

2016

The Mission of the Church: Its Misconceptions and My Proposal and Claim

Horacio Castillo
Luther Seminary

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/ma_theses

 Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), and the [Comparative Methodologies and Theories Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Castillo, Horacio, "The Mission of the Church: Its Misconceptions and My Proposal and Claim" (2016). *Master of Arts Theses*. Paper 36.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses at Digital Commons @ Luther Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Arts Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Luther Seminary. For more information, please contact akeck001@luthersem.edu.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH:
ITS MISCONCEPTIONS AND
MY PROPOSAL AND CLAIM

By

HORACIO CASTILLO

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

THESIS ADVISER: STEVEN D. PAULSON

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

2016

This thesis may be duplicated with permission of the author.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to first thank my wife Amanda and my children, Abigail and Joaquin, for all their support and understanding as I spent many hours working in my seminary classes. They have been both my encouragement and my drive to finish my degree. They have helped me to keep focus in the midst of many transitions in the last three years. Thank you and I love you so much.

I also want to thank Dr. Steven D. Paulson as he has been not only my mentor but also my pastor, and friend. For his guidance and his preaching of the forgiveness of sins of Jesus Christ which he has given to me and now I am able to preach it to others.

I want to thank my fellow sinners for the support they provide through the conversation and consolation of saints, especially to Dr. Marney and Rev. Barry Fritts for their friendship. This group of friends in Christ have been my anchor to keep focused on preaching the forgiveness of sins and distinguishing the Law and the Gospel.

Dr. Mark Granquist for his support and guidance in the different classes I took from him which gave me good resources for writing my thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ii

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS..... iv

1. CHAPTER 15

 Description of My Experience 5

 My Experiences in the Church of Guatemala 7

 My Experience in the ELCA.....13

2. CHAPTER 221

 When Ecclesiology, Liberation Theology, or Love masquerade as the Mission of
 the Church.....21

 Ecclesiology as "Gospel".....24

 Liberation Theology as "Gospel"35

3. CHAPTER 3.....43

 The Evangelical (Lutheran) Understanding of the Mission of the Church.....43

 The Gospel not the Prescription of the Law.....45

 The Prescription of the Law.....48

 Christ, the Active Subject.....49

 The Problem of Adding the Law and Our Work to Faith.....52

 The One-Trick-Pony Evangelical Preacher.....55

 Gospel as Gift, not the Work of the Law.....62

4. SUMMARY AND PROPOSAL.....69

 My Experience70

 When Ecclesiology, Liberation Theology, or Love Masquerade as the Mission of
 the Church71

 The Evangelical (Lutheran) Understanding of the Mission of the Church.....74

 An Evangelical Proposal Forward.....78

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....82

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Augsburg Confession
BC	<i>The Book of Concord.</i> Edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert. Minneapolis, 2000.
ELW	<i>Evangelical Lutheran Worship</i>
FC, SD	<i>Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord</i>
LC	<i>Large Catechism</i>
LW	<i>Luther's Works, American Edition</i>
SA	<i>Smalcald Articles</i>
SC	<i>Small Catechism</i>
LCMS	Lutheran Church Missouri Synod –
ILAG	Iglesia Luterana Agustina de Guatemala – (Augustinian Lutheran Church of Guatemala).
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
LSS	Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota

CHAPTER 1

DESCRIPTION OF MY EXPERIENCE

“¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”¹ Matthew 28:18-20.

Since its conception with Jesus the mission of the church has been that of making disciples, that is, of making Christians. The way in which God accomplishes this is that of the proclamation of God’s favor to his people which is none other than through Jesus Christ himself. In Christ and through Christ we receive the forgiveness of sins that grants life and salvation. This is the way God intended it to be, not through the Law and not through any other means. This favor of God to his chosen ones is the proclamation of the Gospel, the Gospel is the forgiveness of sins, “for where there is the forgiveness of sins there is life and salvation.”² This life and salvation, through the forgiveness of sins, brings peace and freedom in Christ. To do what? To continue to forgive sins. For what purpose? To continue to make Christians. And what is the purpose of Christians? To help their neighbor in word and deed, *not* so that they can be worthy of forgiveness and therefore of life and salvation, but so that other Christians are created and are

¹ The Holy Bible, English Standard Version Copyright © 2001 by [Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.](#)

²LC 5, in BC, 362.

nurtured. Can the Law help us make Christians? The short answer to this question is, “No,” and the long answer to this questions continues to be, “No.”

The Law was given for two purposes: one, to preserve life so that we, as sinners, would not kill each other at first sight, and two, so that we are lead to Christ “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” Romans 3:23 and also to reveal sin (Rom. 5:20), not to remove it. Sin is removed when we are led to Christ. What is it that we receive and are granted in Christ and by Christ? As you have gathered the answer by the previous points, here it is again, we receive and are granted the forgiveness of sins. As we are freed to do just that, forgive sins, we are called to proclaim Christ making Christians, not by our own power and strength, but by the power of the Holy Spirit as we read in John 20:21b-23: “*Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.*”²² *And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.*”²³ *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.*” (At this point there is no other reason to continue writing this thesis because the mission of the church has been explained in these sentences. However, as we live in this Old Kingdom, I must fulfill the demands of the Law, not for salvation but for my neighbor who needs it, and lay out why I am writing this thesis.)

Having said all these, the purpose of this thesis regarding what the Mission of the Church is, or should be, is to address all the different expressions and understandings of what the mission of the church is for different people all over the world. I, of course, have not been all over the world, however, I do underline my main point in the different understandings of the mission of the church, by focusing on what I experienced in Guatemala and in the United States of America (US). Moreover, from what I have experienced, both in Guatemala and in the US, I can see that

the misconception of what the mission of the church is, does not have barriers and transcends borders.

My Experiences in the Church in Guatemala

I lived my whole life in Guatemala until I was thirty-two years old, and it was not until recently, three years ago to be precise that I moved to Minnesota with my family (wife and two children). My experience in Guatemala in regards to theology and the mission of the church was influenced by Roman Catholic and American Evangelical theology, practice, and tradition. To clarify, when I speak of the American Evangelical Church in Guatemala, I am not speaking about what one of the Lutheran Churches in the United States was once called. It was quite the mix and the experience for me. As a kid and teenager I did not care about theology, preaching, or the mission of the church. My father and mother were both pastors and very involved in the church, my father was ordained in 1962 into one parish of the Evangelical American church in Guatemala, which ended once he moved to the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in Guatemala in 1985. My mother was very active as a lay leader at the many different churches my father served, and was ordained into the Lutheran church in 1993. The church where my mother was ordained was an independent Lutheran church my father founded in 1991 after being asked by the LCMS parish to resign. The LCMS at that time, at least in Guatemala, was not in agreement with the ecumenical work my father was doing with the Roman Catholic Church of the area, and the work with indigenous and poor people as the LCMS, at that time, was focused in serving the middle-upper class. My father was most influenced by both Roman Catholic and American Evangelical theology since he attended both seminaries. The Roman Catholic was a high school

preparatory level seminary in a small town in the highlands of Guatemala and the American Evangelical was a seminary of the Central American Mission in Guatemala City. This Central American Mission Church was a mixture of Methodist and Presbyterian theology and tradition. However, as you can tell, he did not pursue the Roman Catholic route (otherwise I would not be writing this thesis) and ended up being ordained into one of the many denominations of the American Evangelical church in Guatemala, the Central American Mission. To mention some of the different branches of the protestant churches or denominations in Guatemala there are the Pentecostals, Methodist, and Presbyterian. My father was forced by my grand-mother, when he was a teenager, to pursue his call in the American Evangelical Church rather than in the Roman Catholic because she had converted to Evangelical from being a devout Roman Catholic. My father and mother met around 1966 when my father had already graduated from the Evangelical seminary in Guatemala City and he was already serving a church in Guatemala City. At the time my mother was finishing up her teaching career in elementary school. My parents got married a couple years after they met. My Father is definitely what I would call a hybrid between these two denominations, Evangelical and Roman Catholic. As I mentioned, my father joined the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church in Guatemala in 1985 and became Lutheran. He liked to say that this was a happy medium for him and his theology. My mother, on the contrary, was heavily influenced by the American Evangelical theology as she belonged to one of the Evangelical churches in Guatemala since childhood.

My father and mother worked alongside one another and had great passion for the church and its mission. However, I realized later on that their understanding of the mission of the church was rife with a theology of the fulfilment of the law, not only by them but by the members of the parishes they would serve. The creation of Christians, contrary to my opening statement, was by

means of the Law. This is to say that they would proclaim a Law disguised as Gospel, or as we would call it, a wolf in sheep's skin. Both my father and mother would essentially preach the third use of the Law. They would say, "Christ has already given his life for you, now you must follow the Law as your guide to serve your neighbor, and by doing so, please God as he is demanding this from you. If you do not fulfill the Law then God will not be pleased with you." In 1985, as I mentioned above, my father was called to serve the only church the LCMS had in Guatemala and to some extent he felt comfortable there, at least with the Lutheran theological understanding of the third use of the Law. The traditions and practices were not something my father was fond of since the leadership of the LCMS parish did not intend to reach out to the indigenous population of the local community much less expand the church throughout Guatemala.

My father saw his mission and his calling as that of serving the least in society, which in Guatemala in many cases are the indigenous people, but he was not allowed. The leadership of the LCMS did not like one bit that my father was doing ecumenical work with a Jesuit priest from the area. Moreover, my father was attracting the indigenous poor from the surrounding areas where the LCMS was located, west of Guatemala City, and the LCMS leadership wanted to focus their mission to the middle and upper class, at least at that time. Later on, my father and my mother founded the Augustinian Lutheran Church of Guatemala (Iglesia Luterana Agustina de Guatemala – ILAG) in 1991 by serving the least of society. This was my parent's dream come true. They focused their work in two ways. First and foremost, the church was going to serve as what is meant to be and do, that is, proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, or at least in their understanding of what that means, that is, the third use of the law and to some extent a liberation theology which focuses in the empowerment of the poor and oppressed by society. Second, the

church would serve their neighbor while they still lived in the Old Kingdom: fighting for people's rights as in Guatemala, the least in society who suffer great deal of injustice by the church, government, and other citizens in power.

