

# Lutheran Spirituality and the Pastor

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## Lutheran Spirituality and the Pastor

### I. The Devotional Writers and Lutheran Spirituality

The heart of Lutheran spirituality is found in Luther's famous axiom *Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio* (prayer, meditation, and affliction). The one who has been declared righteous through faith in Christ the crucified and who has died and rose in Baptism will, as the psalmist says, "delight ... in the Law of the Lord and in His Law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2). He will read, mark, learn, and take the Word to heart. Luther writes concerning meditation on the Biblical truths in the preface of the Large Catechism, "In such reading, conversation, and meditation the Holy Spirit is present and bestows ever new and greater light and devotion, so that it tastes better and better and is digested, as Christ also promises in Matthew 18[:20]."<sup>1</sup> Through the Word and Sacraments the entire Trinity makes its dwelling in us and we have union and communion with the divine and are conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29; Colossians 3:10). When our faith-life is so formed, nourished and strengthened, we will be a living epistle of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:1-3) and a little Christ to those around us.

#### A. History of Lutheran Spirituality

Luther was certainly a devotional writer. This is seen in volumes 42 and 43 of the American edition of *Luther's Works*. He intended his Catechism to be a simple outline of devotion.<sup>2</sup> However, when we speak of the Lutheran devotional writers we usually think in terms of the writers of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Also following this period there were important Lutheran devotional writers, like Walther, Loehe, and Laache to name a few.

The Lutheran devotional writers stood firmly in the fold of Lutheran orthodoxy and the seventeenth-century dogmaticians. They confessed the central article of the faith which is the material principle of the Evangelical Lutheran Church—justification by faith alone without the deeds of the law. A person is justified or declared righteous not by anything he does or accomplishes but alone through the imputed righteousness of Christ that is ours by faith. On the basis of Christ's sacrifice and His perfect keeping of the law in our place (Galatians 3:13; Romans 5:18-19), God does not impute (count or reckon) sin but declares the whole world righteous or innocent. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Corinthians 5:19; Romans 4:5; Romans 5:18; Romans 3:23-24). This verdict of "not guilty" the Holy Ghost brings to the individual through the means of grace and is obtained by faith (Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 12:3).

#### *Justification and Devotional Literature*

At the same time, these writers were a part of the devotional movement that swept the Lutheran lands in the seventeenth century as a result of the ravages of the Thirty Years' War and a general decline in Christian life and morals.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 381.

<sup>2</sup> LW 54:17; LW 43:187-211; see Robert Kolb, ed., *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture, 1550-1675* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 238ff.

German literature from this period, especially lyric poetry written between 1600 and 1720, is characterized by a consciousness of human suffering and the fragility of earthly existence. This awareness prompted contrary impulses, no doubt aroused by the hardships resulting from the Thirty Years' War. There were many literary comments about the vanity of all worldly endeavors, often accompanied by an advocacy of ascetic self-restraint and interest in mystical religiosity.<sup>3</sup>

This movement promoted a practice of piety which focused on an intimate union between the heart of Christ and the heart of each faithful Christian. Thus the devotional writers often used the personal pronoun *ich* (I) in their writings, rather than the *wir* (we). They defended the doctrine of the inerrant Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, but in addition they highlighted the truth that Jesus comes to dwell in the Christian providing consolation in daily struggles and new strength to grow in the Christ-like life. Unlike the later Pietists who overemphasized sanctification and devalued the means of grace, the devotional writers held that the means of grace, the liturgy, personal devotions, and piety went hand-in-hand. These writers are not to be confused with the Pietists whose founder was Spener (1635–1705). Their devotional literature and hymns were used in the practice of Lutheran spirituality and spiritual formation.<sup>4</sup> While terms like this were not used, the devotional writers made considerable use of piety (*pietas*, *Frömmigkeit*) and godliness (*Gottseligkeit*). This devotional literature (*Erbauungsliteratur*) was to encourage proper meditation on the Word and contemplation of the loving Savior **through reading, marking, learning and inwardly digesting the Word, as the ancient collect states**. Both clergy and laypeople alike were to prepare themselves for difficult times through sustained meditation on Scripture. Through this process the Word said or sung was to be brought from the mind to the heart, touching one's whole being with the comforting love of Christ.

Among the early Lutheran devotional writers were Johann Habermann (1516–1590), known for his prayer book;<sup>5</sup> Philipp Nicolai (1556–1608), the author of the king and queen of chorales, and Johann Arndt (1555–1621), the writer of *True Christianity*, in the west and north of Germany; Martin Moller (1547–1606) at Görlitz an der Oder;<sup>6</sup> Johann Gerhard (1582–1637), who was also

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<sup>3</sup> Eric Lund, ed., *Seventeenth-Century Lutheran Meditations and Hymns* (New York: Paulist Press, 2011), 5.

<sup>4</sup> This refers to the ways in which our faith-life is formed, nourished and strengthened.

<sup>5</sup> Johann Habermann (Avenarius 1516–1590) was born in Eger, Bohemia (Sudetenland), modern-day Cheb in the Czech Republic. He was a pastor in various places in Saxony and later became a professor at Jena and then at Wittenberg. His interest was Hebrew and Old Testament studies. However, he is best known for his widely used prayer book, *Christliches Gebetbuch*, published at Wittenberg in 1567. Habermann gives themes for daily prayer for each day of the week and for special occasions. His prayers are mainly a paraphrase of the Psalms and other sections of Scripture. His prayer book went through many editions and was widely known. Thus the phrase "taking one's Habermann" came to mean taking one's prayer book for prayer ("Seinen Habermann zur Hand nehmen," hieß so viel wie beten." See Friedrich Kantzenbach, *Orthodoxie und Pietismus* [Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus Gerd Mohn, 1966], 24).

<sup>6</sup> Martin Moller (1547–1606) was born at Leissnitz (Kropstädt) near Wittenberg where he later studied. In 1568 he was called to be the cantor at Lemberg in Schlesien. In 1572, he was ordained in Wittenberg and became the pastor at Kesselsdorf near Lemberg, and in 1575 pastor at Sprottau. He assumed the position of *pastor primarius* at Görlitz (on the Oder River) in 1600. Here he lost his eyesight in 1605 but actively continued to discharge his pastoral duties until his death on March 2, 1606. He was the author of the well-known *Praxis evangelica*, a practical and popular exposition of the pericopal texts for the Sundays of the church year and festival days. His other famous writing was *Preparing For Death* in 1593 (*Handbüchlein zur Vorbereitung auf den Tod oder Heilige Sterbekunst*). "He

the great Lutheran dogmatician; far to the east Valerius Herberger (1562–1627) at Fraustadt, Posen, modern-day Wschowa, Poland;<sup>7</sup> Christian Scriver (1629–1693), well loved in Scandinavia;<sup>8</sup> and Paul Gerhardt (1607–1676), the great Lutheran hymnwriter.<sup>9</sup>

Probably Paul Gerhardt is the best known of the seventeenth-century devotional writers among orthodox Lutherans today. Gerhardt suffered continual persecution under Prussian domination for his confessional Lutheran stand.<sup>10</sup> To his orthodox biblical Lutheran doctrine Gerhardt fused the devotional emphasis of Johann Arndt, Johann Gerhard, and the other devotional writers. Seeing his parishioners suffering great losses through terror, disease, and hunger in the wake of the Thirty Years' War, Gerhardt, as Arndt and others before him, saw his decisive task to bring spiritual renewal. This he did through his hymns. When one reads the devotional writings of

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endeared himself to his generation, and to all generations of men since, especially by his book on 'the holy art of dying.' A book of this kind can never outgrow its usefulness in the Christian Church. The sad subject with which it deals is an ever-present reality with mortal men. And Moller is a most excellent companion to the dying Christian" (*Theological Quarterly* XIV:4 [October 1910]: 254–255).

<sup>7</sup> Valerius Herberger (1562–1627) was born on April 21, 1562, at Fraustadt, Posen, modern-day Wschowa, Poland. He studied at Frankfurt an der Oder and at Leipzig. He returned to his hometown where he became a teacher in 1584, deacon in 1590, and finally pastor in 1599. In 1604 his congregation at Fraustadt was compelled to leave its beautiful large church by King Sigismund III to make room for a small group of Roman Catholics. By Christmastime, Herberger had obtained another place of worship, and appropriately called this house of worship "Kripplein Christi" (the little manger of Jesus), and he became known as the "Prediger am Kripplein Christi." Herberger and his parish suffered many trials and tribulations in the Thirty Years' War and as a result of various epidemics of the time. He died May 18, 1627.

Herberger was one of the most outstanding preachers in his day. Because of his evangelical sermons he was called "Jesusprediger." The Romanists nicknamed him "The little Luther." His sermons remind one of the lively comforting style of Luther. Herberger published many writings, predominantly sermon books: *Evangelische Herzpostille*, *Epistolische Herzpostille*, *Geistliche Trauerbinden*, and *Himmlisches Jerusalem*. One of his largest writings was *Magnalia Dei*, a running commentary on the Scriptures (recently translated with the title *The Great Works of God*). He also wrote the hymn *Farewell I Gladly Bid Thee* (*Valet will ich dir geben*) which is an acrostic on his given name.

<sup>8</sup> Christian Scriver (1629–1693), whose pseudonym was Gotthold, was born at Rendsburg in Schleswig-Holstein. He was pastor at Magdeburg and later court preacher (*Oberhofprediger*) at Quedlinburg. He was once asked by the wife of Charles XI of Sweden to come to Stockholm and be the court preacher. As one of life's more unfortunate husbands and fathers he married four times and was survived by only one of his fourteen children. He desired to live an ordered and regulated Christian life of faith.

