or Biblical, it is not evangelical or catholic.

It is on the basis of that necessary tension that I want not only to commend this topic to your continuing consideration as pastors, but do so in terms of its evangelical-catholic, as well as its Biblical, confessional and pastoral implications. While there may be a particular Lutheran awareness of this subject, it is not something that should separate us from the rest of Christianity. Rather, it ought to be another place in which a Lutheran confession and practice stakes a central position among Christians that may, please God, draw more extreme positions toward the middle.

[\[29\]](#)

If this assertion is true, then Walther himself, who considers this topic with such depth and vigor, must help make the case. His first four theses lay out the standpoint from which he speaks. First, Walther speaks hermeneutically: Law and Gospel are the whole doctrinal content of the Bible, though they differ from one another fundamentally. Second, he asserts that doctrinal orthodoxy requires a right distinction between Law and Gospel, both from the standpoint of teaching and practice. Third, he asserts that this distinction is an "art" that can be learned only from the Holy Spirit in experiential ways. Fourth, returning to hermeneutics, he argues that without this distinction, the Bible cannot be rightly understood.

After these four initial theses, the next twenty-one theses are all examples of how Law and Gospel are not rightly divided. While Walther never forgets theological or definitional issues, his remaining theses are largely or exclusively focused on preaching and pastoral care that is consistent with orthodox teaching regarding justification by faith. Such orthopraxis involves everything from the manner and the order of preaching Law and Gospel, to the proper diagnosis of the state of one's hearer and the correct application to that state, to a careful consideration of contrition and faith and conversion and sanctification, to the role of the church and sacraments, to encouragement to err on the side of the Gospel, not the Law. In every case, however, Walther's assertions flow from a consistent attention to the application of the doctrine of justification in the real world.

It is this firm grounding in justification by faith that makes Walther's work so quintessentially Lutheran. Yet, that is also why it is truly evangelical and also catholic.

Remaining Catholic

For us to be evangelical-catholic in pastoral practice, we would do well to give Walther a respectful hearing. First, catholicity demands something of this kind of pastoral work. Walther is particularly catholic in thesis XVII: "... the Word of God is not rightly divided when a description is given of

faith, both as regards its strength and the consciousness and productiveness of it, that does not fit all believers at all times."[\[30\]](#)

Walther's focus in the discussion of this thesis is upon the young pastor who so idealizes personal faith that it becomes a standard none can attain. However, underlying that very practical warning is the principle of catholicity itself — the catholic Faith (*fides quae* — the faith that is believed) does not change. Neither, then, can the understanding of the faith that believes (*fides qua*) be changed. The same stumbling, faltering, pleading, confused faith of the father who exclaimed, "I believe, help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24) is seen in every age and every believer.

It is the same for the whole of the Law/Gospel dynamic. No, the clarity of Luther or Walther regarding this subject is not evident in every age of the catholic faith, but the tension, the dynamic, the push-pull of God's twin message of Law and Gospel is most certainly present "at all times." Simply put, this is because Commands and Creed do not change. No matter what current passing fads may be present, where men and women encounter the Commands of God as truth, they will see their sin. And where the Creed is confessed in truth, they will see their hope.

One must, in particular, recognize that the catholic tradition maintains important aspects of God's law that are often neglected where Christianity is more partisan and Protestant. This includes teaching on natural or eternal law with a greater consistency than virtually any part of Protestantism, including recent Lutherans. One might also note that the tendency toward antinomianism, which is so devastating in contemporary Protestant circles, is perennially opposed by a fuller understanding of the catholic Faith and, for that matter, natural law.

Where Christianity is more partisan and *Roman* Catholic, one frequently misses the full weight of the condemning voice of the Law as law is too often presented as an almost minimalist standard of civic righteousness rather than God's absolute demand for holiness. The strictest words of Law are relegated to the category of evangelical counsels.[\[31\]](#)

Thus, whether one looks to either the Protestant or Roman Catholic (and Eastern Orthodox) poles of the Christian Church on earth, one is reminded of the necessity of a broader catholicity in teaching and applying the vital truths of God's Law.