As I was drawn into the church more and more, I thought that was a very good approach. It made sense that if we were a church, which happened to be Lutheran, we were to proclaim the gospel first and foremost and help our neighbor as a result of the gospel. However, I did not understand and realized the moralistic approach to preaching the gospel. In the first place my ears had not yet been opened to the gospel of the forgiveness of sins. I thought the gospel was a set of rules to have and fulfill so that God would favor those who follow his commands. It was an "if – then" approach: "*if* I fulfill God's law, *then* I would be favored by God." At that time, this approach made sense to me. All Christians must come to Christ so that they are saved, not completely by what Christ has done in his suffering, death, and resurrection, but by what Christ has done plus what we can do or at least try our best to do. Later on, I learned that this is what Gabriel Biel, Luther's arch Roman Catholic opponent taught: *facere quod in se est* (Do what is in you). To my surprise, this dictum has thrived throughout many centuries and still present with us today.

As my experiences and education grew, I met my wife, now a Lutheran pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, then a graduate student of Luther Seminary, who introduced me to Lutheran theology in the form of books from Lutheran theologians. I could not get enough of this gospel that differed from the "gospel disguised in sheep's clothing" I had heard my entire life. I had finally been freed from the law and from the premise of an "if-then" God. Having been freed and raised to new life by the Lord of life, I could never return to a life of slavery under a conditional Lord of Death. I had enough conditions imposed by my parents. Why

would I want a God who only blesses me if I do what he pleases, especially because I have failed miserably at “doing what is in me?” I thought, “how can God be a cause and effect God? God did not ask in Exodus 20, “Would you like me to be your God?” No, rather God said, “I am the Lord your God.”

When I started preaching with a gospel that frees from sin, death, and the power of the devil, as we find it in Luther’s *Small Catechism*,³ one of the leaders of the ILAG came questioning my wife’s preaching and my own. She asked, how can you be preaching in that manner? What is going to keep people coming back to the church if you preach to them that they are freed by Christ? This is when it became clearer to me that the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ was none other than the law for them. In another instance, when I was teaching a class on the doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from works of the law, another of the leaders of the ILAG came to refute me on that teaching arguing that there must be something we should or can do to accept Christ’s offer of salvation. It only made sense that she would think that way since she, more than I, was exposed to American Evangelical theology.

Once again, I was surprised and started wondering what kind of teaching they were doing. I, of course, faced the same questioning by the students of the seminary we were running in the ILAG as to how it is that we have no active part in our salvation. The teaching of the theology of “do what is in you,” which goes by another name, “the theology of the ladder”⁴ was exposed in all its horror. Their argument was based on the Roman Sacramental system, as ninety-nine percent of the members of the ILAG churches were out of the Roman Catholic

³ Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism*, by Martin Luther in Contemporary English (Minneapolis and Philadelphia: Augsburg and Concordia Publishing Houses, 1979), 13.

⁴ Forde Gerhard. *Where God Meets Man: Luther’s Down to Earth Approach to the Gospel*. (Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 7.

tradition. As more people became interested in the philosophy upon which my father had founded the church, that is, preaching the gospel and helping thy neighbor, I started to advocate that we, as a Lutheran church, teach Lutheran doctrine and theology. One of the biggest changes I was pushing towards was our Lutheran understanding of the sacraments. As Lutherans, the sacraments are a gift we receive from faith for faith as we read in Romans 1:17 and not by the works of the law or our own understanding or effort.

As I received permission to teach the sacraments as gift and not as our work, I got a lot of push back from the seminary students and pastors. But I was moved just as Martin Luther was when he was asked to recant at the Diet of Worms, “Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds and reasoning—and my conscience is captive to the Word of God—then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience.”⁵ However, there is no support by scripture that our salvation is outside Christ and that we have the most minimal part in that salvation. The students and pastors of the ILAG had a hard time, not necessarily understanding the doctrine, but of letting go of the “control” they believed they had over God and God’s election of his people by means of faith in Christ and Christ’s work alone for our salvation. They explained that their understanding in their minds was clear, but their heart, which held to the law dearly, would not let go that easily. This is when we can look to Martin Luther’s *Large Catechism* for his explanation of the First Commandment, that our sin is a matter of the heart, “Idolatry does not consist merely of erecting an image and praying to it, but it is primarily a matter of the heart, which fixes its gaze upon other things and seeks help and consolation from creatures, saints, or

⁵ Kittelson, James. *Luther The Reformer. The Story of the Man and His Career.* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 161.

devils.”⁶ This is why God claims our hearts so that we do not cling to the law and idols but only to him. There are, of course, many more examples that I could give in my ten years of service in the ILAG but I will move now to the next chapter of my life in the United States and more specifically in Minnesota.

My Experience in the ELCA

Now I will move on to share the next set of experiences that I have had in the ELCA as a student of Luther Seminary, as a pastoral candidate, and now as rostered pastor in the ELCA.

During my work with the ILAG I was also given the opportunity to visit ELCA churches throughout the US.. I mostly visited the St. Paul Area Synod in Minnesota and the Southeastern (US) Synod in the south with whom the ILAG has an ongoing partnership with both churches. Additionally, we visited other churches in Texas, Ohio, and Washington. As I had not spent much time in the ELCA churches I was, to some extent, naïve of the different issues and problems that the Lutheran church in America had been going through, especially the ELCA. I did know that no church is perfect and that there are different discussions and disagreements, but I was not aware of the depth of the theological division even within the ELCA not to mention with other Lutheran bodies. Since my focus is on the mission of the church as the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins and the misconception of what the gospel is, I will give only examples where I found this to be true.

Every time I experience the misunderstanding of what the Gospel is, i.e. forgiveness of sins, that exists in the ELCA specially, I get still surprised even though I should, by now, expect this kind of explanation about what the gospel is for, that is, the third use of the law, a social-

⁶ LC 1, 21, in BC, 388.

justice gospel, or to better define it, a social-justice law. If not a majority, a good number of pastors and lay leaders within the church believe and convey this kind of preaching.

My first encounter to the proclamation of a Law disguised as Gospel was in the form of preaching from the pulpit. While listening to a sermon on the parable of the wicked tenants in the gospel of Matthew chapter 21, I did not hear the gospel, that is, Christ's gifts for us in his salvation, rather I heard advice about how we are to follow the law. The way this sermon was presented was the advice on how we are to not be as the wicked tenants but how we are to be gracious guests. There was no promise of the forgiveness of sins but a law that burdens consciences. When we find a parable in the bible, the first thing that we need to realize is that this is the Law laid out by Jesus so that "seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand" Mark 13:13. This is exactly what happens when we think that the Law is the promise and gift. We falsely believe that Jesus has given us the Law so that we may have life in this Old Kingdom and the promise that we, through our fulfilling the law so that we will be given the New Kingdom. Thanks be to God, however, that Jesus continues to say that "blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear" Mark 13:16. What Jesus is talking about in the parable of the wicked tenants is that he is the heir that the wicked tenants kill, he is the one who, by dying, grants us his inheritance because we would not have it any other way. We think that by being "gracious guests," we will gain the inheritance. It is Christ, however, who is granting us that inheritance in the forgiveness of sins rather than judging us as we deserve, which is punishment and wrath.

Another instance in which I found myself troubled was at the planning of a church gathering. I was asked to prepare the closing of the gathering. Since there were going to be many pastors and lay leaders present I figured that they would also like to hear Christ's promise for

them in the forgiveness of sins. As a preacher who is preaching the majority of the time and not being preached to, I wanted to provide an opportunity for those pastors to hear the freedom of the Gospel so that they would be unburden by anything and everything that would be troubling their consciences. I decided the words used by Jesus himself to grant his forgiveness on the paralytic man of whom we hear about in the gospel of Mark [2:1-12] would be adequate. I slightly modified this verse and wrote ““When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ In the same manner, and by Christ authority, I say unto you right now, your sins are forgiven, stand up, take up your mat and go home.”” For me it was as simple to say, as I have been given this promise which gives me life and salvation, I might as well share it with others. The thought behind it was that since I am sent into the world to serve my neighbor in my vocation, I am strengthened in the faith of Jesus Christ to continue to serve in my vocation as a preacher. Other preachers and lay leaders need to hear this promise often as well. To my surprise, however, I was asked by the leader of the gathering to modify this absolution because it sounded too harsh for the people in attendance and they were unnecessary words.

It made me wonder: what is so offensive to forgive sins if we preach that Christ was given to die for us for the forgiveness of sins? Is it because we do not have any part in our salvation, or is it because we do not want to recognize that we are indeed sinful? I believe it to be both cases. There is no “homework” Jesus is giving us so that we fulfill the law. There is simply the forgiveness of sins. There are no strings attached. As Lutherans, we confess that we are *simul iustus et peccator*, which is, in part, to confess that of course we are not perfect. Along with this we say that God “saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31) but he did not say, “it is perfect.” Twisting these sayings together as only sinners can do, the true

mission of the church—the forgiveness of sins—is rejected, and something else is added to it, that is, the Law. This is the formula behind the misconception of the mission of the church.

One of my most recent experiences was at a retreat of pastors where one of the leading pastors of the gathering said that the previous Sunday he had attended a church where he had heard the Gospel read but he did not hear the Gospel proclaimed during the sermon. The Gospel reading for the previous Sunday of our gathering was the gospel of Luke 4:16-19 when Jesus is rejected at Nazareth and he is at the temple reading the scroll from the Prophet Isaiah:

¹⁸ The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

This text is pretty clear to me that the Spirit of the Lord is upon Jesus, and he is the one who has been anointed to do something very specific, to proclaim, to deliver a sermon, to deliver the gospel to the poor, proclaim liberty to the captives, give sight to the blind, and free those who are oppressed. However, this pastor said that he did not hear the Gospel preached because the pastor delivering the sermon instructed the congregation to help the poor, to go and free the captives, to go and give sight to the blind, and to free those who are oppressed. The distortion I see here is that the Gospel is turned into the Law, and the mission of the church becomes social justice, and that justice that we are to proclaim is our justice. The pastor said that if we are not doing these things then we are to be most pitied because we are not doing what we preach, that is, delivering justice and equality to those who are the least, or as they call them now, “the other.”