It was his attempt to give his Magdeburg parishioners—each of whom, it was said, he knew by name—a regulated life of prayer and pastoral care. Scriver certainly tried to be a model with a precision which bordered on the pedantic: six hours' sleep; four hours for prayer, reading the Bible and other devotional books and reflection thereon; two hours only for meals; two hours for pleasure, under which he included performing church music and charity; nine hours of official duties; and one hour in the morning or at night to reflect on death. The last of which, he said was the most difficult of all to get accustomed to. (Nicholas Hope, *German and Scandinavian Protestantism 1700–1918* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995], 29)

Scriver produced a staggering amount of devotional literature, employing many pictures from nature and materials from the Church Fathers. His most famous works are *Seelen-Schatz and Evangelien-Predigten*. His sermon for Maundy Thursday is an excellent sermon on the Lord's Supper. His literature was well loved in Scandinavia.

<sup>9</sup> There were other major Lutheran hymnwriters. There were Nicolaus Herman (1480–1561) in Joachimstal; Josua Stegmann (1588–1632); Johann Heermann (1585–1647) in Schlesien; Martin Rinckart (1586–1649) with his "Now Thank We All Our God"; Johann von Rist (1607–1667); Sigismund von Birken (1626–1681); Thomas Kingo (1634–1703), the great Danish hymnwriter; and the Lutheran composer Johann Crüger (1598–1662), whose anniversary we remember this year. During this time the Saxon Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), at the Thomaskirche in Leipzig, was producing some of the most magnificent church music of all times. Lutheran liturgical life was seen in all its splendor and glory in Leipzig and Electoral Saxony. Lutheran church architecture reached its apex in the construction of the Frauenkirche of Dresden in 1734.

<sup>10</sup> Gaylin R. Schmeling, "Paul Gerhardt: Pastor and Theologian," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 48:1 (March 2008).

Gerhard and Arndt and the hymns and sermons of Paul Gerhardt, one finds a warm piety and the power of God unto salvation which touches the heart. The Christian needs a personal relationship with the Savior through the means of grace. This literature was intended to nourish and strengthen believers through the Gospel, encouraging repentance and spiritual renewal and formation. One of the predominant themes of Lutheran Spirituality is **Union and Communion with God through the life-giving Word and the blessed Sacraments.**

### *The Arndt and Gerhardt Connection*

In many ways Gerhardt and the other devotional writers follow in the footsteps of Johann Arndt (1555–1621). Arndt was the most influential devotional author that Lutheranism produced. He was called as pastor in Badeborn, Anhalt in 1583. In 1590, when Anhalt faced the Second Reformation, he was deposed for insisting on the unaltered Augsburg Confession and the right to use the baptismal exorcism. After this he served as pastor in Quedlinburg, where he influenced Johann Gerhardt; in Braunschweig, the city of Chemnitz; and in Eisleben. His final position was superintendent in Celle. His most important work was *True Christianity* (*Sechs Bücher vom wahren Christentum*). It was one of the early German Lutheran devotional books for the common people. Next to the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis it is the most widely circulated devotional book in Christendom. When our forefathers came to this country they brought the Bible, the catechism, the hymnbook, and *True Christianity*.

The connection between Arndt and Gerhardt is evident in Gerhardt's use of the prayers in Arndt's *Paradiesgärtlein* as the basis for a number of his hymns.<sup>11</sup> He used devotional motifs common to Arndt and the other devotional writers such as the creation, nuptial, and wounded side motifs. The relationship between the two is especially seen in his use of Bernardian mysticism and the mystical union. Gerhardt's contemplation of the cross in Bernardian mystical form is seen in the hymn "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" (ELH 334).

## **B. Baptism, the Foundation of Lutheran Spirituality**

### *Dying and Rising in Baptism*

Baptism is the source of Lutheran spirituality. Through Baptism we are united with Christ. We are in Christ, incorporated into His body, the church, and He abides in us as the vine and the branches (John 15:5). Romans 6 expands upon and enlarges on what it means to be in Christ. Union with Christ is a union with Him in the saving events of His history, His dying and rising again. To be in Christ means to be united with His death and resurrection:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through Baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be

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<sup>11</sup> Otto Schulz, *Paul Gerhardts Geistliche Andachten in hundert und zwanzig Liedern* (Berlin: Nicolaischen Buchhandlung, 1842), 125–135. Here five hymns are listed that are based on prayers from Arndt's *Paradiesgärtlein*. See also Elke Axmacher, *Johann Arndt und Paul Gerhardt* (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 2001), 233–238.

rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. (Romans 6:3–13)

Jesus' Baptism culminated in His death and resurrection, through which He fulfilled all righteousness, obtaining righteousness for all by His holy life in our place and by His sacrificial death. Jesus spoke of His suffering and death as His Baptism (Luke 12:48–50; Mark 10:38–39). Christ's Baptism, culminating in His death and resurrection, is the basis for our Baptism so that in it we participate in Christ's death and resurrection, dying to sin and rising to new life.

Baptism then is not only a watery womb (John 3:5; Titus 3:5), but as St. Paul indicates it is also our watery tomb. Here our sinful nature inherited from Adam began to die, which will reach its climax in our physical death when our sinful nature will be no more. In Baptism we were united with Christ and His cross. Our old sinful flesh was nailed to the cross, crucified with Him, and we died to sin. We were crucified through the killing word of the Law. We were buried with Christ in the tomb. Sinners must die; that is what we have earned from our sin (Romans 6:23). Our sinful flesh was killed; it began to die. Therefore, sin no longer has power or domination over us. We died the death we were to die and we were declared righteous because Christ's perfect righteousness was counted as ours by faith. We were justified or pronounced innocent, not on the basis of anything we did, for we were dead, but on the basis of Christ's work. Because we have participated in the death of Christ through Baptism, we are freed from sin and delivered from death and the devil (Romans 6:7). All our sins were washed into the depths of the sea through Jesus' blood (Micah 7:19).

As Jesus arose triumphant that first Easter morning, so we arose to new life in Baptism by the power of Christ's resurrection (Romans 4:5; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21). We participated in His resurrection. The forgiving word of Christ's cross and resurrection in Baptism, that declaration of innocence, made us arise. Faith in Christ's cross was created in our hearts and we were given resurrection power so that we can live resurrection lives, victory lives free from Satan's tyranny. Therefore, our Baptism gives us all the blessings of Christ's dying and rising again, and the absolute certainty of salvation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This simple illustration may help clarify St. Paul's point in Romans 6. You take an apple and put it in a jar. Now place the jar on the table. Where is the apple? It is in the jar and, therefore, on the table. Wherever the jar is there the apple will be. If you bury the jar, you bury the apple. If you unearth the jar, the apple is likewise unearthed. What is true of the jar is true of the apple in it. In the same way, through Baptism we are united with the body of Christ. We are in Christ, so that whatever Christ has experienced is counted as happening to us. We are merged into Christ; therefore, we died with Him and rose again.

### *Baptism Our Holy Week Event*

Baptism is our Holy Week event. As Jesus made His last journey to Jerusalem with His disciples where He faced His great passion, St. Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). That is exactly what Baptism is for us. We go with Him that we may die with Him. It is our Good Friday and Easter. In our Baptism we are united with His death and now His death is our death. Good Friday's cross is our cross and our sinful nature is crucified with Him. His crucifixion is our crucifixion of the flesh. His death and burial is our death to sin. Through Baptism Good Friday is an event in our lives. We go with Him that we may die with Him.

St. Paul writes to the Galatian Christians, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14). In Baptism we are crucified to the sinful world around us and the world to us. We die to this world. This means a radical break with the sphere of Satan's domination. It means breaking with life as it is known, leaving the past behind. It means being beyond the reach of the Law and its demands, escaping the unpaid debts of sin. All debts were blotted out through Christ's death which is ours. Think of the great significance of receiving the sign of the cross in Baptism. We are united with the cross of the Crucified and we are crucified to the world. We are in this world, but not of this world, not a part of it, for we are in Christ.

Baptism is also our Easter, our resurrection. Easter is not only something wonderful that happened to Jesus. United with Him, His resurrection is our resurrection. In Baptism we begin to die to our sinful nature which will reach its completion in our physical death. If we die with Him, then we will also live with Him (2 Timothy 2:11-12; Romans 6:8). Thus in Baptism we arise with Jesus to new life by the power of Christ's resurrection (Romans 6:4-5). New resurrection life is not something we must wait for until the last day. Through the power of Christ's resurrection new life is instilled in us in the baptismal waters, for trust in Christ as our Savior is created in us. This is our resurrection life right now. This baptismal resurrection life, nourished through the means of grace, will culminate in the resurrection of our bodies on the last day.

Baptism is designated the "first resurrection" in Revelation because here we begin to arise from the dead. "Blessed and holy are those who have a part in the first resurrection" (Revelation 20:6). Over those who share in this baptismal resurrection, the second death, which is eternal death in hell, has no power. They will be priests of God and Christ forever.

To impress upon new Christians the connection between Baptism and Christ's death and resurrection, the Ancient Church often performed Baptisms on Easter Eve. Those baptized were buried with Christ on the day that Jesus laid in the tomb. Then as He arose on Easter, Easter was the first day of their new life in Christ.

### *The Daily Use of Baptism*

Many people value Baptism for their children and realize that Baptism was important for them when they were a child. Yet, they have a difficult time seeing any value in Baptism for daily life. My Baptism was a long time ago: what is it doing for me right now? Baptism is the entrance into the Christian life. But, once we are Christians, once we are believers, is there any continual

use of Baptism in our lives? The answer is a definite yes! Baptism is not merely a one-time occurrence in the past without any real meaning for the here and now. It has real value each and every day of our lives.