It is the same with the Gospel. The Roman emphasis upon the Gospel at work in the sacraments is far superior to what one finds in any Protestant or evangelical circles, and even many Lutheran churches. While doctrinal weakness is certainly present, Roman Catholic Christians find a gracious assurance in Baptism, Eucharist, and Confession that belies centuries of Protestant accusations that the Roman Church is entirely legalistic in the doctrine of salvation.

Protestant churches — particularly Evangelical ones — have a lively relationship with the *Word* of God, written and preached, that one seldom finds in Rome, even post-Vatican II. The Gospel message of life and salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ is proclaimed with consistency and passion (if not always with the clarity one would desire).

But catholicity is not Word *or* Sacrament. It is Word *and* Sacrament, just as it is Law *and* Gospel. Indeed, to have one over the other, Word over Sacrament or Sacrament over Word, is to lose

catholicity. More clearly, it will mean the loss of an essential means of Gospel *application*. *It is to fail to retain yet another aspect of the oppositional character of the catholic Faith.*

Law and Gospel are of the essence of Christian teaching and life because the catholic Faith is inherently oppositional — it is a faith that exists in paradox, and only in paradox. It is suffering and comfort. It is demand and promise. It is judgment and deliverance. It is death and life. It is cross and glory. And it is Word and Sacrament.

Gregory Nazianzen reminds us of this oppositional reality in the universe of Christian dogma with its tense truths staring at one another as across a great gulf: "Yesterday I was crucified with Him; today I am glorified with Him; yesterday I died with Him; today I am quickened with Him; yesterday I was buried with Him; today I rise with Him."^[32]

The catholic, creedal Faith declares the truth of both Good Friday and Easter, so it is a faith of Law and Gospel, whether or not a given generation specifically identifies those categories, consistently realizes their implications, or precisely articulates them. Law and Gospel *are* the catholic Faith which the Fathers confessed at their clearest and best, though its oppositional truths can easily be undermined by affirming one without the other or one to the neglect of the other.

Indeed, if the catholic Faith continues, so also does Satan's work of undermining the Faith, which is always a work of confusing or denying one or the other of God's words. To have one without the other — Law without Gospel or Gospel without Law — is to lose the catholic Faith. Jaroslav Pelikan says that is what Marcion did: he so radically separated the Law from the Gospel as to oppose them completely, with each the purview of separate gods. "'Marcion's special principal work,' according to Tertullian, was 'the separation of the law and the gospel'; his special and fundamental religious conviction was a single-minded dedication to the gospel."^[33]

If few so radically divorce Law and Gospel like Marcion, far more will neglect the one for the other. Again, Pelikan identifies a weakness in many of the early Fathers themselves, namely, the substitution of moralism for a lively tension between the demands and promises of God. He says: "At the same time it is evident that as moralism and legalism manifested themselves in Christian theology, much of the edge was removed from the argument of Christian apologetics against what was taken to be the 'Pharisaical' conception of the law".^[34]

Despite such inconsistencies, the Law/Gospel emphasis is a given for the catholic confession. And if Law/Gospel emphasis is part of catholic confession, it is also part of catholic practice. The great works of pastoral practice from the early church by Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory the Great illustrate this clearly. Gregory Nazianzen seems to have first articulated the understanding that necessarily flows from either an implicit or explicit apprehension of God's demand and His promise. "The principle is this: just as the same food and medicine is not appropriate to every bodily ailment, so neither is the same treatment and discipline proper for the guidance of souls."^[35]

Gregory the Great's Latin work on this topic was to have a more lasting influence than Gregory Nazianzen, but it clearly follows the same principle. It is the very principle one sees in Walther. What Nazianzen calls *τεχνη*, Gregory the Great calls *ars*, and Walther (at least in English) calls "art."^[36] The art in pastoral care results from the fact that it deals with men and women in every

state from stubborn rebellion to agonizing remorse to supreme hubris to repentant faith. To know which word is most needed in any given situation — Law or Gospel, condemning demand or sweet promise, rebuke or restoration — is the art in the practice of the catholic Faith.

Remaining Evangelical

If Law and Gospel require catholicity, and if genuine catholicity inevitably retains the core tension of God's twin truths, it is also the case that doing ministry between Law and Gospel requires us to be evangelical.