Christ's mission, if we want to call it that, is to free us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. He is not waiting to do it as a future promise, but he has already accomplished it in his suffering, death, and resurrection. As baptized Christians, we are now delivering the Crucified and Risen Christ with all his benefits to real, live sinners. The message that this pastor delivered was on stewardship. What is so troublesome about this is both, the message delivered to pastors, and that these pastors are taking this message as if this is truly the Gospel and the mission of the church. They are taking the Law as if it were the Gospel and are burdening their parishioners with works of the Law as if this was a gift that is bringing Christians life. My answer to this is with the words of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 2:21:

*¹⁹For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And *the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.**

The last experience I want to share is how the forgiveness of sins is rejected as the mission of the church for God's people. I was invited to a gathering of pastors of "color" to share how Lutheran Social Services can be of help to find Racial Equity for Minorities here in Minnesota. I hear the injustice people have experienced and continue to experience due to their racial and ethnic background. The main thing lay leaders and pastors asked from LSS was so that justice is achieved for those communities under oppression and injustice. I understand from my experience in Guatemala that injustice is very real for people, but when we look for justice to be served for us who have been suffering oppression for many centuries without the forgiveness of sins in Christ, justice becomes only revenge. Being at a gathering of pastors I was expecting,

once again, a conversation on reconciliation, peace, and forgiveness. To be clear, this is not to say that the forgiveness of sins as God's kingdom that comes to us, giving us life and salvation through Christ, will prevent us from applying the Law of this old kingdom to those responsible for injustices. However, when proclaiming God's mercy there is true forgiveness which can only bring good fruits from those who have been granted God's mercy. This is what the Apostle Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 5:17-20a that we, as a church, are to proclaim as the calling we receive from the Holy Spirit:

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.

The mission of the church is therefore not to lay the Law and justice of the Law on people to make them Christians. Rather, it is the Gospel – a justification that the justice of the law can never accomplish – which brings life and salvation. We are confident in God, through Christ, that our calling is to proclaim the forgiveness of sins for we know that the letter (Law) kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Cor. 3:6b). If we try to impose the Law or proclaim the Law as the gift that God gives us so that we are righteous before him (*coram Deo*) by trying to fulfill it, there is nothing else that we are doing but rejecting God's mercy and grace. Moreover, by looking to find equity through the law alone, the only thing we will find is to create division between people rather than bringing them together. What we try to do with the Law in finding justice and equality is to transfer the power from one group of people to the other. My

contribution to this conversation was of reconciliation through the forgiveness of sins. The response I received was that the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation are not possible unless justice is served, unless there is an apology from those who have oppressed the minorities, and unless guilt and sin is named and made known.

The only thing I could feel and see was a desire for revenge and retribution rather than reconciliation and true forgiveness. I am not saying that there should not be consequences in this Old Kingdom for those who break the Law or that we should not acknowledge sin, but rather that we speak the truth in love to one another rather than in hate. Timothy Keller aptly speaks about relationships, more specifically of the marriage relationship in this manner, “Love without truth is sentimentality; it supports and affirms us but it keeps us in denial about our flaws. Truth without love is harshness; it gives us information but in such a way that we cannot truly hear it.”⁷

In this first chapter I have laid out my background in regards to how I got involved in the church in Guatemala and how I became ordained in Word and Sacrament in the ILAG. There have been more than a good share of experiences that I have found troubling in regards to Lutheran Theology and the misconception of it in the Lutheran Church both in Guatemala, in the ILAG, and in the United States, in the ELCA. Lutheran Theology and the mission of the church has been misunderstood and misinterpreted into a third use of the Law and a liberation theology, which instead of preaching the Gospel as the forgiveness of sins, is being preached as the third use of the Law. More specifically, this third use of the Law is the demand to love our neighbors as ourselves. However, there are many consciences troubled both the members of the church and the pastors who rely on that kind of preaching.

⁷ Keller Timothy. The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God. <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/16321346-the-meaning-of-marriage-facing-the-complexities-of-commitment-with-the>. (Accessed May 1st, 2016).

As I have laid out my experience and my reasoning to write this thesis, I will also lay out the systematic or not so systematized theology of glory, third use of the Law, and liberation theology which focuses more in the law as the means through which God is pleased with us. In this kind of theology there is no distinction between Law and Gospel and the doctrine of the Old and New Kingdom of God. When there is the belief that there is only one kingdom, i.e. the Old Kingdom, there is only the Law which brings us freedom and the means through which we can free ourselves. This is a rejection and denial that we are completely passive before God when it comes to our salvation, there is nothing we can do to earn neither faith nor salvation. However, there are many theologians, pastors, and non-ordained people who insist on our activity rather than passivity before God and his salvation. Moreover, they claim that Jesus is our aid to reach eternal life by means of the Law, that is, by loving our neighbor and fighting for social justice. Therefore, their preaching of the Gospel continues to be the Law, it is a wolf dressed in sheep's wool, and they hope this will actually work to make Christians and to make Christians do their job, do what God called them to do. This is when these theologians confuse the Law with the Gospel and this is what I will address in the second chapter.

CHAPTER 2

WHEN ECCLESIOLOGY, LIBERATION THEOLOGY, or LOVE MASQUERADE AS THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The forgiveness of sins as the mission of the church has always been offensive to people. We do not need to dig deep into history to discover such an offense. We simply need to go into Scripture as our main source. This history to which I am referring to here is not another quest for the “Historical Jesus,” but the history of the church of Christ and his mission among his people. As I noted in the first chapter, people get uneasy when one preaches the forgiveness of sins. First, this is because when you forgive the sins of any, it means that they are sinners, and no one likes to be told they are sinners even when this is true. No one. We, as sinners, fight so hard to claim for at least a small pearl of righteousness within ourselves. Second of all, if you forgive sins, people ask, “Who has given you this authority, are you not a sinner as well?” This was one of the problems Jesus ran into when He heals the paralytic man in the Gospel of Mark 2:1-12 when he said very clearly “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Jesus did not say anything else. Jesus completed the mission through the forgiveness of sins.

However, forgiveness is what we as sinners reject because such an unequivocal announcement robs us of the righteousness we presume to have, our potential, or even our cooperation with God. The scribes in the Gospel of Mark accuse Jesus of blaspheming since only God can forgive sins, but if only God can forgive sins, then what is the mission of the church? Jesus said to them “*Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’?*”¹⁰ *But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority*

on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic—¹¹ “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” This authority we remember was given to Jesus in his baptism as the Father gave Jesus a sermon (Mark 1:11) “You are my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased,” and sent him into his ministry, into his mission. The paralytic man, having been forgiven, was raised by Jesus and sent home to serve in his earthly vocations and to preach the same as Jesus had preached to him, the forgiveness of sins.

Nevertheless, what is it that the church does instead? The church attempts to *add* something to this forgiveness. As I noted in the first chapter, when I was asked not to proclaim an absolution at the gathering of leaders, it was believed to have no value, that it was mere words. Furthermore, I have also heard people say, “Words do not put food in your stomach, I can forgive sins but that would not fulfill your physical needs.” So, the church goes on to make something else of the true mission of the church rather than the forgiveness of sins, and adds a social mission or some visible sign of unity, effectively burying Christ, or outright removes the forgiveness of sins altogether.

We see in another instance that demonstrates Jesus’ ministry is in the preaching of this forgiveness of sins in Mark 1:29-39 as Jesus heals many in Simon’s house. When the day was over, Jesus goes on to pray away from the crowd to a deserted place and Simon and his companions search for him. When the disciples find Jesus they say, “everyone is looking for you. And [Jesus] said to them, ‘Let us go on to the next towns, that I may *preach* there also, for *that is why I came out.*’”⁸

What is it that we learn here from Jesus himself? That preaching was his purpose, healing was a sign pointing to the most important part: preaching the gospel, the forgiveness of sins.

⁸ Emphasis mine.

However, it is unfortunate that church up to this day continues to add something to this gospel or “turn to a different gospel, not that there is another one,” as Paul says in Galatians 1:6-7, “but there are some who trouble [us] and want to distort the gospel of Christ.” The forgiveness of sins is mere words that does not put food on the table or bring justice to the oppressed. “It is nothing since it does not do anything for us,” as people I have heard say, or, “The forgiveness of sins is not enough, it does not show results, and since Christ is absent we must be Jesus’ hands and feet in the world.” To do what? It would seem that we are now to do the Law since the Law has become our greatest gift, and thus, the Gospel. Matthew Skinner, a New Testament Professor at Luther Seminary, speaks to this “absence” of Jesus and says:

These things (to forgive one another’s sins, study scriptures, baptize people into a new identity, and share a meal to recognize the sustenance God provides) aren’t mere rituals or time-fillers. They sustain us in *Jesus’ absence*, when the hazards of nighttime, fatigue, and resignation confront us all. They promote readiness.⁹

The church has come up with many different points of view on ecclesiology and missiology trying to answer what the mission of the church is. This idea is a Christology of absence (Jesus being gone for the time being), then means the church must be the fill-in or stand-in (vicar) for Christ until he becomes present again. So the ecclesiology says: Christ absent, church present—means taking the place of Christ. This then has many implications as to how we must replace Christ, including how we must be Christ to others while Christ cannot be that Christ. Most especially, it means Christ cannot speak, and the best the church can do is try to fill the void or silence with its own self, presence and power. However, they miss the point even when they have the answer right in front of them: Jesus Christ who is forgiveness of sins.

⁹ Dr. Skinner’s article published on November 3, 2014. An article on the gospel of Matthew 25:1-13. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-l-skinner/we-better-get-to-work_b_6093642.html. Emphasis mine.

Scripture reveals this sin to us in the story of Philip who asked Jesus to show them (the disciples) the Father so that they would be satisfied (John 14:8-9) and Jesus answers Philip “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip?” The church continues to look for signs and the most celebrated sign to which the church clings is the Law, as though the Law is the gift that brings life and salvation. Many argue that the Law is in fact a gift, to which I agree, but it is not that which brings faith and salvation, it does not deliver Christ but orders society, restraining sin and finally brings judgment of death upon all sinners. The Law demands everything from us and even though we imagine we can tailor the Law to our experience or situation, the Law does not have mercy. The Law is very bad at forgiveness. Mercy according to the Law is to reduce its demand of perfection for something less stringent, forgoing the Gospel: the forgiveness of sin. This reduction is not forgiveness, it is just a lesser judgment which ultimately crawls up into the conscience and hammers away until it brings death rather than bringing life. This is why we, as Evangelical preachers, make the distinction between Law and Gospel. There is no embedment of the Law with the Gospel, on the contrary we separate them and make a distinction otherwise we only have the Law. The Apostle Paul rightly says “I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me,” Romans 7:9-10. Nevertheless, the sinner clings to the Law and prefers to be wounded and live as a zombie, or at least pretend they are alive, rather than giving up their presumed cooperation with God through the Law so that they may be made alive and righteous through the Gospel: the forgiveness of sins.