Baptism is for life. It is not enough to receive it, we will also live it. Each day we need to continue the dying and rising that began in Baptism. Our sinful flesh died in Baptism, but it does not stay dead. It must be daily put to death anew. Through Christ's resurrection, Baptism is the power source of our new life, our resurrection life right now, so that we can daily crucify the flesh and arise to new life. This means we will daily put off the old man which is the sinful nature with which we were born, and we will put on the new man, the new life in Christ. Baptism makes possible this daily putting off and putting on which St. Paul urges. "Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires... and ... put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24).<sup>13</sup>

We die daily to the sinful flesh by returning to our Baptism in true repentance and faith. Rather than pampering the flesh saying, "Our sins aren't really so bad; we are decent people," we will nail our flesh back on the cross, realizing in sorrow that our sins caused the Lord's great passion. Our sins caused His terrible wounds and nailed Him to the tree. We will not indulge our sinful flesh with our favorite sins such as hatred, covetousness, greed, pride, drunkenness, and gluttony. Rather, we will crucify the flesh by daily confessing our sins in true sorrow, burying them in Baptism with Christ in the tomb. Then through the Word of absolution given us in Baptism and through the nourishment of the Word and Supper, our new resurrection life will come forth stronger to live a more Christ-like life.

We will daily return to our Baptism by confessing our sins in heartfelt sorrow. In this way we throw those sins back into the baptismal water, drowning our old sinful nature. Then the new life will come forth strengthened, desiring to live a God pleasing life. This is the proper use of Baptism of which Luther speaks when he writes in the Small Catechism, "Such baptizing with water means that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts; and that a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever."

All this means that the power of Christ's resurrection is present for our lives right now. Now we don't have to be miserable slaves of Satan doing his every bidding ending in eternal death. Christ's resurrection gives us the strength to face all the conflicts and problems of life with a firm confidence in Him as our Savior. It gives us the power to overcome and obtain the victory. That power comes to us as we daily return to our Baptism where we die with Him and again arise with Him, and then nourish that resurrection life through the life-giving Word and the Holy Supper of His body and blood. This is our daily use of Baptism.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The basic paradigm for counseling and for all Christian life is the return to Baptism by putting off sinful habits and by putting on a new spiritual life as St. Paul points out in Ephesians 4:22-25. For example, if an individual's sin is pornography, in confession he will put off the old. He will confess the sin and be rid of all pornographic literature in his possession. Then through absolution he receives the full forgiveness of Christ and the new man is strengthened and arises, putting on the new life. This means that he will avoid those places and those things which will lead him into pornography and he will be strengthened through the Word and Sacraments so that he can continue to resist such cravings.

<sup>14</sup> See Gaylin R. Schmeling, *Baptism: My Adoption into God's Family* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999), 95-102.

### C. Mysticism and Mystical Union

When faith in the Savior is worked in the heart by the Spirit through the means of grace, an individual is totally forgiven on the basis of Christ's atoning sacrifice and he stands justified before God. At the same time new spiritual life is worked, our new man is created, and the entire Trinity makes its dwelling in us (John 14:17, 23–24).<sup>15</sup> This indwelling of the Holy Trinity is referred to as the mystical union (*unio mystica*). The mystical union is the union between God and justified man wherein the Holy Trinity dwells in the believer substantially and operates in the same by His gracious presence. Thus the believer has union and communion with God, partaking in the divine (2 Peter 1:4). This union is effected by God Himself through the means of grace, Word and Sacrament.

The doctrine of the mystical union as employed by the devotional writers is seen by some as a perversion of Lutheran doctrine and the advent of Pietism. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our Lutheran Confessions speak of the gracious indwelling of the Trinity by faith in the elect who have been justified through the imputation of Christ's righteousness.<sup>16</sup> Philipp Nicolai, the great Lutheran hymn writer and preacher, made considerable use of this doctrine in providing comfort for Christians:

Above all this, the fact that God out of great love dwells and rests in His elect and again that they rest tenderly and sweetly in Him and eternally rejoice, this indwelling of God in His elect produces great benefits and much heavenly fruit as Christ says: He who remains in me and I in him the same brings forth much fruit. [*Ueber dies alles, dass Gott aus grosser Liebe in seinen Auserwählten wohnt und ruht, und sie hinwiederum sanft und lieblich in ihm ruhen und sich ewiglich erfreuen, schafft diese Einwohnung Gottes in seinen Heiligen auch grossen Nutzen and viel himmlische Früchte, wie Christus sagt: Wer in mir bleibt, und ich in ihm, der bringt viel Früchte.*]<sup>17</sup>

The following is a definition of the mystical union from the nephew of Johann Gerhard, Johann Quenstedt (1617–1688), the dogmatician known as the librarian of Wittenberg:

The mystical union is the real and most intimate conjunction of the substance of the Holy Trinity and the God-man Christ with the substance of believers,

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<sup>15</sup> John 15:5–7, 17:23; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:17–19; 1 Corinthians 6:16–17; 2 Corinthians 6:16.

<sup>16</sup> To be sure, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is the eternal and essential righteousness, dwells through faith in the elect, who have become righteous through Christ and are reconciled with God. (For all Christians are temples of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who moves them to act properly.) However, this indwelling of God is not the righteousness of faith, which St. Paul treats (Rom. 1:17; 3:5, 22, 25; 2 Cor. 5:21) and calls *iustitia Dei* (that is, the righteousness of God), for the sake of which we are pronounced righteous before God. Rather this indwelling is a result of the righteousness of faith which proceeds it, and this righteousness (of faith) is nothing else than the forgiveness of sins and the acceptance of poor sinners by grace, only because of Christ's obedience and merit. (FC SD III, 54, Kolb-Wengert, 571–572; see also Luther, WA 20:229, WA 40<sup>II</sup>:421 [LW 12:377], 40<sup>I</sup>:233 [LW 26:132], 40<sup>I</sup>:283 [LW 26:167], 40<sup>I</sup>:285,286 [LW 26:168].)

<sup>17</sup> Philipp Nicolai, *Freudenspiegel des ewigen Lebens*, ed. Rudolf Eckart (Elberfeld: Verlag des Lutherischen Büchervereins, 1909), 67.

effected by God Himself through the Gospel, the Sacraments, and faith, by which, through a special approximation of His essence, and by a gracious operation, He is in them, just as also believers are in Him; that, by a mutual and reciprocal immanence they may partake of His vivifying power and all His mercies, become assured of the grace of God and eternal salvation, and preserve unity in the faith and love with the other members of His mystical body.<sup>18</sup>

Calov (1612–1686), considered by some the fourth in the series of Lutheranism’s most preeminent theologians following Luther, Chemnitz, and Gerhard (but others would prefer Quenstedt in this position), has this to say about the mystical union:

The form (of the mystical union) is a union (*conjunctio*) with God, not relative but true, not purely extrinsic but intrinsic, not through a bare positioning but through an intimate immanence, not only the operation of grace alone but likewise the approximation of the divine substance to the faithful with a mystical περιχώρησις, nearer nevertheless to a commixture or an essential transformation of man.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore we see that the mystical union was not an innovation of Arndt though definitely taught by him,<sup>20</sup> but rather it is a scriptural doctrine embraced by all the Lutheran fathers. One of the places that Paul Gerhardt uses the comforting doctrine of the mystical union is in his Christmas hymn, “I Stand Beside Thy Manger Here”:

This only, Lord, I humbly pray,  
O grant it, dearest Savior,  
That Thou wouldst dwell in me this day  
And here abide forever.  
So let me be Thy cradle blest.  
Come! Come, within my heart to rest,  
My precious Joy and Treasure!  
(ELH 129:5)<sup>21</sup>

### *Proper and Improper Mysticism*

The biblical doctrine of the mystical union as taught by the devotional writers is not to be confused with the false mysticism of the enthusiasts and the pagan world. In the mystical union the distinction between the divine and human is not confused. The soul of man is not absorbed into the divine. Rather the Lutheran theologians explicate the mystical union using the analogy of the personal union in Christ. As the human and the divine in Christ are united into one

<sup>18</sup> Quenstedt, *Theologia* III, 622; quoted in Heinrich Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1899), 482.

<sup>19</sup> Calov, *Theologia Positiva*. Cap. VIII. Thes. III. 503. Timothy Schmeling, “Life in Christ: The Unio Mystica and its Relation to Theosis” (M.Div. thesis, Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, 2003), 7. See also Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, Vol. III, trans. James Langebartels (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003), 385–393, and Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 86.

<sup>20</sup> Johann Arndt, *Sechs Bücher vom wahren Christenthum* (Stuttgart: J.F. Steinkopf), II:6, 216–219.

<sup>21</sup> See also ELH 115:14; 161:4; 517:7.

person and yet the natures remain distinct, so in the mystical union the Trinity makes its dwelling in man but God and man remain distinct. There is no essential or substantial union, but there is a union of substances.