The evangelical impulse in Christianity, whether or not we capitalize the noun, retains two vital elements of Christian pastoral practice which dare not be lost. The first is the necessity of conversion and the second, its corollary, is the necessity of evangelism or missions.

That Evangelical Christianity^[37] is in the forefront of evangelism and missions cannot be disputed. I say that, by the way, not primarily because of the growth of Evangelical churches in the United States, but because of the astounding world-wide growth of Evangelicalism, and, in particular, the Pentecostal movement. This is a reality that Philip Jenkins has identified and substantiated most clearly. He describes the explosion of Christian growth in the southern hemisphere and Asia as follows: "These newer churches preach deep personal faith and communal orthodoxy, mysticism and puritanism, all founded on clear scriptural authority."^[38]

Harvey Cox (with more than a little distaste) has recently focused on the growth of Pentecostalism in particular. Despite all of his misgivings and plain disavowals of Pentecostal social and theological conservatism, he has to admit the phenomenal growth of this subset of Evangelical Christianity from literally nothing at the beginning of the 20th Century to hundreds of millions in our day.^[39]

There is much about Evangelicalism to which any Lutheran, much less a Lutheran with an understanding of and appreciation for catholicity will object. Yet, it is that understanding of catholicity, with its center in historic, creedal truth for all eras and cultures of Christianity, that should compel us not to let Evangelicalism's weaknesses blind us to its strengths. As much as one must worry about the tendency to reject the use of creeds in worship, Evangelicalism generally has a *de facto* appreciation for Trinitarian and Christological dogma that many liturgical churches lack — including Lutheran or Roman churches, for that matter. About two years ago I spent a day with an Evangelical house church pastor-professor in Beijing. His creedal orthodoxy lacked only the regular, liturgical, public confession that we so rightly cherish. Evangelicalism, in general, fully shares the catholic earmarks of Trinitarian faith and the saving Lordship of the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Indeed, Evangelical passion for mission gives proof positive that they take the exclusive implications of the creedal Faith far more consistently than mainstream Protestants *or* Rome.

Because that is so, we dare not discount those two ear-marks which so clearly identify Evangelicalism: personal conversion and evangelism. Indeed, we as evangelical-catholics, AKA "Lutherans," *must* take them to heart. Our understanding of Law and Gospel demands it. To read Luther or Walther or any of the great Lutheran teachers of the past is to see plainly a focus on conversion, even as they so vigorously clarify both the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion and the means of grace which the Spirit uses to convert. Clearly, their dynamic understanding of Law and Gospel is the very foundation for an understanding of both the necessity and the proper

understanding of conversion. Man and woman live before God. His Word of Law at work in our lives both sets the standard and identifies the failure of righteousness. By the great mystery of the Holy Spirit, people are brought to repentance and to faith in the astounding Gospel declarations of Baptism, Absolution, and Eucharist as well as the ongoing preaching of forgiveness for Jesus' sake. That is EVANGELICAL-catholicity! That is conversion. And that is the mission of the Church — to carry this message to the world.

To be evangelical-catholic is to remember not only the catholic deposit of truth bequeathed to us, but also the catholic experience of mission, whether it is the example of St. Patrick in Ireland or Hudson Taylor in Asia. To be evangelical-catholic is to appreciate not only the ethereal peace of liturgical chant, but also the thunderous praise choruses of exploding churches in Africa and the astounding courage of the persecuted house-churches of Asia. To be evangelical-catholic is not only to carefully *define* conversion, but also to be the Holy Spirit's instrument *in* the conversion of the lost.

Remaining Biblical

All of this means no more and no less than remaining Biblical. Remember, our theology of Law and Gospel is, first and foremost, a hermeneutical insight. It is a matter of seeing the "stuff" of Scripture — what the Word is all about. Walther is right. If you don't see God's high holiness and His right demand for the same, and then God's astounding surprise of an externally provided righteousness and mercy in Christ Jesus, the Bible is a closed book. No wonder the Bible turns so easily into a toy for technical-critical "analysis" or a compendium of human wisdom and useless quotations. What else can it be for those who have not had their eyes and hearts open to understand the Scriptures: "Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations" (see Luke 24:44-49).