Ecclesiology as “Gospel”

Avery Cardinal Dulles in “Models of the Church”¹⁰ portrays the different stances of the Roman Catholic Church in regards to ecclesiology and missiology. This book not only communicates the Roman Catholic postures on these topics, but also the so-called Protestant denominations, including the Lutheran denomination positions. When claiming the Law as a gift, the Lutheran denomination is not free from this error, in fact, it actually is one of the main drivers of the works righteousness teaching only with all or most of the Lutheran or Evangelical language. Dulles focuses in five different types of ecclesiological approaches, or as he prefers to call them, “models.” The models are listed as follows: 1. The Church as Institution, 2. The Church as Mystical Communion, 3. The Church as Sacrament, 4. The Church as Herald, and 5. The Church as Servant. He says that, “each of these models is considered and evaluated in itself, and as a result of this critical assessment I draw the conclusion that a balanced theology of the Church must find a way of incorporating the major affirmations of each basic ecclesiological type.”¹¹ From the very beginning of the book, when one speaks of having a “balanced theology,” which appears to be five different forms of the Law, that is, five different models of ecclesiology. The work of the Law is to create balance in life, that is, equity and justice. Here, this balance Dulles is talking about is to try to find the common ground between one theology and another so that, with merging differing theologies, the church can point to a “practical answer” to the churches’ weaknesses rooted in ecclesiology. Then one can create a “practical” or visible mission of the church. Not surprisingly, none of these models reflect the *Confessio Augustana VII* which makes clear the Church is only and always where the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins is taught purely and the sacraments administered rightly.

¹⁰ Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Models of the Church*, (New York: A Penguin Random House Company, 2002).

¹¹ *Ibid.* 5.

The explanation Dulles gives as to why the use of “Models” in ecclesiology instead of types or any other definition is because, “the Bible, when it seeks to illuminate the nature of the Church, speaks almost entirely through images, most of them...*evidently metaphorical*.”¹² He gives examples of what those metaphors are, such as marriage in Ephesians 5:32. He goes on to say that “images function as symbols,”¹³ and that, “religious imagery is both functional and cognitive... the images must resonate with the experience of the faithful,” and that, “religious experience, then provides a vital key for the evaluation and interpretation of symbols.”¹⁴

There is a problem here when the church focuses much on symbols, images, and even more so, on metaphors. This means that when the church uses these “tools” then the preacher needs to contextualize Christ through the use of images, symbols and metaphors in an attempt to make him an experience so that people can relate Christ’s “experience” to their experience. This means movement away from the distinction of Law and Gospel, which depends not upon combining symbols, but of giving a direct promise. The result is Christ becoming an example to follow, to be compared with, and to look up to as an ultimate goal. However, Christ is not an experience, or something to which or someone to whom we need to relate. Christ is not an example or a goal, Christ is the Savior and Redeemer of the world, and more specifically, of the individual when this Word, Jesus Christ, is preached to people as the forgiveness of sins (Gospel) not as an example (Law).

Dulles does observe that, “we must reckon with the fact that human language itself becomes bent by theological usage so that figures that were originally metaphorical can be

¹² Ibid. 11. Emphasis mine.

¹³ Ibid. 12.

¹⁴ Ibid. 13.

properly though still analogously predicated.”¹⁵ Dulles provides an example saying that, “terms such as ‘People of God’ and ‘Body of Christ’ are often considered...something more than mere metaphors. The psychology of images is exceedingly subtle and complex. In the religious sphere, images function as symbols.” This explanation, even though true, is still problematic. When we start playing with the Law in the form of “figures” or even “symbols,” in matters of what applies to us and what does not apply, we are still left with the Law and uncertainty. We are only either reducing the Law or trying to adapt it to our “needs” or ignore it. In the same manner with metaphors, when we start nitpicking at them, we only end up with uncertainty because then anyone has their own truth and their own perspective or interpretation of what a metaphor is. Dulles goes as far as to say that, “the contemporary crisis of faith is, I believe, in very large part a crisis of images.”¹⁶ To my point, the crisis of faith, as Dulles puts it, becomes a problem of the Law and a problem of bad preaching in which Christ and his forgiveness of sins is *not* preached.

When we think the Triune God is to be preached as a metaphor, symbol, or image we are not preaching the Gospel. Preaching the Law in the form or model of an ecclesiological symbol is not redemption because Christ is not a metaphor, symbol, or image. Jesus Christ is God, a person, redeemer, savior, and forgiver of sins who brings us life and salvation through preaching and administration of the sacraments that no model could ever accomplish. When Christ actually gives a promise, then the person is made into, brought into, the church—and this means not just a group of people trying to bring justice, but truly the body of Christ—not the head where the mouth is, but the body—not as a mere metaphor, but as truly united with Christ, going where he goes and being what he is—but mostly saying what he says: I forgive you all of your sins.

¹⁵ Ibid. 12.

¹⁶ Ibid. 13.

The seeking after ecclesiological models or the expansion of metaphors to describe a “religious experience” has confused God and the preaching and delivering of God with many voices, with our own voices, our own reason, and our own understanding of God rather than the voice of God that comes through the mouth of a preacher, both Law and Gospel. Dulles says that the mystery of God applied to the church was set by Paul VI when he declared that, “the church is a mystery. It is a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God. It lies, therefore, within the very nature of the Church to be always open to *new and even greater exploration*.”¹⁷ Even though God was indeed a mystery, the hidden God in the Law, the Apostle Paul talks about how God reveals himself to his people in Christ, Colossians 1:24-26 “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.” God is no longer a mystery for us for he has chosen to show himself to us in mercy through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to forgive our sins, to forgive our betrayal, and to not judge us as we deserve, with the Law, but to give us his peace. However, the church continues to treat and desire God as the Law alone, rather than distinguishing between the Law and the Gospel. It is as Proverbs 26:11 says that “like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.” The church wants to have an absent Christ and a hidden God so that they are not out of a job, or worse, found dead in sin. Nevertheless, the church’s job or mission, is to reveal this hidden God through the proclamation of Christ and his forgiveness of sins, not to keep it hidden from his children under a pile of metaphors.

¹⁷ Ibid. 10. Emphasis mine.

Ewert Cousins, Dulles says, “has written lucidly of the similarities and differences between the two fields,”¹⁸ theology and physical science, to explain why the church should use and currently uses models. “Our religious language and symbols should be looked upon as models because, even more than the concepts of science, they only approximate the objet they are reflecting...to use the concept model...prevents concepts and symbols from becoming idols and opens theology to variety and development just as the model method has done for science.”¹⁹ The methods, symbols, and images are means, according to Cousins, so that *the hidden God is explained* to people and they actually are able to understand who this God is according to their experience. Thus “the religious experience touches the innermost part of the person.”²⁰ Luther’s reply to Erasmus’ attempt at “explaining” the hidden God was, “the gouty foot laughs at your doctoring.”²¹ That is to say, the hidden God is not revealed by “explanation” be it that of reason or that of metaphor. This sort of “doctoring” only make things worse, for the more we “explain God away” the more we are faced the wrath of the hidden God. The hidden God is not revealed in our explanations, but through the proclamation that He indeed forgives all our sins. Additionally, if we are trying to titillate the innermost part of the person, this is no different than being a motivational institution or psychotherapists. The purpose of the church is not to motivate wills or direct people in navel gazing, but to free them from their sin, death, and bondage to the devil.

¹⁸ Ibid. 16.

¹⁹ Ibid. 16.

²⁰ Ibid. 16. Emphasis mine.

²¹ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*. (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1972), LW 33:53.

When the church is made into something other than what it has been called to be, then it just becomes another Law abiding institution that gets busy trying to apply good moral principles, moving people from vice to virtue by means of the Law. Philip Jenkins, in his book “The New Christendom,” speaks to this problem of the church becoming another law abiding institution trying to move people from vice to virtue by saying that, “Every so often, some American or European writer urges the church to adjust itself to present day realities, to become relevant by abandoning outmoded supernatural doctrines and moral assumptions.”²²

Relevancy is something that the church as an institution is searching for by means of the Law, at least in the United States. The church, especially its leadership, is trying to adjust to present day realities by updating the doctrine and moral principles of the church according to what society asks for, according to the shifting “needs” society demands. However, this is not actually preaching the Gospel, rather this is only shifting the focus to the Law and/or the reduction of it. One of the chief reasons for this problem is that the church has shifted its focus throughout history from the Gospel to the Law, or to better say it, the church has not made the correct distinction between the Law and the Gospel. We can see this in the rejection of Jesus in all four gospels as he came to forgive sins and the people hung him on the cross killing him. The people, the Pharisees and the scribes, to mention a few, demanded the fulfillment of the Law in order to become righteous. The Apostle Paul also experienced this with the Super-Apostles in Galatia and to every church he visited. Paul preached the good news of Jesus Christ and even when he and his message were received people quickly turned to the Law in a heartbeat when they heard another message other than Christ. In our day, we find the same story, the rejection of the Gospel for the embracing the Law. The message of the Super Apostles (2 Corinthians 11:1-

²² Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011), 11.

11) or Enthusiasts,²³ as Luther called those who would like to deceive Christians, continues to mislead Christians driving them into the misconception that the Gospel is embedded in the Law, that the Law is a form of the Gospel, and there is no distinction between the Law and the Gospel.