As the personal communication of attributes arises out of the personal union of the divine nature and the human nature in Christ so out of the spiritual union of Christ and the church, of God the Lord and a believing soul, arises a spiritual communion not only in the kingdom of glory and in eternal life but also in the kingdom of grace and in this life. Therefore Saint Peter says concerning the true believers that they have become partakers in the divine nature.<sup>22</sup>

This gracious union with God is conveyed and preserved through the means of grace. Many of the medieval mystics and Reformed enthusiasts believed that outward means were unimportant in the union with the divine. In other words the Spirit conveys and maintains this union without external means. Contrary to this, the devotional writers continually preserve the connection between the mystical union and the means of grace. Finally in the mysticism of the Lutheran fathers man does not climb to God through contemplation, but God Himself descends to us in the manger and the cross. Christ unites us with Himself in the Word, He clothes us with Himself in Baptism, and He feeds us with Himself in the Holy Supper so that we have union and communion with the divine.<sup>23</sup>

#### D. Devotional Themes

The mystical union is often expressed by the devotional writers with the **nuptial motif**, which has its roots in Scripture (Song of Solomon; Hosea 2:21-22; Revelation 21:2). As husband and wife become one flesh, so Christ unites Himself to His bride the church and to each believing soul, giving her all His divine gifts and taking upon Himself her burden of sin. The bride by nature was naked but He clothed her with the garments of salvation and covered her with a robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10). With these thoughts in mind, Gerhard ends his hymn, "The Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth," "And there, in garments richly wrought as Thine own bride, I shall be brought to stand in joy beside Thee" (ELH 331:10). This motif often includes Luther's joyful exchange (*der fröhliche Wechsel*).<sup>24</sup> Christ, my husband, takes upon Himself my sin, death, and hell and gives me, His bride, in exchange His forgiveness, life, and salvation. Gerhard makes this same connection: "Lord, my Shepherd, take me to Thee. Thou art mine; I was Thine" (ELH 377:7). Christ, my husband, who gave His life for me will never abandon me. What comfort this is!

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<sup>22</sup> *Wie aus der persönlichen Vereinigung der göttlichen und menschlichen Natur in Christo entsteht die persönliche Mittheilung der Eigenschafften / also entsteht aus der geistlichen Vereinigung Christi und der Kirchen / Gottes des Herrn und einer gläubigen Seele / eine geistliche Gemeinschaft / nicht allein im Reich der Herrlichkeit und im ewigen Leben / sondern auch im Reich der Gnaden und in diesem Leben / Dannenhero S. Petrus 2. Epistel 1. v. 4. von den wahren Gläubigen spricht / dass sie der Göttlichen Natur sind theilhaftig worden.* (Johann Gerhard, *Postilla Salomonaea* in Johann Anselm Steiger, *Johann Gerhard, Doctrina et Pietas, Abteilung 1, 1* [Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog Verlag, 1997], 97).

<sup>23</sup> For a consideration of the benefits of the mystical union, see the section in Gaylin Schmeling, "Gerhard – Theologian and Pastor," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 44:4 (December 2004): 311-313.

<sup>24</sup> LW 31:351-352.

In their pastoral care the fathers make considerable use of the picture of the **wounded side of the Lord**. This image is based on John 19:34.<sup>25</sup> This picture was used already by Augustine and it was used throughout church history.<sup>26</sup> On that first Good Friday after Jesus completed salvation for all men, His side was opened showing how the treasure of salvation is distributed to all people. It flows to us in the water and blood: the water of Baptism, the blood of the Lord's Supper and in His Word which is spirit and life. Gerhardt uses this picture when he writes, "My greater treasure, Jesus Christ, is this which from Thy wounds most blest flowed forth for my salvation" ([*Mein großer Schatz Herr Jesu Christ, ist dieses, was geflossen ist aus deiner Leibes Wunden*], ELH 331:7). In another hymn he speaks in Bernardian mystical style of kissing the wounds of the Savior,<sup>27</sup> showing how greatly he prizes the treasure flowing from the wounded side of Christ.

At other times, the devotional writers speak of **hiding themselves in the wounded side** of the Savior in all of the struggles and problems of life. Here there is rest and peace in the outrageous fortune of life. As St. Paul, they connect the rock smitten in the wilderness with Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). Jesus is the Rock of Ages from whose side flows the double cure. Johann Gerhard then adds to this picture the cleft in the rock of Song of Solomon 2:14 where one is to fly as a dove for shelter. Here our soul can fly as a dove and hide in the cleft of the rock, that is, take refuge in His wounded side until all the stormy blasts of life are over.<sup>28</sup> Gerhard writes, "I hear the voice in the Song, which urges me to hide in the clefts of the rock (Song of Solomon 2:14). You are the strongest rock. The clefts of the rock are your wounds (1 Corinthians 10:4). In them I may hide myself from the accusations of all creation."<sup>29</sup>

A refuge has been prepared for me in the satisfaction You [Christ] made for my sins. I have a refuge in Your intercession for me at the right hand of the Father. Take flight, O my soul, to the morning light. Like a dove, hide in the clefts of the rock (Song of Songs 2:14), take refuge in the wounds of Christ, your Savior. Hide in this rock until the wrath of the Lord passes by, and you will find rest in this refuge. You will find protection. You will find acquittal. Amen.<sup>30</sup>

Finally Gerhard draws together the **wounded side of the Lord and the nuptial motif**.

You have a type of how the Lord Christ was to have His side opened up by a spear in Adam, who had his side opened by God, and from the rib which was taken from him was crafted a woman. Thus, as Christ fell into death's sleep on

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<sup>25</sup> See also Zechariah 12:10, 13:1; 1 John 5:6. For a complete presentation of the wounded side motif see Schmeling, "Gerhard—Theologian and Pastor," 307–309.

<sup>26</sup> Augustine, "Tractate on John" CXX:2, Phillip Schaff, ed. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VII* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 434–435.

<sup>27</sup> Schulz, 9. *Ich umfange, herz und küsse der gekränkten Wunden Zahl und die purpurroten Flüsse Deiner Füß' und Nägelmal*.

<sup>28</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Meditations on Divine Mercy*, trans. Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), [1:7] 45.

<sup>29</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Sacred Meditations*, trans. Wade R. Johnston (Saginaw, Michigan: Magdeburg Press, 2008), [Meditation 1] 22.

<sup>30</sup> Gerhard, *Meditations on Divine Mercy*, [1:7] 45.

the cross, from His opened side flowed blood and water—the two Holy Sacraments—from which the Church, Christ’s Bride, was built up.<sup>31</sup>

As Adam’s bride was taken out of his side while he slept (Genesis 2:21), so the second Adam’s bride, the bride of Christ, is cleansed and formed through the waters of Baptism, the blood of the Lord’s Supper, and His Word which is spirit and life. This corresponds to what issued from the Savior’s wounded side during His three day’s sleep in death (John 19:34). Therefore, Jesus can say of His bride, the church, as Adam said of Eve the mother of our race, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23). The church is so intimately united with Christ through the means of grace that she is one flesh with Him (Ephesians 5:32).<sup>32</sup>

Following the lead of Johann Arndt, Gerhardt makes a considerable use of the **pictures from nature and creation** in his works. He points to the wonderful blessings of the earth. He directs his readers to the beauty of the seasons and the magnificent splendor of God’s creation (*Die güldne Sonne*, ELH 57). At the same time he uses these pictures from nature to point to our spiritual life. As the sun descends and seems to be defeated, Gerhardt tells us we have another sun, Christ the Sun of gladness, dispelling all our sadness (“Now Rest Beneath Night’s Shadow,” ELH 569:2). The beauties of the summer should remind each Christian of the wonderful splendor of the summer of heaven. The fall points to the end of the world and to the fall of our life. Every evening as we remove our clothes and go to sleep, we are to think of our mortality. When we arise and dress, we are directed to the glorious garment in which we will be dressed in heaven’s morning. Likewise the rhythm of the day reminds us of our dying and rising in Baptism (ELH 569:4). Everything in mundane life should point us to the spiritual.

The devotional works that make significant use of illustrations from nature and creation are at times referred to as emblem literature. This literature usually centers on a visual image that is meant to convey a spiritual lesson. Christian Scriver is a master of this genre of meditative literature. In his *Gotthold’s Occasional Devotions* (*Gottholds Zufällige Andachten*), published between 1663 and 1671, one finds four hundred such devotions based on a particular object or scene. There are meditations on the dew, the sailors, the church tower, the mirror, the gravestone, the snow, the rainbow, etc. Below is a portion of the devotion on the stork.

Gotthold added: I have recently read some wonderful things about these birds [storks], namely, that they love their young so heartily that they are not afraid to die for their sake. It has been observed during the most intense fires that they will repeatedly and earnestly carry water in their throats and bills to rescue their nests on burning houses. In Delft, Holland, they noticed storks, which could not rescue their young, cover them in their nests, spreading their wings over them, and thus dying along with them. This is what you call dying for love and in love.

This also brings to mind our dearest and most worthy friend, Jesus, about whom it has been fairly written when he is portrayed, hanging, on the cross: He died for love and in love. In truth, love caused the death of the Son of God. Death could

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<sup>31</sup> Johann Gerhard, *An Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ*, trans. Elmer M. Hohle (Malone, Texas: Repristination Press, 1998), 30.