There it is: to be Biblical is to proclaim repentance and forgiveness, Law and Gospel. And, of course, the inverse is true: to proclaim Law and Gospel we must be Biblical.

Can you read Walther or Luther and not be astounded at their grasp of Holy Scripture? Can you read Gregory's *Pastoral Care* and not be stunned by his hundreds of quotations from the Word? Can you read *City of God* without having to tear through your own Bible to keep up with Augustine? Can you be a shepherd of souls without being a student of Scripture?

To be Biblical is to be simple, though not simplistic. Yes, it means reading contextually, and reading with due care for the historical and grammatical nuances of the text. But, above all else, it means taking the Word to heart, realizing that God the Spirit is using His hammer and His healing touch as you read, teach, and preach. Recently I read Luther's volumes on the Joseph cycle in Genesis. It was first surprising, then deeply enriching to see that from beginning to end, Luther read the Joseph story as a paradigm of Law and Gospel, the ministry of the Word in Joseph, to bring brothers in sin to repentance and then to restore them righteous and forgiven as brothers in faith, hope, and love.^[40]

Was that quaint exegesis from a by-gone era? No! No it was not. It was a churchly, faith-fed and faith-filled reading of the living Word of God. You want a dead-letter reading? Pick any

contemporary historical-critic. Do you want to realize the living power of the Word? Learn to read from the fathers of the past.

They will teach us to read humbly, and so to take fully to heart the Law of God. His commands are not spurious, but simply mirror His righteousness. To read with the Church through the ages is to be constantly condemned and constantly challenged by the Law, brought to repentance and also brought to a lively understanding of what it means to live without false gods — even and especially where His Law enables us to see the lies in our own cultural and ecclesiastical mores and practices. The Law will force us to admit the extent to which we have spurned God's truth, not only in matters such as homosexuality, but also clergy divorce and remarriage; not only in identifying unjust governmental policies toward the poor, but also the seduction of unaffordable clergy pay packages that disable our churches in poor communities. The Bible will unceasingly accuse us because of the Law it contains.

And, of course, to read Scripture humbly is also to take to heart the glorious Word of freedom — that to be forgiven is to know that the old is gone and the new is come (2 Cor 5:17). It is to know why Paul exults in Sarah over Hagar (Galatians 5:21-31) and how it is that God uses only redeemed sinner-saints to proclaim His forgiveness, even in the Ministry (see 2 Cor 4:5-7).

Dear Lord Jesus, open our minds to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45) so that we read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, and rightly divide them (2 Tim. 2:15).

Remaining Confessional

Fourthly, to do ministry between Law and Gospel, it will be of incalculable benefit to remain confessionally Lutheran. Note well: I do not say it will be "necessary," but that it will be greatly beneficial. While Luther and the *Book of Concord* and confessional Lutheran teachers articulate the Law/Gospel dynamic more clearly and accurately than anyone else I know, we belie our confession that Law and Gospel are the heart of Biblical truth and that they are the stuff of the evangelical and catholic Faith if we proudly assume that either the message of Law/Gospel or right practice of Law/Gospel ministry are dependent upon Lutheran institutions.

It is tempting right now to take that assurance as reason to flee Lutheran denominations. After all, Missouri has become so enamored of Evangelicalism on one side as to be in danger of exchanging its birthright for a mess of programs, and on the other side, the ELCA is so seduced by the apostasy of contemporary mainstream Protestantism as to have nearly lost any semblance of Biblical theology. Again, Missouri's zeal in the defense of "truth" is often loveless, while the ELCA's defense of "love" is just as often at the expense of truth.