There are two problems when there is no distinction between the Law and the Gospel. First, humanity's sin always wants to claim equality with God and therefore rejects God's work through Christ's forgiveness. And second, that the preachers of the Gospel are none other than Pharisees and Super Apostles. Mainstream Christian denominations are producing so called pastors that learn how to only preach the Law for the sake of being relevant and serve society's desires and will, rather than God's will for his people. The misleading thought behind this is that the Gospel is the Law, and the work of the pseudo-gospel is to make people "do" something. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) is something that people consider a guide for our Christian life as the means of salvation and is cherished by many because it gives us something to do rather than being completely passive before God. This sermon has become the guide to our Christian life into sanctification, and therefore redemption. However, this has been the misconception of the church for too long now. The Law of God is not comforting, rather it is accusing, demanding, and unmerciful. It is a long word that tells us what to do and what not to do. But unfortunately for us this is not good news because even when the Law has been given, it does not mean that we can accomplish and fulfill it. The Law commands us what to do but does not grant the power to accomplish what it commands. People think that the reason why the Law was given is because it can be done and fulfilled. However, in Galatians 2:21 we can see how the Apostle Paul clarifies for us that the Law is not a life giver nor the means of sanctification much

²³ Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis, 1990), 146-172.

less justification but the revealer of our transgressions (Romans 5:20) and worker of death (Romans 7:9).

As Dulles discusses the five different models of the church, he makes a comparison of modern ecclesiologists, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. Dulles acknowledges that neither of these five models are the solution to the church's problems as he says "I draw the conclusion that a balanced theology of the Church must find a way of incorporating the major affirmations of each basic ecclesiology type."²⁴ However, as I will point out, Dulles' understanding of ecclesiology and missiology under these five models and the support of both Protestant and Roman Catholic ecclesiologists misunderstands, misinterprets and misuses the true mission of the church as God the Father intends it through God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. This ecclesiology and missiology hybrid between Protestant and Roman Catholic are based and taught under the Law, and the distinction between Law and Gospel is not made.

The first model, The Church as Institution, is one that is hierarchical and, as explained by Dulles, "the Church of Christ could not perform its mission without some stable organizational features." However, the work of the church as an institution depends heavily on the Law because the focus is on the work of men and women, and especially the responsibility to make Christians and bring them salvation falls on the Pope, Bishops, and Priests. This is a trickle down system where the lay people need to follow certain prescriptions from the Institution of the Church to be in good standing with God. This is why Dulles says that "in the Institutional ecclesiology the *powers* and *functions* of the Church are generally divided into three: teaching, sanctifying, and governing."²⁵ Moreover, the church becomes a moral principles keeper rather than a proclaiming

²⁴ Dulles. *Models of the Church*. 2.

²⁵ Ibid. 29-30. Emphasis mine.

body of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as Dulles explains, “the church is the school that instructs them [membership] regarding the truths they need to know for the sake of their eternal salvation.”²⁶ By “instructs” and “truths they need to know,” Dulles is not referring to the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins (Gospel), but the ways in which they are to do what is in them (Law).

The second model, The Church as Mystical Communion, is a model that rejects and denies the first model, The Church as Institution, and makes its emphasis on the gathered community. Dulles points out that “the notion of the Church as community has appealed to many modern theologians. In some Protestant circles, this notion has been developed in an anti-institutional sense.”²⁷ One of the problems is seeking a more righteous model by being “anti-institutional.” Not only does it NOT make the gathered more righteous and pure, but the anti-institution is always replaced with some other institution or model in this old world. Another issue with this system is that, just as with the first in its fundamental form, neither does the proposed “gathered community” proclaim the forgiveness of sins because God is everywhere, he and his benefits are not confined to a narrow word. The hidden God is enough for this model since “the church in a certain sense exists for its own sake. Wherever men are in the Church they have partially fulfilled the aim of their existence; they are, at least inchoatively, in union with God.” There is no need to be part of a body where the Gospel is proclaimed because, first, the Gospel is not proclaimed, and second, the Law rules inside and outside the Church.

The third model, The Church as Sacrament, places its emphasis in the sacraments, not in as the proclamation of the forgiveness that Christ brings through them but as the work the

²⁶ Ibid. 33.

²⁷ Ibid. 40.

Church, as a community, does in society. Therefore, the focus and importance of the work of the church in its members is the visible demonstration of deeds of God's grace for the neighbors. Dulles says, "man comes to himself by going out of himself. He becomes active only in reception, and receives only through encounter with the world about him. Without contact with the world through the body, the spirit simply would not actuate itself. As it achieves actuation, it expresses itself in tangible form."²⁸ Dulles' explanation, once again, places man, the human being, as the active subject because man is the one making himself go out of himself. God's alien work is thrown out completely because man's spirit is the actor, not God. He wants to say that reception is the first part of being active, which would then say that with sacrament you start passive, but then it "activates" you—or should.

The fourth model, The Church as Herald, is closer to the Evangelical (Lutheran) understanding of the church as it draws from Martin Luther himself and his understanding of what church and its mission is. Unfortunately, the proclamation of the Gospel needs to be received and believed as a prescription of the Law making the hearers the active subjects of a cooperation system with God. Dulles uses Bultmann's understanding of the church as herald along with his famous assertion concerning the *individual's moment of decision*, "the word [of God] is [an] eschatological occurrence – that is to say, it makes God present here and now, giving life to those who accept it and death to those who refuse."²⁹ Furthermore, faith and salvation are a condition that lays on the person as they commit their life to Jesus Christ as it is described that "faith...is regarded as the necessary condition for receiving the salvation that God

²⁸ Ibid. 57.

²⁹ Ibid. 72.

promises in Jesus Christ.”³⁰ Even though faith is a free gift from God, through Christ and the Holy Spirit, to us, Dulles and Bultmann make faith man’s work. The necessity of faith is not a condition laid upon us as the Law, rather faith is necessary for our salvation NOT as our work, but as Christ’s work on the cross and his forgiveness proclaimed to us.

And finally, the fifth model, The Church as Servant, is more so than the Church as Herald for this model is structured on the manifestation of works for the neighbor. Proclamation is said to be important, but the works that the Church can perform are central because it is visible to the world, thus secular people, those in the fringes of society can be served. Dulles says that “so it is that the Church announces the coming of the Kingdom not only in word, through preaching and proclamation, *but more particularly in work*, in her ministry of reconciliation, of binding up wounds, of suffering service, of healing....And the Lord was the ‘man for others,’ so must the church be ‘the community for others.’”³¹ And of course, the motivation of the Law could not be lacking in this type of model to help men and women to realize their work and help their neighbor since “the Christian faith can *motivate men*, as perhaps nothing else can, to employ their power for service.”³² However, if the main focus is concerned about motivating the will, and not about the forgiveness of sins, then does the church in this model presume to judge whether the poor are fed out of coercion of the Law or out of Evangelical freedom in the Gospel? The motivation does not matter to the needy because they are the recipients of the deed, the work of the Christian in a material way. To what end is this motivation then? Certainly not salvation

³⁰ Ibid. 76.

³¹ Ibid. 85. Emphasis mine.

³² Ibid. 90. Emphasis mine.

for either the poor or the one who helps the poor. This is work is service of the neighbor's needs. Salvation does not depend on motivation but on the proclamation of the Gospel.

Liberation Theology as Gospel

The search for something new in theology and even in God continues. The church nowadays is busy and worried about why they are losing membership at a rapid pace and nothing that the church is doing seems to be working. This is indeed a mystery for the church but the reality is that if the church is just another institution among the many that provide the same Law that others do, why would anyone want to be or continue to be part of the church? More and more the thought that the church should be another social-justice platform along with other social movements sends the church far adrift from truly doing what it was made to be, that is, to proclaim the Gospel. When I speak about preaching the Gospel, I want to make the clear and correct distinction of what the Gospel is and what it is not. What it is: the forgiveness of sins. What it is not: the Law, that is, social justice.

In our present day, the mission of the church and the preaching of the gospel continues to be overcome by social justice rather than preaching the forgiveness of sins which brings life and salvation. And this kind of preaching, social justice, is also known as *liberation theology*. The questions I pose to liberation theology are, what are we liberating ourselves and others from? And, what are we liberating for? More importantly, through which means? Before I answer these questions, I want to point out that becoming a preacher of social justice, i.e. liberation theology, as if this were the Gospel, is nothing else than preaching the Law as a guide to have a Christian life. This is what we know better as The Third Use of the Law³³ which will only deceive one into

³³ FC, Ep 6:1-6, in BC, 502.

thinking that by the means of the Law one can become righteous before God. This will lead a preacher to appeal to the Free Will³⁴ can-of-worms thinking that one has some sort of power within oneself to not only work our way up to heaven but also have justice served. This means that if we are doing what Jesus would do and following his example, then by not searching or fighting for justice for our neighbor we are neither fulfilling our callings nor is the Gospel being preached and enacted. However, there is a catch because this kind of theology only brings one so far until one finds oneself stuck when the Law cannot be fulfilled. Therefore we attempt to reduce the Law and its accusation to a more manageable level and we become the judge, we make our attempt to take God's place and decide for him whether one Law applies to us or not.

Let us take, for example, Matthew 5:21-30. Here Jesus addresses anger and lust: first, if one murders another they will be liable to judgment. However, we have found what we call a loophole in the Law and a way out. If one kills someone in self-defense they are dismissed and can go on free of charge. Second, if a man even looks at a woman with lustful intent he has already committed adultery with his heart. The consequence, in order to be in good standing with God, is to tear out the eye with which one was lustful. However, we might ask God, do not you think that this goes a little too far? Thus, the reduction of the law and our exoneration from it, that is, I make my case, "I did not touch much less grab! I just looked! I should at least get credit for not touching!" Even though we realize that we cannot fulfill the Law we still try to use it for our purposes and misuse it. We can see over and over again that the Law is limited for our redemption, our relationship with God and with one another, and our sanctification and justification, yet we still try to keep it as our companion and our direction in all of these matters.

³⁴ AC, Lat. 18:1-9, in BC, 51.

There was a post on Twitter by @SonofBaldwin³⁵ that caught my attention: “We can disagree and still love each other unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist.” This is a clear example of the reduction of the Law and its limit to solve our problems, especially when we want to use the Law to move Christians from vice to virtue, with the highest virtue being self-sacrificing love. This is what the confusion of the Law and the Gospel does and when we preach and teach only according to the Law we are faced with despair. To have the Law alone as our Gospel we are only given a hidden God which only feeds the problem of an absent Jesus. If Jesus is absent and he has left us to complete his work then the only option we have is to use Jesus as an example and the law as our tool to finish whatever Jesus did not finish, that is, when we think according to the Law alone.