<sup>32</sup> Valerius Herberger also uses the wounded side motif. (Valerius Herberger, *The Great Works of God: Parts One and Two*, trans. Matthew Carver [St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2010], 175, 179).

not kill him, but love drew him down from heaven for us, laid him in a manger, brought him to the cross, and killed him. We are fond of gathering herbs and plants when they are most potent. Likewise, I maintain, our heavenly Father determined that his beloved Son should die at the time when his love had reached its highest degree, and as he died in love, so did he also rise again and ascend to heaven where now, in all eternity, he loves nothing more dearly than the sons of men. He also wishes nothing else for us than that we should live and die in his heartfelt love.<sup>33</sup>

The **Divine Physician and the medical motif** is common in Augustine<sup>34</sup> and the other early church fathers. Based on passages such as Matthew 9:12 the devotional writers also use the picture of the physician of souls. All people are born into this world sick in sin. We could do nothing to change our sin-sick condition. In fact Scripture tells us that we were dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). Yet Jesus, the Divine Physician, gives life. He restores us to health and He heals our wounds (Jeremiah 30:17). Like a surgeon He wounds through the Law stopping our diseased and sinful hearts. He then transforms them through the Gospel of forgiveness (Deuteronomy 32:39). This wonderful medicine of the Gospel He prepared for us through His holy life and death for our redemption. This life-giving medicine of the Gospel is brought to us through the means of grace where Jesus comes to us as the Good Samaritan pouring healing balm on the diseased flesh and binding up our wounds.<sup>35</sup> Arndt prays in his postil, "You pious Samaritan, here lie the wounded, pour into our wounds the oil of mercy and the joyous wine of comfort for your wine alone gladdens the distressed heart."<sup>36</sup> Like his teacher Arndt, Gerhard relished the use of the divine physician picture.

From the magnitude of the price, figure the amount of the danger; from the price of the remedy, figure the danger of the disease. Altogether great were the wounds that could only be healed by the wounds of the living and vivifying flesh of Christ. Great indeed was the disease that could only be cured by the death of the Physician.<sup>37</sup> If I did not have a disease, I would not seek the help of medicine. He is the Physician (Matthew 9:12). He is the Savior (Matthew 1:21). He is Righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). "He cannot disown himself (2 Timothy 2:13). Have mercy on me, O Medicine, O Savior, O Righteousness. Amen."<sup>38</sup>

The **wanderer or traveler motif** was common among the devotional writers. The great Lutheran dogmatician from Strassburg, Johann Conrad Dannhauer (1603–1666), even entitled his main theological work *Hodosophia christiana* (*The Christian Way of Wisdom*). The theme of Gerhardt's

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<sup>33</sup> Lund, 253–254.

<sup>34</sup> The great doctor this is Jesus—*medicus magnus hoc est Iesus* (Augustine, *Sermo* 229.6). They were slaying the doctor; the doctor made a medicine from his own blood for his slayers—*illi occidebant medicum: medicus de suo sanguine faciebat occisoribus medicamentum* (*Sermo* 229E.3).

<sup>35</sup> For a complete study of the use of the medical picture in early Lutheranism see Johann Anselm Steiger, *Medizinische Theologie: Christus medicus und theologia medicinalis bei Martin Luther und im Luthertum der Barockzeit* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2005).

<sup>36</sup> *Du frommer Samariter, hier liegt der Verwundete, gieß in unsere Wunden das Öl der Barmherzigkeit und Freudenwein des Trostes, denn dein Wein erfreut allein das betäubte Herz* (Johann Arndt, *Evangelien-Predigten* [Groß Oesingen: Verlag der Lutherischen Buchhandlung Heinrich Harms, 1998], 51; see also pages 596, 738).

<sup>37</sup> Gerhard, *Sacred Meditations*, [Meditation 2] 24.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, [Meditation 8] 45.

sister's funeral sermon was, "The Last Battle of Spiritual Pilgrims and Wanderers."<sup>39</sup> This motif is based on the Old Testament Exodus. As Israel of old we were all liberated from the great satanic pharaoh. We passed through the Red Sea of Baptism, and now we are traveling through this present wilderness where there are struggles and conflicts on every side. Yet the Lord is with us all the way, strengthening us in every burden with the heavenly manna, the means of grace, until we cross the Jordan of death, reaching the heavenly Canaan above. Gerhardt's hymn, "I Am a Guest on Earth,"<sup>40</sup> employs this imagery. He speaks of himself wandering here on earth striving to reach the heavenly *Vaterland*.

The wanderer motif is also found in Gerhardt's hymn "Commit Whatever Grieves Thee" (TLH 520; ELH 208). This hymn is based on Psalm 37:5: "Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass" (*Befiehl dem Herren deine Wege und hoffe auf ihn; er wirds wohl machen*). In its German form the hymn is an acrostic on Psalm 37:5, formed by the initial words of the stanzas.

1. **Befiehl** du deine Wege
2. **Dem Herren** mußt du trauen
3. **Dein'** ewge Treu und Gnade
4. **Weg'** hast du allerwegen
5. **Und** ob gleich alle Teufel
6. **Hoff'**, O du arme Steele
7. **Auf**, auf, gib deinem Schmerze
8. **Ihn**, ihn laß tun und walten
9. **Er** wird zwar eine Weile
10. **Wirds** aber sich befinden
11. **Wohl** dir, du Kind der Treue
12. **Mach'** End, o Herr, mach' Ende<sup>41</sup>

An interesting aspect devotional literature is the **gathering of Scripture passages**. At times the devotional writers collect many sections of Scripture into a compact form as a special comfort to the Christian. For example, hymnist Paul Gerhardt wrote:

But in death, we should observe that we should not fear so greatly before death. We should not be dismayed so greatly before the grave. We should not be disheartened in the pains of our life and the loss of all our body's strength. Rather then, we should turn with Christ to God in heaven and say, You are my Father, You are my God, You are my refuge who helps me [Psalm 89:26]. Because You are my God and my Father You will not forsake Your child, You fatherly heart. You are my light and my salvation, before whom should I fear? You are the strength of my life, before whom should I be afraid [Psalm 27:1]? So I am also certain that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature

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<sup>39</sup> Christian Bunners, *Paul Gerhardt: Weg, Werk, Wirkung* (Berlin: Buchverlag Union, 1993), 132. *Letzter Kampf geistlicher Pilgrime und Wandersleute*.

<sup>40</sup> Schulz, 37. *Ich bin ein Gast auff Erden*.

<sup>41</sup> Schultz, 64.

may separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord [Romans 8:38–39].<sup>42</sup>

In the same way, theologian Johann Gerhard wrote:

If I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You Lord are with me (Psalm 23:4). The Lord is my light and my salvation whom should I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life whom should I fear (Psalm 27:1)? On God I will hope and I will not fear what flesh can do to me (Psalm 56:4). Who sits under the protection of the Most High and remains under the shadow of the Almighty, he speaks to the Lord, “My confidence and my fortress, my God in whom I hope” (Psalm 91:1). Here also belongs another beautiful passage. Fear not I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine. Then when you go through the water I will be by you, so that the streams should not drown you. And when you go through the fire you should not be burned and the flames should not set you afire. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior (Isaiah 43:2–3). All this St. Paul summarizes when he says “If God is for us, who may be against us” (Romans 8:28)?<sup>43</sup>

### E. Theology of the Cross

The Lutheran devotional writers were definitely influenced by the theology of the cross. Here they follow in the footsteps of Luther who reminds us, “He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering.... God can be found only in suffering and the cross.”<sup>44</sup> For example, Paul Gerhardt does not look for God in the great and spectacular things of this world but in the humble child in the manger and the crucified one. This is seen in his hymn, “O Jesus Christ, Thy Manger Is” (ELH 161), where he beholds his God as the humble child in the manger.

Salvation is not accomplished through great and powerful signs in the eyes of the world. God chose not to accomplish redemption through His bare majesty and power. Rather Gerhardt shows us that salvation was accomplished in the death of God and His seeming defeat as he points out in his hymn, “O Sacred Head Now Wounded” (ELH 334). The channels of God’s salvation are not to be found in magnificent signs or in things that the human mind could understand. Rather the means of grace are a seemingly insignificant book, a palm-full of water, and some bread and wine. Gerhardt’s battle in Berlin centered in this very point. The Reformed could not accept the fact that the baptismal water could be regenerative and that the host and chalice were Christ’s body and blood. God chose to hide His power in these insignificant things. Gerhardt realized that the church was not a great and powerful outward organization such as the Elector hoped to accomplish through uniting the Lutheran and Reformed churches in Brandenburg-Prussia. Rather the church is found in the insignificant gathering around the means of grace.

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<sup>42</sup> Paul Gerhardt als Prediger: Vier Leichenpredigten desselben aus den Jahren 1655, 1659, 1660 und 1661 (Zwickau: Druck und Verlag von Johannes Herrmann, 1906), 81–82.

<sup>43</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Sämtliche Leichenpredigten*, ed. Johann Anselm Steiger, et al. (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog Verlag, 2001), 97. See also Herberger, 375.

<sup>44</sup> LW 31:53.

The theology of the cross also affects the life of the Christian. The Christian should not expect that his life will always be outwardly easy. But his life is always at its best under the cross because his gracious Father is guiding his life. This we see in Gerhardt's life. His life did not appear to be outwardly successful. But in the conflicts and struggles (*Anfechtung*), God was at his side. God is not closest to us in peace and leisure but in the suffering of the cross. This is Gerhardt's attitude toward the cross.

Though a heavy cross I'm bearing  
And my heart Feels the smart,  
Shall I be despairing?  
God, my Helper, who doth send it,  
Well doth know All my woe  
And how best to end it.  
(ELH 377:2)

#### F. Comfort (*Trost*) of the Lord

The main purpose of the devotional literature of the time was doctrine (*Lehre*) and comfort (*Trost*). The people of the seventeenth century were in need of comfort as a result of the Thirty Years' War, and they needed to be instructed continually in the doctrine on which that comfort was based. Their land lay in ruin. Education and business had nearly ceased. More importantly, the church had suffered great loss in its outward organization. Churches were burnt, pastors driven out of their congregations and the normal rhythm of parish life disrupted. Susan Karant-Nunn in her book, *The Reformation of Feeling*, argues that *Trost* (comfort) was a major characteristic of Lutheran pastoral care and piety. This emphasis she finds lacking in Reformed sources, which place a greater emphasis on discipline and the suppression of emotion.<sup>45</sup>

Our times appear outwardly quite different. We are relatively well-to-do: we have one of the highest standards of living that there has ever been, and one would assume that all should be right with the world. Yet all around us there are people who are on the verge of despair. They can find no meaning or purpose in life. For them, life is "an aimless mote, a downward drift from futile birth."<sup>46</sup> Rick Warren and Joel Osteen are looked to for comfort, yet what they offer will not help us make it through the day. We often feel burdened with our sins, forsaken and alone. Even in the best of times our fast-paced lives leave us trying to catch our breath, never quite at peace within ourselves. Our world is definitely in need of the comfort.