In light of that, it is comforting to remember that ministry between Law and Gospel is not necessarily bound to membership in a "Lutheran" ecclesial community, for God the Spirit has never abandoned the people of God or left them without Law and Gospel, nor will he in our day. Nonetheless, I beg you not to abandon or even take lightly the truth as we have confessed it in our ordinations. The Lutheran confessions are wonderfully grounded, Biblically faithful, theologically balanced testimonies to the world, *and to the rest of Christianity*. Authentic Lutheran ministry is more clearly "evangelical-catholic" than any other institutional manifestation of the Christian

Church. Where else does this truly evangelical-catholic combination exist? Note well what we confess as Lutherans:

1. Scripture confessed with full authority (even, I daresay, as infallible and inerrant!),
2. Conversion, evangelism, and mission seen as the heart of the Church's vocation,
3. Original sin taken with radical, enduring seriousness,
4. Baptismal rebirth fully affirmed,
5. Christ's bodily Sacramental presence joyfully believed,
6. The catholic creedal consensus accepted without reservation,
7. The Holy Ministry *and* the Priesthood of All Believers held true,
8. The *Una Sancta's* trans-denominational reality fully upheld

Where else is the Law/Gospel dynamic taken more fully to heart and the whole paradoxical mix of Christian truth held as one, but in the churches that are faithful to the Augsburg Confession?

That none of our ecclesial communions is as faithful as we would like is not reason to abandon the Lutheran confessions. No, strangely enough, the fractures and bleeding of the Church of Christ (including our own churches) is instead reason to take heart. Luther was not wrong to say that "whoever desires to see the Christian Church existing in quiet peace, entirely without crosses, without heresy, and without factions, will never see it thus, or else he must view the false church of the devil as the real church."^[41] There may be a day of Lutheran realignment, I don't know. But I see no basis or right reason to abandon our confessions — not ever and certainly not now. No, I see every need to affirm them more vigorously, and to remain voices in the middle of Christianity, reaching both toward Rome and Evangelicalism from that central place which can affirm all the strengths of both and the weaknesses of neither.

A recent *Time Magazine* opinion piece by Joe Klein is titled, "The Middle Is a Bad Place to Be,"^[42] Only the title interests me because his argument is purely political. When it comes to the Christian Faith one might also say, "The middle is a bad place to be." Being in the middle between Rome and Evangelicalism is certainly lonely, and it will mean that we are never fully a part of either of the two most populous Christian movements of our day. Nevertheless, it is the right place to be.

Remaining Pastoral

Finally, doing ministry between Law and Gospel requires that we be pastoral. Can we agree that being pastoral has something more to it than just "empathy"? Walther would say it involves, above all else, rightly distinguishing and applying Law and Gospel. It is pastoral when we, in sermon preparation, are careful to identify and proclaim the Law of God in Holy Scripture with unflinching firmness so that it fulfils its purpose — especially its chief theological and spiritual purpose of bringing repentance. It is therefore also the essence of being pastoral, when, in that same preparation, one identifies and proclaims the Gospel in all its offensive unconditionality — the

Gospel as it specifically addresses the sins condemned and absolves the hearts that have heard the Law. Walther: "the Word of God is not rightly divided when the Law is not preached in its full sternness and the Gospel not in its full sweetness" ... [\[43\]](#)

Pastoral care, however, is more than Law/Gospel *preaching*. It is personal. It is the care of the souls of individuals. And it is, for the individuals in the pastor's care, the *right use* of Law and Gospel that matters. This is not really an entirely new evangelical insight from Luther, despite his brilliant clarity on the topic. It is similar to the same basic principle of pastoral care that Thomas Oden has identified in Gregory the Great: "What is helpful to one may be hurtful to another." [\[44\]](#) The enduring use of Gregory's manual on pastoral care through more than a millennium of Christian history is enduring testimony to the fundamental insight of Law/Gospel.

What Oden sees in Gregory the Great is what Gregory himself saw in Paul. "Paul is viewed by Gregory as the pastoral prototype of one who could perform both types of contextual admonition in a well-integrated way. He could confront the aggressive individualist and increase the self-initiative of the overly timid without injuring the spiritual formation of either." [\[45\]](#)

All of Walther's distinctions, and Luther's insights and practices before him, are simply further refinement of this basic insight of pastoral care. Pastoral care is with persons, with individuals, with unique beings, each in a different place spiritually. Pastoral care is wooing and evangelizing the sheep who are not part of the Good Shepherd's flock. Pastoral care is the loving firmness that seeks and also admonishes the wandering sheep — for the rod is part of the Good Shepherd's *comfort* (Ps. 23) — just as pastoral care is the soothing application of forgiveness to the man whose guilt has destroyed him emotionally. Pastoral care requires a brave willingness to chastise, and a humble will to absolve. Its concern is new life for every single sheep, each and every person. It is what the flock requires.