Luke 12:45 rightly describes what our reaction is as a consequence of claiming that we have an absent Jesus and the Law as our means to salvation when it says “But if a servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming’, and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk.” We are drunk with the Law, and we think that by getting more Law we will solve the problem of people misbehaving. We beat people with the Law so that we can move them from vice to virtue, but this never works in creating faith. This is as if an alcoholic would want to stop drinking by drinking more alcohol. Martin Luther pointed out in the Heidelberg Disputation in thesis 26 that “The law says, ‘Do this,’ and it is never done. Grace says, ‘believe in this,’ and everything is already done.”³⁶ Yet the church still persists in our

³⁵ @Sonofbaldwin is an online activist. <https://twitter.com/sonofbaldwin/status/633644373423562753> (accessed May 1, 2016)

³⁶ Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation*, 1518 (Michigan/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 107.

desire to use the Law as a mold of people, even resorting to a highway billboard which reads, “That ‘Love Thy Neighbor’ think...I meant that. – God.”

Now I come to answer the questions about liberation theology, “What are we liberating ourselves and others from, and more importantly, by what means?” Liberation theology attempts to liberate oneself and others from the oppression of this old and broken world, known also as the Old Kingdom, and it attempts to do it by the means of the Law alone. The specific form of the Law that liberation theology attempts to preach is to say that the Gospel comes only through love, but this ends up unable to distinguish between the Law and the Gospel, as Romans 13:10 shows, “love is the fulfilling of the law (not the Gospel).”

Gustavo Gutierrez³⁷ is considered the father of liberation theology and he does not make the distinction between Law and Gospel, nor does he with the Old Kingdom and New Kingdom. It is here where we find ourselves entangled in the problem of trying to liberate ourselves by the means of the Law, or love, as Gutierrez attempts to do it. In Gutierrez’ book, “Spiritual Writings,” with an introduction by Daniel G. Groody, we can see how the lack of distinction between Law and Gospel, the Old Kingdom and the New Kingdom, plunges us more and more into works righteousness, despair, revenge, and the like. Gutierrez begins the first chapter with the title “Liberating Spirituality” and he defines spirituality in the following way:

The dominion of the Spirit that informs every detail of our lives. If ‘the truth will make you free’ (John 8:32), the Spirit ‘will guide you into all the truth’ (John 16:13) and will lead us to complete freedom, the freedom from everything that hinders us from *fulfilling ourselves* as human beings and children of God, and the freedom to love and to enter

³⁷ Gustavo Gutierrez. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustavo_Gutierrez

into communion with God and with others. The Spirit will lead us along the path of liberation because ‘where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom’ (2 Cor. 3:17).³⁸

The problem with this kind of statement is that we become the active subject before God; he gives us his freedom so that we *fulfill ourselves* through love, to love God and to love one another. As I mentioned before, liberation theology uses the Law in the form of love. But love is confused as the means by which we will be able to fulfill the Gospel when the Gospel has actually been not only already fulfilled by Christ but done and given to us by him in the preaching of the forgiveness of sins and the administration of the sacraments. In the Gospel, which is the forgiveness of sins, everything has been done for us through Christ. Jesus Christ is the active subject and we are the passive recipients of his work. Although our sinful nature continues to claim subjectivity before God rather than passivity, the search for the Law to be our crutch to fulfill a Gospel has been already fulfilled for us by Christ.

Two examples in Scripture where we find love to be the Law is in Matthew 22

³⁶“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” And Galatians 5:14 “¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Even though Scripture is very clear that love is the demand of the Law, we still insist on having love (the Law) as the Gospel. Then the Law becomes a process we can take on to reach our goal of our sanctification and eventually our redemption. However, we know that justification, sanctification, and redemption go hand in hand, they are neither ideas nor they are separate. On

³⁸ Daniel G. Groody, *Gustavo Gutierrez. Spiritual Writings*. (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, NY, 2011). 47. Emphasis mine.

the contrary, justification, sanctification, and redemption are a reality that is done by Christ in his death and resurrection, in our baptism and in the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins through the proclaimed Word to us (1 Cor. 1:31). We are sanctified because we have been justified in and by Christ as he has come to forgive our sins (Romans 6:1-4; Acts 2:37-39).

Gutierrez goes on to say that “a spirituality is a concrete way, inspired by the Spirit, of living the Gospel; it is a definite way of living ‘before the Lord’ in solidarity with all human beings.... Some Christians are beginning to live this experience as a result of their commitment to the process of liberation.”³⁹ This is to say that we can liberate ourselves through and with the Law and Jesus not only becomes our example and helper to do this, but his mission in being our savior by forgiving our sins just as he forgave the paralytic, is removed.

John Hoyum, a Luther Seminary M.Div. student, responded to an article in *The Concord*⁴⁰ in regards to “Islam and the Law.” Hoyum states that “The Quran understands itself to be the final, incorruptible expression of the law, given to the prophet Muhammad. Moses and Jesus were prophets of this law as well.” This of course comes into conflict with the pluralism that we live in North America, specifically the United States. Nevertheless, Hoyum continues to say that, “theologically, however, the Quran announces the yet more threatening prospect that the law alone is our first and final relation to the God who creates and consummates the world. This frightening vision preaches a God whose only mercy is the qualification of the law’s demands but never the forgiveness of sins.” Even though I am not addressing or discussing Islam, the Quran, or the prophet Muhammad here, it is good to point out that Christianity is flirting with

³⁹ Ibid. 47.

⁴⁰ “The Concord.” A Luther Seminary internal newspaper that is run by students who provide a space for students to voice their opinions in different theological themes as well as professors who are invited to write on theological issues.

Islam's theology in the matter of what the Law is for our Christian life. Moreover, Dr. Granquist,⁴¹ responding to another article in *The Concord*, "Christianity and Islam are Incompatible," says, "the basic element of Islam [is], the call to the believer to submit to the will of God and to follow God's laws. This is how one becomes right with the creator." Granquist continues to explain that, conversely, Christianity "understands that human beings are out of compliance with God's will, but it also understands that human beings are unable, by themselves, to conform their innermost lives to what God wants of them."

In the Lutheran understanding we confess exactly this of Christianity. However, there is a misunderstanding within the Lutheran denomination and other mainline denominations, that even though we have been unable to fulfill God's demand of the Law, there is still a possibility to do it. Otherwise, we would not have statements like the following, portrayed in *The Concord* by Maggie Andersen (M.Div. student), who appeals to the Luther Seminary student body to consider taking a SCUPE class⁴² asking the following:

Are you frustrated with a lack of diversity among our faculty? Hungry to read texts by people other than old white men? Tired of classrooms that look almost as white as a bag of marshmallows? I have a solution for you: take a SCUPE class! The mission of SCUPE is to train 'faith leaders to mobilize communities inter-racially, inter-culturally, and inter-religiously for justice, inclusivity and peace.'

The question is, once again as it is with liberation theology, who's justice? And, by what means are we searching for inclusivity and peace? The justice that it is portrayed in such

⁴¹ Mark A. Granquist is an Associate Professor of the History of Christianity at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota.

⁴² SCUPE: Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education, is an institution located in Chicago which brings together seminary students from around the country to learn about an urban ministry in a deeply contextual manner during an intensive course.

theology and way of thinking is our human justice according to the Law alone. The mission of the church, including the preparation of future pastors, boils down to the cooperation with God, through the means of the Law, to look for justice in the Old Kingdom, the inclusivity of love, and peace. This is of course nothing new, as some might recall the surge of the Social Gospel in North America in the 1960's and '70's. Our human nature whose original sin can be described in Luther's words as "a presumption of righteousness,"⁴³ is on display in Liberation Theology. This presumption of righteousness is antithetical God's work through Christ for us in the forgiveness of sins.

In the first chapter I laid out my experience both in Guatemala and the United States in regards to the use of theology and more specifically on how the Law is confused and misinterpreted in a daily basis in the ministry settings as the basis for the mission of the church. In the second chapter I have discussed the confusion of Law and Gospel in the scholarly setting and how ecclesiology and liberation theology have taken the place of the proclamation of the Gospel as the mission of the church. In the third chapter I will be presenting and making the right distinction of the Evangelical (Lutheran) understanding of the mission of the church under the basis of the Gospel rather than the Law.

⁴³ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, Chapters 1-4*, in LW 26:310.

CHAPTER 3
THE EVANGELICAL (LUTHERAN) UNDERSTANDING
OF THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The mission of the church is founded in Christ's mission, which in the Evangelical understanding (also known as Lutheran), is the forgiveness of sins in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. God's mission, through Christ for humanity, is the reconciliation God the Father brings to us as we read in 2 Corinthians 5:17-19 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." First, we see that God's mission is to reconcile us to himself through Christ and not through the Law. There is no prescription of the Law in order for humanity to overcome sin, death, and the devil. On the contrary, the Law is concerned about our relationships with our neighbor as we see it in the Decalogue (Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21) and also to reveal transgressions rather than removing them, and multiplying sin rather than reducing them (Romans 5:20). Therefore, we are given the Evangelical teaching and preaching of the Law: in its first use, it is a gift from God to preserve life, though it does not bring salvation. In the second use of the Law it accuses us unto death because we cannot fulfill it. Here is when the Law drives us to seek comfort in Christ who forgiveness us all of our short fallings.