The comfort that the devotional writers have to offer is not sunshine and lollipops. There is no promise of paradise in the here and now. We were never promised a rose garden. But in the midst of trial and tribulation, there is confident hope. Gerhardt and the other devotional writers fill their literature with words of comfort such as *Schirm und Schild, Hilf und Heil*. They emphasize *Trost* in all their writings. We are not left alone and hopeless in the ravages and

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<sup>45</sup> Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 96, 97, 105, 178, 201, 226, 251–252.

<sup>46</sup> "O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth" (CW 400:1), written by Martin Franzmann (1907–1976).

misfortune of life. We have the greatest helper there is: God the Father in heaven. Therefore Gerhardt can confidently sing,

Commit whatever grieves thee, Into the gracious hands  
Of Him who never leaves Thee, Who heav'n and earth commands.  
Who points the clouds their courses, Whom winds and waves obey,  
He will direct thy footsteps And find for thee a way.  
(TLH 520:1; ELH 208)

Not only can our great Helper help in every need, we have the certainty that He will help. He already did the greatest thing for us. He sent His Son to lay down His life on the altar of the cross to pay for our sins and chose us as His own in Baptism where faith was worked in our hearts. If He already did this, the greatest thing, then He will be with us in all the other needs and struggles of our lives, working all for good (Romans 8:28), even turning evil into good in our lives (Genesis 50:20). This is Gerhardt's point when he writes:

I build on this foundation: That Jesus and His blood  
Alone are my salvation, The true eternal good.  
Without Him all that pleases Is valueless on earth;  
The gifts bestowed by Jesus Alone my love are worth.  
(ELH 517:3)

Through the doctrine of the mystical union, Gerhardt adds to the assurance that our Savior God will be with us in our needs. The Christian faces many burdens, but because Christ dwells within him, he knows that God is for him; therefore nothing can be against him. "If God Himself be for me, I may a host defy" (ELH 517:1). Johann Gerhard says concerning the comfort of this indwelling:

Because You were given to me, so also shall all things be given to me. My nature is glorified more in You than it was disgraced in Adam through sin. Because You assumed into the unity of Your person [Christ has two natures, divine and human, in one person] that which was only tarnished [accidentally weakened] by Satan, You truly are flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone (Ephesians 5:30). You are my brother. What can You deny to me, the person to whom You are most intimately joined by the same essence of flesh and by the feeling of fraternal love? You are the bridegroom (Matthew 22:2) who, according to the good pleasure of the heavenly Father, bound the human nature to Yourself as a bride by means of a personal covenant. With a thankful soul, I proclaim and acknowledge that I, too, am invited to the celebration of this marriage.<sup>47</sup>

Finally in Gerhardt's hymns we are taught the holy art of dying (*ars moriendi*). United with His cross by faith in the Savior, we can be unafraid of living and unafraid of dying as he so beautifully points out in the hymn:

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<sup>47</sup> Gerhard, *Meditations on Divine Mercy*, [2:4] 65-66.

Be Thou my consolation, My Shield when I must die;  
Remind me of Thy passion When my last hour draws nigh.  
Mine eyes shall then behold Thee, Upon Thy cross shall dwell,  
My heart by faith enfold Thee, Who dieth thus dies well!  
(ELH 335:8)<sup>48</sup>

Our Helper is the one who can do all for He is almighty. He will take care of us for He already gave His life for us on the cross and made His dwelling within us. This One strengthens us in all the difficulties of life through His means of grace, Word and Sacrament. The means of grace are our nourishment for the way, the fortress in battles and the rock of help. Here we receive the strength to do all things through Him (Philippians 4:13), the power to overcome and obtain the victory (1 Corinthians 5:57).

From now on I cannot doubt the indwelling of Christ, because it is sealed for me in the imparting of His body and blood. From now on, I cannot doubt the assistance of the Holy Spirit, because my weakness is strengthened by such a support. I do not fear the plots of Satan because this angelic food strengthens me to do battle. I do not fear the lures of the flesh because this life-giving and spiritual food strengthens me by the power of the Spirit. I eat and drink this food so Christ may dwell in me and I in Christ. The Good Shepherd will not allow the sheep, fed by His body and blood, to be devoured by the infernal wolf. He will not allow the strength of the Spirit to be overcome by the weakness of my flesh. Praise, honor, and thanksgiving to You, O kindest Savior, forever, Amen.<sup>49</sup>

## II. The Aptitude of a *Seelsorger* and Spiritual Formation

When we consider Luther's axiom *Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio* (prayer, meditation, and affliction) we usually think in terms of the aptitude of a *Seelsorger*.<sup>50</sup> Certainly Luther encourages pastors to follow this three-fold rule. However, the axiom has a wider application.<sup>51</sup> It is the method of spiritual formation for each individual who daily dies and rises in Baptism.

According to Luther and the fathers, this method of spiritual formation is found in Psalm 119. Here he describes spirituality that he had learned reading and praying the Psalms.

Moreover, I want to point out to you a correct way of studying theology, for I have had practice in that. If you keep to it, you will become so learned that you yourself could (if it were necessary) write books just as good as those of the fathers and councils, even as I (in God) dare to presume and boast, without arrogance and lying, that in the matter of writing books I do not stand much

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<sup>48</sup> See also ELH 20:3; 334:9; 341; 372:7; 377:4-5. This medieval genre of literature was common to the devotional writers. For example, Martin Moller wrote a book entitled *Handbüchlein zur Vorbereitung auf den Tod, oder Heilige Sterbekunst*. Recently there has been a renewed interest in bereavement and consolation literature from the period of Lutheran orthodoxy. An example of this is Anna Linton, *Poetry and Parental Bereavement in Early Modern Lutheran Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>49</sup> Gerhard, *Meditations on Divine Mercy*, [2:13] 87.

<sup>50</sup> *Oratio, meditatio, tentatio faciunt theologum*.

<sup>51</sup> Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 15-43.

behind some of the fathers. Of my life I can by no means make the same boast. This is the way taught by holy King David (and doubtlessly used also by all the patriarchs and prophets) in the one hundred nineteenth Psalm. There you will find three rules, amply presented throughout the whole Psalm. They are *Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio*.<sup>52</sup>

#### A. *Oratio: Prayer and Spiritual Formation*

King David prays in this Psalm, “Teach me Your statutes. Make me understand the way of Your precepts; So shall I meditate on Your wondrous works. ... I entreated Your favor with my whole heart; be merciful to me according to Your word” (Psalm 119:26–27, 58). Here David reminds us of our inability to understand spiritual things and to grow spiritually. By nature we are totally ignorant of divine wisdom. Therefore the Christian will pray for the guidance of the Spirit in his study and meditation on the Scripture. Prayer will be a daily part of the Christian’s life. Remember our Lord often spent time in prayer as He prepared for His important work (Mark 1:35). Luther tells us not to be proud and arrogant about our own abilities, but rather to go into our little room, get down on our knees, and pray to God with humility and earnestness that He through His Son would give us His Holy Spirit to enlighten us, lead us, and give us understanding as we study the Word.<sup>53</sup>

Luther gives a simple form of prayer or devotion in morning and evening prayer in his Catechism. It includes the Trinitarian invocation with the making of the sign of the holy cross, the confession of the Apostles’ Creed, the praying of the Our Father, and concluding with Luther’s morning and evening prayer.

*[In the morning, when you rise you shall make the sign of the holy cross, and you shall say:]*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*[Then, kneeling or standing, you shall say the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. Then you may say this prayer:]*

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray You to protect me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

*[And then you should go with joy to your work, singing a hymn, or the Ten Commandments or whatever your devotion may suggest.]<sup>54</sup>*

Using the Trinitarian invocation emphasizes Baptism as the foundation for spiritual life. The devotional outline includes Apostles’ Creed, the baptismal creed, as a summary of saving faith in Jesus as the Savior. Devotional prayer centers in the Our Father, Christ’s own prayer, which

<sup>52</sup> LW 34:285 [St. L. XIV:434ff.]; Pieper Vol. I, p. 186.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 285–286. Luther said that a considerable time in prayer is half of study (*Viel gebetet ist zur Hälfte studiert – ora et labora*).