To remain pastoral is to remain within the tension of God's dynamic. God condemns the world — right down to individuals. God has redeemed the world — right down to individuals. It is the work of proclaiming these twin truths to which we are called. They are our orders. It is *not* a philosophy we proclaim. It is the relationship of the Triune God with the world that we incarnate and inculcate. So we call people to repentance. And we call them to faith. We speak of God demands and we defend their righteousness, their holiness, their beauty. We make them specific — and personal, for they address every level of life and every man and woman and child. And we declare, personally and specifically, a holy absolution. We declare it constantly — please God in every sermon and all our public teaching. We also wash bodies and consciences with it in Holy Baptism. We lay it tongues and give it to lips in Holy Eucharist. We whisper it and impress it on scalps in Holy Absolution. We squeeze it into the hands we hold in pastoral care for the sick and the dying. Always, always, always — we speak these words of death and life. It is the only thing our congregations really require of us.

We ought to know because it is what we ourselves require — personally and individually. So being pastoral certainly *does* mean empathy. It means the deepest empathy, for the pastor is himself personal individual, needing to die and rise with Christ. Before Gregory the Great provided insight in how to provide pastoral care for another, he warned shepherds of their own spiritual vulnerability: "Often it happens that when a man undertakes the cares of [churchly] government, his heart is

distracted with a diversity of things, and as his mind is divided among many interests and becomes confused, he finds he is unfitted for any of them."^[46] Walther's insight is similar regarding the school of experience, specifically one's own experience of condemnation and absolution: "he will best learn this art who has attained to the love of his Lord Jesus and has experienced the power of the Law and the Gospel."^[47]

That this means our calling requires us regularly to read the Word for devotional and individual purposes, and not only to prepare sermons, should go without saying. That it means we must have a disciplined life of prayer is also obvious. That we should always be reminded of the specific Holy Orders under which we serve the church is plain. But that is not enough.

Simply put: to be pastoral requires us to be *pastored* — to experience "the power of the Law and the Gospel" spoken by another to us individually and personally. That we have such need is reason enough in itself to seek a part in this Society or one similar to it. That every pastor does not have a confessor is sheer foolishness as well as arrogance. We need pastoral care. In Gregory's terms, we need to live under a rule, which is to say, we need to live in conscious accountability to others regarding our office.^[48] While denominational structures ought to supply such need, they do so only in part if at all.^[49] Such a need cannot go unmet. I need a confessor. I need a pastor. I need someone to admonish me with the Law and to console me with the Gospel. I cannot do that for myself.

That is to say, I need to listen. My vocation is one of speaking — speaking, speaking, speaking. But my individual need is one of listening, specifically to the Word. I am, after all, just another one of Löber's ladies — someone whose sin must be spoken, identified, revealed, made plain. I need the Word that speaks to my sin. I need to hear it like they did. And I am, after all, part of Christ's Lady, the Church, so I need to hear His whisper of love in the Gospel — I need it spoken specifically to me, in light of my *own* sin, salving *my own* misery, absolving *my own* guilt.

Thank God that the same sheep whom I admonish and console sometimes also talk back — to admonish and console. Thank God for Baptism, Absolution, Eucharist — for Scripture and confessions — for colleagues in ministry and this ministerium in particular. Thank God for His Words — His Law, His Gospel.

FOOTNOTES

^[1] Walter Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi: The Settlement of the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri 1839-1841*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 392.

^[2] I will capitalize Law and Gospel as I refer to them as a dynamic force in God's dealing with humanity. Otherwise I will use lower case.

^[3] Forster, pp.392-393.

[4] All translations, unless otherwise noted, are from the *English Standard Version*, © 2005, the Standard Bible Society.

[5] I am indebted to Yvonne Younis, a laywoman from Martin Luther Chapel, for this reminder.

[6] *Adversus Haereses*, Bk IV, Chap 15. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103.htm>.