We cannot overcome sin, death, and the devil, by any means, not by the Law and not by our cooperation with God by his means of grace. Only God can overcome sin, death and the devil through Christ's death and resurrection. Martin Luther, in the *Smalcald Articles*, Concerning the Law, says, "that the law was given by God, in the first place, to curb sin by means of the threat and terror of punishment and also by means of the promise and offer of grace and favor . . . The foremost office or power of the law is that it reveals inherited sin and its fruits. It shows human beings into what utter depths their nature has fallen and how completely corrupt it is. . . . This is what is meant by Romans [4:15]: 'The law brings wrath,' and Romans 5[:20], 'Sin becomes greater through the law.'"⁴⁴

In the gospel of Luke 9:51-53 a Samaritan village rejects Jesus as his face was set toward Jerusalem: "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem." Jesus' face was set to Jerusalem where the cross was awaiting for him to fulfill Scripture as we read in Isaiah 53:5-6: "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." The rejection by the Samaritan village reveals that this is the only response sinners have to Jesus. However, the promise from God in Isaiah to us, this is the freedom that Christ brings to us through the proclamation of the gospel, that is, in the forgiveness of sin. There is nothing we can do to achieve and deserve such gift, this

⁴⁴ SA 3, 2:1, 4, 5, in BC, 311-312.

is God's will and mission. Martin Luther says of this great gift from God in the *Smalcald Articles*, Concerning the Gospel:

We now want to return to the gospel, which gives guidance and help against sin in more than one way, because God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word, in which *the forgiveness of sins* is *preached* to the whole world (which is the proper function of the gospel); second, through baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters. Matthew 18[:20]: Where two or three are gathered...⁴⁵

The Gospel Not as the Prescription of the Law

The Gospel, therefore, is not a prescription to do something, rather it is a gift that we do not accept, in fact, cannot accept, much less merit. The Gospel is granted and is an indication of who God is and what God is doing through Christ for us. We, as sinners and human beings, are completely passive before God's activity and work, which is the forgiveness of sins. We are made holy, we cannot make ourselves holy, and we know that this is the work of the Holy Spirit who speaks the Word into our ears; the Holy Spirit is he who makes faith in us. We may observe the work of the Triune God as portrayed in the synoptic gospels, Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, and Luke 3:21-23: "And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." We can see that the Father is the Creator not only

⁴⁵ SA 3, 4, in BC, 319. Emphasis mine.

of heaven and earth, of all things seen and unseen (Gen. 1-2), but also of our faith and our new creature as he speaks and breathes life into us. The Son is the Word who creates our faith and who creates us anew as we see in John 1:1-5 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” And the Holy Spirit is the sanctifier who creates an ear for us to hear and believe in the Son of the Father spoken to us.

In the Evangelical tradition, Martin Luther teaches us what scripture says regarding the Holy Spirit in the explanation of the third article of the Apostle’s Creed in the *Large Catechism*:

On account of his [Jesus’] work the Holy Spirit must be called a Sanctifier, or one who makes holy. How does such sanctifying take place? Answer: Just as the Son obtains dominion by purchasing us through his birth, death, and resurrection, etc., so the Holy Spirit effects our being made holy through the following: the communion of saints or Christian church, *the forgiveness of sins*, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. That is, he first leads us into his holy community placing us in the church’s lap, where he *preaches* to us and brings us to Christ.⁴⁶

The active subject in creating, justifying, and sanctifying sinners, is always God through Christ as God wants to be known in and through Christ alone, not outside of him. As I pointed out in the first and second chapters, our sinful nature is to want to take God’s place as the active agent using the Law as our guide to reach our own salvation. Moreover, we want to claim that the Gospel must be fulfilled as the demand of the Law so that our works are counted towards our

⁴⁶ LC 2, 36, 37, in BC, 435-436.

achievements before God. However, this is a deception we create for ourselves because the Gospel does not demand our works for being saved, nor does the Law. The Law instead protects our relationships with our neighbor. Nevertheless, we want to make the Gospel a form of the Law and believe that the Gospel demands works from us in order to please God, to reach our salvation and heaven, by our doing our part (doing what is in you) rather than Christ's doing everything.

In regards to the Mass, Martin Luther writes that even though “the forgiveness of sins and God's grace were also sought here” [the Mass], the church did not deliver God's gifts in it.⁴⁷ There was a system of merit established within the Roman tradition in addition to the Mass, such as pilgrimages, fraternities, relics and indulgences that were placed on the church's souls as great burdens to fulfill with the expectation to achieve the forgiveness of sins. This is what we identify as the work of the Law which is placed upon people's consciences so that they are driven to be active subjects before God. And even though there are no such things in our day, at least not with those names and forms, the function of new forms of the Law is the same as it was in Luther's time. Social Justice and love which specifically excludes the naming and forgiving of sins are our new forms of the Law that are demanded from the church (the gathering of saints) to fulfill as if it was the demand of the Gospel. This is why Luther's writings are still relevant to our day since sin and the clinging to the Law never goes away as our Old Adam or Old Eve keeps going back to claim their participation in salvation. Luther, in the *Smalcald Articles*, writes, “all of this is not to be tolerated, not only because it is without God's Word, not necessary, and not commanded, but because it is contrary to the first article. Christ's merit is not acquired through

⁴⁷ SA, 2, 2:18, 24, in BC, 305. Paraphrase.

our work or pennies, but through faith by grace, without any money and merit---not by the authority of the pope, but rather by *preaching a sermon*, that is, *God's Word*.⁴⁸

The Prescription of the Law

Even though nowadays we do not have the authority of the pope in the protestant churches as in Luther's time, we have taken the prescription of the Law in different forms. The Roman Catholic understanding and the American Evangelical (i.e. not Lutheran, but Enthusiasts) understanding of the Law has permeated the Lutheran, and truly Evangelical, teaching and preaching of the Gospel which is the preaching of a sermon, preaching the forgiveness of sins. Thus there is no distinction of Law and Gospel in the current American Evangelical landscape, but rather the confusion of it. This leads to the misunderstanding that we as Christians, as Pastors, and non-ordained people need to preach, "live out the Gospel in our lives," and is epitomized in slogans like Rick Warren's "deeds, not creeds." However, at the core of this kind of "proclamation of the Gospel" the Gospel is undergirded by Law, which is truly the proclamation of the Law alone.

The social justice movements that have arisen within the church for this reason, the preaching of a pseudo-Gospel, which demands the Christian to fulfill the command of the Law of love as best as they can. Love, therefore, has been made into the Gospel which sooner than later burdens the consciences of Christians, when the true work of the Gospel is to free them from the bondage of the Law, sin, death, and the devil. The Gospel forgives, comforts, and brings God's Kingdom to us. The result of this redemption in the forgiveness of sins, is being made righteous. The result of being made righteous through Christ is what Scripture calls the fruit of the Spirit to

⁴⁸ SA 2, 2:24, in BC, 305. Emphasis mine.

serve our neighbor, with love, with patience, and with kindness. Consequently love, patience, and kindness, to mention some, are the fruit of a righteous tree, but not the thing that redeems and makes us righteous: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:22-24).

The preaching of morality is not the thing that redeems and makes one righteous. On the contrary, morality and the Law’s demand of perfection is accusatory to the point of death as it is written in 2 Corinthians 3:6b “For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” The preaching and teaching of a pseudo-Gospel is neither the source of forgiveness nor the motivation to do good, to love, to be benevolent. Jesus Christ himself is the source through the forgiveness of sin, which is the redemption of our sinful selves and the righteousness that is granted in him. This is how we are made a good tree that bears good fruit “So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.” Matthew 7:17-18. Nevertheless, the search for the Law to be our guidance to bear good fruit continues, confusing the Law with the Gospel.

Christ, the Active Subject

In thesis 27 of the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 Luther writes: “rightly speaking, therefore, the work of Christ should be called the *operative power*, and our work, *the operation*; so our operation is pleasing to God by the grace of the operative power.”⁴⁹ Forde elaborates on this crucial distinction between Christ and the individual, “the real operative power in all works

⁴⁹ Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 110. Emphasis mine.

that can be called good is the work of Christ, that outrageous assertion that in Christ all that God demands has been fulfilled in Christ and that this Christ dwells in us by faith.”⁵⁰ For as true this statement is, it is therefore exceedingly offensive to those who cling to the Law as the means of their own justification. Moreover, an equally offensive, or perhaps more offensive thesis in the *Disputation* is Thesis 1. Luther makes another shocking statement on what the Law is: “The law of God, the most salutary doctrine of life, cannot advance humans on their way to righteousness, but rather hinders them.”⁵¹ And Forde poignantly explains it that this thesis is “a most distressing paradox, and one of the hardest pills for the Old Adam and Eve to swallow!”⁵² This depicts how addicted we are to the Law and our idolatry of our own good works through our presumption of righteousness.

One of the chief documents and confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the *Confessio Augustana*. This Confession, however, has been minimized by pastors, many I have heard saying that this is an outdated and antiquated document. Their reasoning is because the issues at hand in our day, according to them, are different and the answers our found in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* are no longer applicable. Nevertheless, it seems we are still having the same issues the Reformers had almost five hundred years ago and the issues that Jesus and his disciples also had, notably the problems of seeking righteousness by the Law alone and the confusion of the Law and Gospel. Ironically, people who adhered to the Law as their guide and path into heaven also are the same ones who reject the Old Testament. They are now going so far as to say that the Apostle Paul is a grudging and antiquated

⁵⁰ Ibid. 110-111. Emphasis mine.

⁵¹ Ibid. 23.

⁵² Ibid. 23.

man who had no compassion for his neighbor. These pastors proceed, therefore, to break their vows of in which they publically committed to preach and teach according to Scripture and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Many students at Luther Seminary have been brought up under the understanding that the mission of the church is to proclaim social justice, equality, love, and specifically urged against preaching the forgiveness of sins — just as I was at the leaders conference — to properly fulfill their calling as pastors).

However, this *Confessio Augustana* that seem so antiquated, continues to provide answers to our current problems of Law, sin, death, and the devil because all of these are deeply rooted in our sinful nature and have their grip around us and we are bound to these powers without Christ's absolution being preached and granted to us. Even though these Confessions are so helpful it would be good if we were able to preach and teach from Scripture itself only, but the reality is that these Confessions are necessary for they are our witnesses in regards to the vicious attack on the Gospel from sin, death, the devil, and the Law. In Article 4, the chief article of faith, we can see that the claim to justify ourselves through the works of the Law are false, and this is not only proven by reason and logic but founded in Scripture itself. Melanchthon writes: "...we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work, or satisfactions, but that *we receive forgiveness of sin* and become righteous before God out of *grace for Christ's sake through faith...*"⁵³ Even though this is a great promise from God to us, the passivity that is upon us before God is unsettling for Law abiders and third use of the Law followers.