<sup>54</sup> *An Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism* (Mankato, MN: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2001),

He taught us and through which our prayer is united with His continual intercession. Luther's morning and evening prayer emphasize our daily spiritual warfare and divine protection. One may then continue with a psalm, a hymn, or the Ten Commandments.<sup>55</sup>

### **B. *Meditatio*: Meditation and Spiritual Formation**

The psalmist writes, "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation" (Psalm 119:97-99). In the Scripture Christ is present for us with all His blessings, as Luther wrote:

When you open the book containing the gospels and read or hear how Christ comes here or there, or how someone is brought to him, you should therein perceive the sermon or the gospel through which he is coming to you, or you are being brought to him. For the preaching of the gospel is nothing else than Christ coming to us, or we being brought to him.<sup>56</sup>

The Christian will pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as he begins to study and meditate on the Word. The Holy Scripture is the only source for doctrine, faith, and life. That life-giving Word he will diligently read, mark, learn and inwardly digest as the ancient collect directs. The pastor and all his members are to meditate on and contemplate upon the Word. That doesn't mean one quick read and then off to Facebook. No, he will contemplate upon the Word and inwardly digest it. Johann Gerhard in the *Schola Pietatis* says that the Christian will ruminate on the Word or roll it over in his mind as a cow chews on its cud. Think of a cow resting in a pasture quietly chewing away, digesting its food. Thus the Christian will study the Word and then mediate and ruminate or chew on the Word. Gerhard reminds us that Isaac went into the fields in the evening of the day to pray and meditate on the truth of the Lord (Genesis 24:63). David said that when he lay on his bed he thought about the Lord and when he arose he spoke of Him (Psalm 63:6 [7] The Orthodox Study Bible). All these examples are to remind a Christian that he is to study and meditate upon the Word.<sup>57</sup>

Remember the example of Mary, the mother of our Lord, who kept all those things and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19). Mary of Bethany sat at Jesus' feet and contemplated on the life-giving Word (Luke 10:38-42). The Bereans searched the Scriptures to confirm the truth of St. Paul's message (Acts 17:11). When our faith-life is so nourished through meditation on the Word, we will be conformed to the image of the Savior (Romans 8:29; Colossians 3:10) and be followers of Him in Christ-like love (Ephesians 5:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6).

### **C. *Tentatio*: Affliction and Spiritual Formation**

David writes, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes. The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of shekels of gold and silver" (Psalm 119:71-72). Here David speaks of the benefit of the Christian cross and suffering.

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<sup>55</sup> John W. Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality for Today* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 78-80.

<sup>56</sup> LW 35: 121.

<sup>57</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Schola Pietatis* (Nürnberg: Gedruckt zu Jena Georg Sengwald, 1653), 2:291-292.

*Tentatio* is usually translated by Luther as *Anfechtung*. *Tentatio* is sometimes understood in a narrow sense referring to the suffering of the Christian because of his faith.<sup>58</sup> It can also be used in a wider sense to refer to all the affliction that a Christian endures in his earthly life.<sup>59</sup> In affliction our sinful flesh is crucified with Christ, a part of our daily return to Baptism. The afflictions that the Lord allows to come upon the Christian are not a punishment for their sins, rather they are a chastisement from our loving Father to strengthen our faith, draw us closer to Him, and guide us in life. Here we are refined like gold and silver (Malachi 3:2-3; 1 Peter 1:7).

The Christian tends to think that when everything is going well in his life God is smiling on him and all is right with the world. God may indeed be smiling on him, but God may be even closer to him in his suffering. God is at his side all the way in this present vale of tears. Through the means of grace the Lord gives him the strength to do all things through Him, the power to overcome and obtain the victory.

The cross alone is our theology (*Crux sola ist nostra theologia*). *Tentatio* makes beggars out of theologians and theologians out of beggars. Concerning *Anfechtung*, Luther writes, "This is the touchstone which teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom."<sup>60</sup>

### III. Proper Lutheran Meditation

#### A. Presuppositions of Meditation

1. Christian meditation presupposes the presence of the risen Christ with His people as He promised, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20) and the mystical union with each and every one of us where the entire Trinity dwells in the believer (John 14:23-24).
2. Christian meditation presupposes that such devotion is not merely thinking about our inner-self, focusing on our self or clearing the mind, but is contemplating upon the life-giving Word of God. It is not merely deep relaxation or visualization.
3. Christian meditation presupposes the doctrine of justification by faith alone. We are saved through the imputed righteousness of Christ and not by anything we do.
4. Christian meditation will follow the rhythm and pattern of the Christian church year.

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<sup>58</sup> Pieper, Vol. III, 69.

<sup>59</sup> Hoenecke, Vol. III, 403.

<sup>60</sup> LW 34:286-287.

**B. False Views of Meditation**

People meditate for a number of different reasons. Some of these reasons have nothing to do with God's Word and even contradict the Scripture. John Kleinig summarizes these improper views of meditation in this way:

First, meditation is supposed to increase a sense of euphoria and well-being. And some techniques of meditation are designed to achieve just this. People are taught to think positively about themselves by concentrating on a series of self-affirmations or by envisaging themselves in some perfect place. Now, it is true that, since meditation involves relaxation, it can produce a sense of well-being. But that is not the purpose of Christian meditation. When we meditate on Christ and his word, we may indeed feel bad about ourselves, since he exposes our guilt and failure as we ponder his word.

Second, other forms of meditation are designed to help people solve their personal problems. It is true that meditation can expand our ability to think laterally, imaginatively, and creatively, so that we can make sense of our experience and find solutions to those problems that bedevil us. But that is not the purpose of Christian meditation, which may, in fact, unsettle us and create new problems for us by sensitizing us to God's will for us, Satan's attacks on us, and the needs of the people around us.

Third, meditation is espoused as a therapeutic exercise for people to tap their latent spiritual potential. So, for example, people who suffer from cancer or some other sickness are trained in techniques of deep relaxation and visualization, so that they can heal themselves. This is often coupled with dietary restrictions and fasting. Now, it is true that some people have been amazingly healed by employing such therapies. Christians, however, do not meditate in order to draw on their spiritual potential and to heal themselves. They do not hold that all spiritual powers are good. Some are evil, because they come from the evil spirit, who can and does perform physical miracles (Mk 13:22; 2 Th 2:9; Rev 19:20). Through meditation Christians may even discover how spiritually weak and powerless they are.

Fourth, some methods of meditation are used more or less blatantly for pagan purposes. It is now quite common for people to practice the more advanced levels of yoga and other Hindu techniques of meditation to reach higher levels of consciousness. This can come in many different guises and is often coupled with teaching about astral planes and angel guides. Those who promote these exercises often claim that Christ taught these ways of achieving divine consciousness. This approach is in fact as old as the gnostic heresy, which almost destroyed the early church and is once again making inroads into the church. But it has little or nothing in common with Christian meditation, which does not

culminate in self-illumination and the achievement of divine consciousness, but in the dark night of the soul and the knowledge of Christ crucified.<sup>61</sup>

### C. Outline of Lutheran Meditation

Meditation includes contemplating on written material, pictures (icons), and the use of the other senses (taste, smell, hearing, and touch).

In our modern world we pride ourselves on how fast we read and do things. Meditation is the antithesis of this. Our meditation on the Word should not be done in a hurried and haphazard manner. This is not skimming a text or speed reading, which is the case with much of our Bible study. Rather there must be suitable preparation. As an athlete warms up for a race so we need to prepare ourselves for proper meditation on the Word and meditative prayer. Physical and mental preparation are both important. The right place, the right time, and the right body posture should be considered.

The following is an outline of how one will meditate and contemplate on the Word.

1. Begin by recalling the grace and mercy of our Triune God. God the Father created us and still preserves us, God the Son redeemed with His own blood, and God the Holy Spirit brings us the treasure of salvation through the means of grace. Especially recall that we were baptized into Christ, where faith in the Savior was worked in our hearts and we are now part of His body, the church.
2. Pray that God the Father, through the Incarnate Word, would help us in our meditation on the Word; to draw near to Him; and receive help, insight and inspiration by the Spirit working through the means of grace.
3. Read the devotional material in logical sections to enrich our understanding of the Word of the Lord. Where applicable, use our imagination to picture the scene that is being described.
4. Read shorter sections chosen for meditative study, slowly and aloud, remembering that the arisen Lord is speaking to us through His Word. Read carefully so that each phrase receives its proper color, meaning and flavor.
5. Meditate and contemplate upon the text applying it to our faith and life. We will ruminate on the Word and inwardly digest it, making its truths our own. We will mine the text finding its treasures.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> John Kleinig, "Meditation," *Logia* 10:2 (Easter 2001): 48.

<sup>62</sup> See also *The Lord Will Answer: A Daily Prayer Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 1 for the "Six R's" of prayer – Recite, read, reflect, repent, rejoice, request.

**Recite** aloud a part of the catechism or a Bible passage to refresh your memory and focus your thoughts.

**Read** the devotional page to enrich your understanding of the Lord's teaching.

**Reflect** on how this teaching applies to your faith and life.

**Repent** by pouring out your heart to the Lord, asking Him to forgive your failures of faith and life. Confess your thoughts honestly to the Lord.

**Rejoice** in God's mercy and forgiveness through His Son, which are the very basis of prayer. We are unworthy of His blessings but He declares us worthy through Christ Jesus!

Pictures of meditation:

[a.] Meditating is like chewing the cud. Think of the cow, in the shade of the tree, peacefully and continuingly chewing the cud. Likewise we are to repeat, reflect upon and consider the Word we have received.

[b.] Meditating is like taking pollen from a beautiful flower. Think of the honey bee, taking its time inside the flower removing the pollen. Likewise we are to make the effort and to take our time to receive the divine Word so that our lives can be as "honey."

[c.] Meditating is like being in a small boat that rises and falls as it moves through the ocean waves. We are to rock the Word of God in our hearts, as we lovingly repeat it, reflect upon it and consider it, in order that it may sanctify and guide us.<sup>63</sup>

6. Engage in prayer or conversation with God, responding to what we have understood and seen in each passage.
7. Repent of the sins this text has brought to mind and be assured of the Lord's full and free forgiveness.
8. Request the Lord's blessings brought to mind by this text for ourselves, our families, our congregation, and community.
9. Conclude by thanking our Triune God for the blessings that He has given us in these words and for all His blessings for body and life.