[7] Regarding Socrates: "For he saw that the causes of things were sought for by them -- which causes he believed to be ultimately reducible to nothing else than the will of the one true and supreme God -- and on this account he thought they could only be comprehended by a purified mind; and therefore that all diligence ought to be given to the purification of the life by good morals, in order that the mind, delivered from the depressing weight of lusts, might raise itself upward by its native vigor to eternal things, and might, with purified understanding, contemplate that nature which is incorporeal and unchangeable light, where live the causes of all created natures." *City of God*, Part 1, Book VIII, Ch. 3. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1201.htm>.

[8] *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, (Allen, TX: Christian Classics [Thomas More], 1989), 90:4, p. 281.

[9] Aquinas, 93:4, p. 285. Aquinas then immediately distinguishes this overarching identity of the phrase "God's will" as his eternal law with God's "wise plan" in the midst of the vicissitudes of created life.

[10] *Luther's Works* (Am. Edition). vol. 27, p. 355. Hereafter *LW*.

[11] *The Faith of the Christian Church*. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), p. 163.

[12] *The Book of Concord*, R. Kolb and T. Wengert, eds., (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000); AAC, XII:48, pp. 195-195.

[13] "Against the Antinomians," *LW*, vol. 47, p. 114.

[14] *City of God*, Part 1, VIII, Ch. 4

[15] *City of God*, 1, VIII, Ch. 10.

[16] "The Twofold Use of the Law and Gospel: Letter & Spirit." <http://homepage.mac.com/shanerosenthal/reformationink/mlpreachers.htm>. In the public domain, originally published as part of *The Sermons of Martin Luther*, Vol. VIII, (Minneapolis, MN: Lutherans in All Lands, 1907), paragraph 28.

[17] Genesis 29:21-25.

[18] See *Law and Gospel*, pp. 7-9

[19] For instance, note this comment: "The Council refers back to the classic teaching on *God's eternal law*. Saint Augustine defines this as 'the reason or the will of God, who commands us to respect the natural order and forbids us to disturb it'. Saint Thomas identifies it with 'the type of the divine wisdom as moving all things to their due end'. And God's wisdom is providence, a love which cares. God himself loves and cares, in the most literal and basic sense, for all creation (cf. *Wis* 7:22; 8:11). But God provides for man differently from the way in which he provides for beings which are not persons. He cares for man not 'from without', through the laws of physical nature, but 'from within', through reason, which, by its natural knowledge of God's eternal law, is consequently able to show man the right direction to take in his free actions. In this way God calls man to participate in his own providence, since he desires to guide the world — not only the world of nature but also the world of human persons — through man himself, through man's reasonable and responsible care. The *natural law* enters here as the human expression of God's eternal law. Saint Thomas writes: 'Among all others, the rational creature is subject to divine providence in the most excellent way, insofar as it partakes of a share of providence, being provident both for itself and for others. Thus it has a share of the Eternal Reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end. This participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called natural law'. *Veritatis Splendor* August 6, 1993. Available online: http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0222/_INDEX.HTM. Chapter II, I:43

[20] "For to have a God is not alone a Mosaic law, but also a natural law, as St. Paul says (Rom. 1[:20]), that the heathen know of the deity, that there is a God. This is also evidenced by the fact that they have set up gods and arranged forms of divine service, which would have been impossible if they had neither known or thought about God. For God has shown it to them in the things that have been made, etc. (Rom. 1[:19-20])." "Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments," *LW*, Vol. 40, p. 97.

[21] KW, Part II, paragraphs 67-69, p. 440.

[22] <http://homepage.mac.com/shanerosenthal/reformationink/mlpreachers.htm>. From *The Sermons of Martin Luther*, Vol. VIII, (Minneapolis, MN: Lutherans in All Lands, 1907), paragraph 13.