To assist one in the practice of Christian piety and sanctification Gerhard reminds the Christian that there are five means of help or support. These five are: 1) Hearing or reading the Word of God (*Verbi divini auditus sive lectio, die Anhörung oder Lesung des Göttlichen Worts*) 2) Receiving the holy Lord's Supper (*Eucharistiae usurpatio, die Niessung des Heiligen Abendmahls*) 3) Holy meditation (*Sancta meditatio, die heilige Betrachtung*) 4) Zealous, diligent prayer, and godly appeal (*Seria oratio, eiveriges fleissiges Gebet und Göttliche Anruffung*) 5) The subjugation and mastery of the body (*Corporis castigatio, des Leibes Beteubung und Zehmung*).<sup>64</sup>

#### IV. Meditation on the Psalms

For centuries the Psalter has been the primary prayer book of God's people both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Early Christians made a regular and consistent use of the Psalms. They prayed (said or sung) the Psalms as the New Israel whose Messiah and Lord is Jesus of Nazareth, the exalted King. In the Middle Ages there were orders of monks who prayed the entire Psalter each week in the Daily Office. The Book of Psalms is an excellent place to

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**Request** God's blessings for yourself as well as your family, friends, and neighbors. Pray confidently, in view of the prophet Isaiah's promise, "The LORD will answer" (Isaiah 58:9).

<sup>63</sup> Peter Toon, "Meditating, the Biblical Way," *Mandate* 28:5 (Sept–Oct 2005): 6.

<sup>64</sup> Gerhard, *Schola Pietatis*, 2:272.

begin Christian meditation on the Word. It is the biblical textbook for prayer and meditation. The Psalter was considered by Luther to be a summary of the entire Bible.

The Psalter ought to be a precious and beloved book, if for no other reason than this: it promises Christ's death and resurrection so clearly—and pictures his kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom—that it might well be called a little Bible. In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible. It is really a fine enchiridion or handbook. In fact, I have a notion that the Holy Spirit wanted to take the trouble himself to compile a short Bible and a book of examples of all Christendom or all saints, so that anyone who could not read the whole Bible would here have anyway almost an entire summary of it, comprised in one little book.<sup>65</sup>

The first Psalm, which introduces the whole collection, describes the righteous person as meditating upon God's Law by day and by night. Clearly, this meditation upon God's Law (that is, the Torah, the full revelation of God and His salvation) is of the utmost importance for those who desire to know, love and serve the Triune God. The ungodly are like chaff which the wind drives away. But by meditating on God's Word the righteous are watered by God like a tree by the streams of living waters. The Psalms are indeed a proper beginning point for meditation on the Scripture. The Psalms encourage us in this meditation, give directives for such meditation, and use many of the major devotional themes.

The Psalms inform our minds, warm our hearts, and direct our wills toward the knowledge of God. As one reads the Psalter he must conclude that *Anfechtung* has always been the common experience of the believer. This is not something extraordinary that is only happening to him as St. Paul reminds us (1 Corinthians 10:13). The Lord has sent this trial or conflict for His good purpose (Psalm 119:71-72). The believer finds his comfort as he meditates on the Psalms perceiving that God has provided endurance and deliverance for His Israel in every age through the means of grace. He prays the Psalms, assured of the redemption of the Lord. The Psalms which Christ Himself inspired are His prayers. Finally the Psalms connect our private meditation with corporate worship. The Psalms have always been an integral part of the divine liturgy. Here the whole company of the saints is gathered together united in praying the Psalms of Christ.

Bonhoeffer makes this interesting comment concerning Christ and the Psalms:

According to the witness of the Bible, David, as the anointed king of the chosen people of God, is a prototype of Jesus Christ. What befalls David occurs for the

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<sup>65</sup> LW 35:254. Luther provided a selection of psalms with an indication of their purpose: Psalm 67 for the increase of faith, Psalm 51 for the confession of sins, Psalm 20 for good government, etc. (Kolb, 240). Many of the Lutheran fathers connected psalms with each of the six chief parts of the Catechism. Heinrich Heshusius (1556-1597), son of the better-known Tilemann Heshusius (1527-1588), was a professor at Helmstedt and later superintendent in Hildesheim. In 1593, he published a catechism based on Luther's *Small Catechism* and the Psalms. Among the psalms he employed are the following: Psalms 15, 24, 1, 127, 120, and 81 for the Ten Commandments; Psalms 117, 118, 95, 89, and 110 for the Apostles' Creed; Psalms 25, 103, 67, 45, 141, 107, 85, 142, 31, and 66 for the Lord's Prayer; Psalm 29 for Baptism; Psalms 51 and 32 for Confession and Absolution; Psalms 111, 23, and 36 for the Lord's Supper (Michael J. Halvorson, *Heinrich Heshusius and Confessional Polemic in Early Lutheran Orthodoxy* [Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2010], 94-118).

sake of the one who is in him and who is to proceed from him, namely Jesus Christ. David did not remain unaware of this, but “being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ” (Acts 2:30f.). David was a witness to Christ in his kingly office, in his life, and in his words. And the New Testament says even more. In the Psalms of David it is precisely the promised Christ who already speaks (Hebrews 2:12; 10:5) or, as is sometimes said, the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 3:7). The same words that David spoke, therefore, the future Messiah spoke in him. Christ prayed along with the prayers of David or, more accurately, it is none other than Christ who prayed them in Christ’s own forerunner, David.<sup>66</sup>

The Psalms are the Prayer Book of Christ. He inspired them speaking through the holy writers. He saw His vocation, particularly His active obedience, in the words of the first Psalm: “Blessed is the man... [whose] delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night” (1:1-2). His entire redemptive ministry was portrayed in the prophetic Psalms. The Psalms were continually on His lips during His earthly ministry. He quotes the Psalter in His public ministry and from it He prayed as He died on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (22:1). He expired with a part of Psalm 31 on His lips: “Into your hands I commend my spirit” (31:5). Then as the resurrected Lord He declared to His disciples that He was the fulfillment not only of the Law and the Prophets but also the Psalms (Luke 24:44).<sup>67</sup>

The church illuminated by the Spirit sees in the Psalms the person and work of Christ as well as His vocation and experience. Because Christ is the head and the church His body, by extension the Psalms are also the prayer book of the church which expresses her vocation and experience. The Psalter as a whole is the prayer of the church as the body of Christ and further, it is the prayer of both head and body (with all its members), that is of Christ and His brethren. The Epistle to the Hebrews and other portions of the Scripture teach us to think of Christ as our exalted high priest who as our mediator in the presence of God is also our intercessor there. When we pray in His name we are joined in the Spirit with His prayer which He continually offers to the praise of God and for the good of His people. To pray the Psalter in and with Him as His body is to be joined to Him in His priestly, heavenly prayer.

Thus the Psalter is the prayer book of Christ and His body the church which we pray in Him as His body, with Him as His disciple, and through Him on the basis of His redemptive sacrifice.

## V. Conclusion

The center of Lutheran spirituality is found in Luther’s famous maxim *Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio* (prayer, meditation, and affliction). The one who has been justified by faith alone in the Savior and united with Him in the baptismal waters will read, mark, learn, and take the Word to heart. Both clergy and laypeople alike will prepare themselves for difficult times and all situations in

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<sup>66</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: Prayerbook of the Bible*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 158-159.

<sup>67</sup> See Peter Toon, *Knowing God through the Liturgy* (Largo: The Prayer Book Society Publishing Company, 1992), 62-79.

life through a sustained meditation on the Word. Through the Word and Sacraments the entire Trinity makes its dwelling in us (John 14:17, 23–24) and we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). When our faith-life is so formed, nourished, and strengthened, we will be able to face all the conflicts and struggles of life with a firm confidence in the Savior, knowing that He is working all for our ultimate good (Romans 8:28). We will be a living epistle of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:1–3) and a little Christ to those around us. As was the case for Gerhard there is no more blessed event filled with comfort and assurance than to partake of the divine having union and communion with God through the means of grace.

“This is no natural thing,” Tauler says in his sermon on the holy Supper. “Here something comes more close to, and into, a man than by eating and drinking something. Christ founded this method in order that He might unite Himself with us all the more closely and inwardly.” He became Man for our sake so that we might become children of God (John 1:12) through Him, and become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). That wasn’t enough for His love—He also wanted to become our food. Nothing is more closely related to the Lord Christ than His assumed human nature (His flesh and blood) into which He united Himself; and on the other hand, nothing comes more close to us humans than what we eat and drink, for it imbeds itself into our most inward recesses.<sup>68</sup> Thus this Holy Supper will transform our souls; this most divine sacrament will make us divine men, until finally we shall enter upon the fullness of the blessedness that is to come, filled with all the fullness of God, and wholly like Him (Gregory Nazianzus, *Oratio* 30).<sup>69</sup>

**Soul of Christ, sanctify me. Body of Christ, save me. Blood of Christ satisfy me. Water from the side of Christ, cleanse me. Passion of Christ, comfort me. O good Jesus, hear me. Within your wounds hide me. Never let me be separated from you. From the malicious enemy defend me. In the hour of my death call me and bid me come to you, so that with your saints I may praise you forever and ever. Amen.**

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<sup>68</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Postilla* vol. 1, trans. Elmer M. Hohle (Malone, Texas: The Center for the Study of Lutheran Orthodoxy, 2003), 300–301.

<sup>69</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Sacred Meditations*, trans. C.W. Heisler (Malone, Texas: Repristination Press, 2000), 20:111.

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