[23] Note how seeming opposites are continually drawn together in the Gospel which God has declared and the Church through all ages believes. Leo's Tome captures the contrasts: "Without detriment therefore to the properties of either nature and substance which then came together in one person, majesty took on humility, strength weakness, eternity mortality: and for the paying off of the debt belonging to our condition, inviolable nature was united with possible nature, so that, as suited the needs of our case, one and the same Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, could both die with the one and not die with the other. Thus in the whole and perfect nature of true man was true God born, complete in what was His own, complete in what was ours. And by 'ours' we mean what the Creator formed in us from the beginning and what He undertook to repair. For what the Deceiver brought in and man deceived committed, had no trace in the Saviour. Nor, because He partook of man's weaknesses, did He therefore share our faults. He took the form of a slave without stain of sin, increasing the human and not diminishing the divine: because that emptying of Himself whereby the Invisible made Himself visible and, Creator and Lord of all things though He be, wished to be a mortal, was the bending down of pity, not the failing of power. Accordingly He who while remaining in the form of God made man, was also made man in the

form of a slave. For both natures retain their own proper character without loss: and as the form of God did not do away with the form of a slave, so the form of a slave did not impair the form of God. For inasmuch as the Devil used to boast that man had been cheated by his guile into losing the divine gifts, and bereft of the boon of immortality had undergone sentence of death, and that he had found some solace in his troubles from having a partner in delinquency, and that God also at the demand of the principle of justice had changed His own purpose towards man whom He had created in such honour: there was need for the issue of a secret counsel, that the unchangeable God whose will cannot be robbed of its own kindness, might carry out the first design of His Fatherly care towards us by a more hidden mystery; and that man who had been driven into his fault by the treacherous cunning of the devil might not perish contrary to the purpose of God." Letter SVIII, III, <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-12-33.htm>.

[24] Ibid., paragraph 22.

[25] KW, p. 121.

[26] KW, pp. 500-501, 581-586.

[27] C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel: Thirty-Nine Evening Lectures*, W.H.T. Dau, tr., St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928), Thesis II, pp. 1, 30; hereafter referred to as *Law/Gospel*.

[28] See Walther's *Theses on Church and Ministry* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987) where he defends this proposition, but see *Law/Gospel*, Thesis XX, pp. 334-345, where he defends against its misunderstanding.

[29] As does, for instance, the Lutheran balance of Word and Sacrament.

[30] *Law/Gospel*, pp. 3, 308ff.

[31] See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* both for excellent discussions of natural law, and for the continuing marginalization of the sharpest demands of Scripture.

[32] *Oration 1*. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310201.htm>.

[33] *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (Vol.1 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*), (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971), p. 72. Note also, on the same page: "Two of the principal emphases of his theology — the newness of the gospel and contrast between two sources as an explanation for the antithesis between good and evil in the world — would seem to have been prominent in his thought... ."

[34] "At the same time it is evident that as moralism and legalism manifested themselves in Christian theology, much of the edge was removed from the argument of Christian apologetics against what was taken to be the 'Pharisaical' conception of the law" *Emergence of the Christian Tradition*, pp. 17-18.

[35] Quoted in *For All the Saints: A Prayer Book by and for the Church.*, Paul Schumacher, ed., Delhi, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 1996, p. 163. The quotation is from Gregory's *Pastoral Care*.

[36] See *St. Gregory the Great: Pastoral Care* (Ancient Christian Writers series), Henry Davis, S.J., tr. (NY: Newman Press, 1950, 1978), p. 14.

[37] I like Wikipedia's definition of Evangelicalism: "The word **evangelicalism** usually refers to a tendency in diverse branches of conservative Christianity. It is typified by an emphasis on evangelism, a personal experience of conversion, biblically-oriented faith, and a belief in the relevance of Christian faith to cultural issues." <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelicalism>.

[38] See *The Next Christendom, The Coming of Global Christianity*, London: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 8.

[39] *The Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1995.

[40] *Lectures on Genesis, LW* vols. 7-8.

[41] *The Three Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Faith, LW* vol. 34, p. 215

[42] September 18, 2006, p. 29.

[43] *Law/Gospel*, Thesis VI, pp. 1, 79 ff.

[44] *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 76.

[45] *Care of Souls*, p. 79.

[46] *Pastoral Care*, p. 27.

[47] *Law/Gospel*, p. 51.

[48] See the Introduction to *Pastoral Care*, pp. 9-10, which points out that Gregory conceived his manual as "a counterpart" to the rules of the monastic communities. Such rules simply mean mutual accountability.

[49] The requirement in LCMS circles that anyone with ecclesial authority over a pastor must expressly refuse to maintain confidentiality in certain cases effectively vitiates any possibility that such a "bishop" could serve as a confessor.

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Last updated -- 27 August 2007

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