The feeling of being passive is against all our personal and societal expectations. The expectation that our society has on us, whether it is in Guatemala or the United States, means

⁵³ AC, Ger. 4:1-3, in BC, 39-40. Emphasis mine.

that passivity is frowned upon. In order to be of service and use to the society one has to be active, one needs to contribute something so that our reward is waiting for us at the end of the day. If one wants to have a nice house, a car, a good job, and so forth, one needs to work for it, there is nothing, no reward if we do not put forth the effort to earn it. Forde writes concerning *Confessio Augustana* IV: “the problem is the *sola fide*, the faith *alone*. It is precisely that *alone*, that *sola*, especially when combined with *faith*, that makes us think there surely must be something missing and leads us, both Protestants and Catholic, to rush in with all our interpretative additions. Surely one can’t seriously mean *alone*? Particularly *faith* alone?”⁵⁴

The Problem of Adding the Law and Our Work to Faith

This is when we run into the problem that we want to add something to that faith because, according to our reason and logic, faith cannot stand by itself, it most have support! And the support we come up with is the Law in the form of works, e.g. love and justice. In the current liturgical Lutheran tradition in the United States, according to the latest edition of the worship book, the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, the close of the service tells us to “Go in peace” after having heard Christ’s forgiveness. However, there is an addition after having been sent in peace. The four options, after being told to go in peace, are “Serve the Lord;” “Share the good news;” “Remember the poor;” and finally, “Christ is with you.”⁵⁵ There is an expectation not only at the end of the service, but elsewhere, to give the members of the church a task, homework, or a deed to go and fulfill after they have been nourished and strengthened by, hopefully, the Gospel. This

⁵⁴ Gerhard O. Forde. *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life*. (Mifflintown: Sigler Press, 1999), 9.

⁵⁵ *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Pew Edition. (Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2006), 115.

is an example that there are more times than not when the preaching of the Gospel is everything but the actual Gospel, and to make things worse, there is a burden placed in people's consciences, that is, "now go do something." Another tradition that has been put into practice is that at the exit of either the church building or the parking lot there is a sign with these or similar words "You are now entering your mission field." How awful is this? In the first place, if the mission of God is to forgive sins as I have argued, then there is no place that is NOT the mission field, including those in the pews. Secondly, the freedom in Christ people might have received during the service is taken away by the prescription of the Law to go love people, or fight against the unjust systems of government, and/or to go do good works in one way or the other.

The mission of the church then becomes the fulfillment of the Law, or at least the attempt to fulfill it. The confusion between Law and Gospel is ingrained so deep that even when we have a clear teaching and preaching from our witnesses of the Confessions and Scripture they are still rejected, misunderstood, and misinterpreted. *Confessio Augustana* VI treats the matter of works, Concerning the New Obedience, and it reads as follows: "It is taught that such faith (Art. 4) should yield good fruit and good works and that a person must do such good works as God has commanded for God's sake but not place trust in them...."⁵⁶ Forde also speaks to this matter saying, "it is terribly difficult to break the hegemony of the legal terminology and the idea of moral progress. From the beginning, Roman Catholic [*and now Protestants*] suspicion has been focused on just this point. 'How...can one speak of justification of faith *alone*?' Does not faith have to be 'formed, completed, shaped, by love?'"⁵⁷ Justification then becomes a process under the premise of Sanctification. Even though justification and sanctification are synonyms and both

⁵⁶ AC, Ger. 6:1-2, in BC, 40.

⁵⁷ Gerhard Forde. *Justification by Faith*. 41. Brackets mine.

worked and operated by God through Christ and the Holy Spirit, they have been separated and thus made into a two step process, a ladder, we can climb up with just the right amount of grace from God.

But Justification, Sanctification, and Righteousness have nothing to do with our doing, with the social justice, mission of the church, or with a process that the Law can help us achieve. The mission of the church, that is God's mission, is the preaching of Christ crucified and risen because he is the only way in which we are forgiven, that is redeemed, and made righteous, that is sanctified. For this explanation, we confess *Confessio Augustana* V, "to obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, *not through our merit but through Christ's merit*, when we so believe."⁵⁸ This is what the Apostle Paul says in Romans 10:13-15, 17, "For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!' So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

This is how God the Father has decided to work, through Christ and the Holy Spirit, through human words that are Christ's Word of forgiveness, and to our surprise and shock, Christ works through preachers, lowly and sinful human beings who are called and given this great promise to proclaim to any and every person who they come across, especially when it comes to the church. Both pastors and non-ordained people have been given, not only Christ's

⁵⁸ AC, Ger. 5:1-3, in BC, 40. Emphasis mine.

promise for them, but also to share it with others. And this again is not the demand of the Law or the gift of the Law, but God's graces and benefits in the forgiveness of sins.

However, what do people do with such passivity before God and "simplistic" work of God when working through the person of Christ by words? They add the Law to God's mercy and there is the expectation that we do the works of the Law, it is demanded that we become active and not simply passive before God. Paulson asks the question, "if [our justification] is by faith alone, the immediate question is: 'then how do I get that faith?'" The answer to this "is simple and profound: God sends a preacher."⁵⁹ Therefore, the "simplistic" work of God is the way God chooses to work and grant his grace and mercy on us apart from the Law as Paul says in Romans 3:21 "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law." The Law does not support the Gospel, it does not provide with what the Gospel might be lacking because the Gospel is complete, there is nothing missing as we read in Isaiah 55:11, "so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." There are also those who long for the third use of the law and insist this is not true, that faith alone is not enough. So they try to make Christ relevant by reducing him to merely a moral example. And so, the freedom bestowed through the forgiveness in his Word is more than we can dare to dream. Moreover, Christ is given to us, not in spite of our sinfulness but because of the very fact that we are sinful.

The One-Trick-Pony Evangelical Preacher

⁵⁹ Steve D. Paulson, "Categorical Preaching," In *Justification is for Preaching. Essays by Oswald Bayer, Gerhard O. Forde, and Others*, ed. Virgil Thompson (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 123. Brackets mine.

Evangelical preachers get attacked for this kind of preaching by Enthusiasts because Evangelical preachers do not concern themselves with being relevant, or with motivating people, or even with being creative in the form of adding something to the Gospel. The Evangelical preacher is monotonous because they give the same word over and over again, that is, the forgiveness of sins. One of my fellow Evangelical preachers, while still being in seminary, was criticized and made fun of by other students, telling her that she was a “one-trick-pony” because she just preached the forgiveness of sins and was not creative to relate her preaching to current events. Nothing makes sinners more immediately relevant to Christ than being forgiven by him through the mouth of a so-called, “one-trick-pony.”

These “creative and motivational” preachers of the Law would and do rather preach about matters of current social problems in order to be relevant and give their congregation something to do. The reality is that this is not the Gospel, and this problem is not something new, this has been affecting the church greatly for too long, as Granquist says, “the direct impact of the Enlightenment on the churches came through the universities where the pastors were educated and trained.”⁶⁰ Even though, nowadays, pastors are not trained in universities, they are still being educated in them before they get to seminary, and in seminary things do not get much better. As it was sadly true before, it is true now, that “rationalistic clergy saw their primary responsibility as inculcating *universal morality* within their parishioners and raising the *moral and educational* level of their communities. Among some of these rationalistic clergy, traditional Lutheran *law-and-gospel sermons were replaced* with addresses about such things as the merits of vaccinations, or discourses on the proper methods of farming or similar subjects.”⁶¹ What is

⁶⁰ Mark Granquist. *A New History. Lutherans in America*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 25.

⁶¹ Ibid. 25.

different today? Ironically vaccinations and the problem of non-vaccinations is still a relevant topic, as it is the problem of the different philosophies of farming: till vs. no till, pesticide use, and the use of GMO's, to mention some. The difference is that we are facing new social realities, the rights of women to abort and racial disparity issues are now piling up on us as individuals and as a society. And this is what preaching has become, sadly and unfortunately; the prescription of the Law so that church membership gets behind social movements to fight for rights and justice rather than being given Christ's promises.

The problem with this kind of thinking is that, as Nestingen says:

Without the gospel, the law is indiscriminate. There is not one gospel, there are gospels by the thousands, all of them promising either to accommodate or possibly even to silence the voice of the law. In fact, the law offers itself as gospel. It makes one promise after another – offering to restore order, to give a new ethical tone, to elicit genuine striving that will put apathy to flight – all on a condition of minimal obedience.⁶²

This is why it is of utmost necessity that we make the clear distinction of Law and Gospel so that the Law is used properly as well as the Gospel. We find in the *Formula of Concord*, for example, that, “the preaching of the holy gospel is really not only a preaching of grace, which proclaims the forgiveness of sins, but also a preaching of repentance and rebuke, which condemns unbelief (something condemned not in the law but only by the gospel).”⁶³ People are embarrassed by the Gospel, not that the Gospel embarrasses or humiliates them, but since they perceive the Gospel as mere words that do not push people into action, that is to love, to work for

⁶² James A. Nestingen, “Preaching Repentance,” In *Justification is for Preaching. Essays by Oswald Bayer, Gerhard O. Forde, and Others*, ed. Virgil Thompson (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 238-239.

⁶³ FC, Ep 5:1, in BC, 500.

social justice, and to break down the barriers of injustice in a specific context. It is embarrassing for them to preach this Word. But the Apostle Paul addresses this kind of thought in Romans 1:16-17 when he says “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”

Article 5 of the *Formula of Concord* confesses that “we believe, teach, and confess that the gospel is not a proclamation of repentance or retribution, but is, strictly speaking, nothing else than a *proclamation of comfort* and a joyous message which does not rebuke nor terrify but *comforts consciences* against the terror of the law, directs them *solely to Christ’s merit*.”⁶⁴ Sadly this is something many seminary students and pastors do not confess. I have even had the experience with non-ordain people that, when I proclaim to them the Gospel freely and with no demand from the Law, still ask to be in bondage to the Law. This is why I end every service with only one of the four different endings of the ELW that I pointed out previously as this is widely used in the ELCA, “Go in peace. Christ is with you” or a similar proclamation of the Gospel. However, when I shared this with another person who is not a member of the church I am serving, she said “yes I agree and then you tell them to go do something.” After many years of hearing the Law preached to them, people cannot and will not know what the Gospel actually is and what it truly like. This is why, “we reject and regard it [contrary teaching] as incorrect and harmful when it is taught that the gospel is, strictly speaking, a proclamation of repentance of retribution and not exclusively a proclamation of grace.”⁶⁵ Of course, there is a benefit in the

⁶⁴ FC, Ep 5:7, in BC, 501. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁵ FC, Ep 5:11, in BC, 501. Brackets mine.

preaching of the Law, as many do, but benefit under the Law is a temporary and earthly benefit and not the eternal heavenly benefit under the Gospel. The benefit under the Law is like when one drives over the speed-limit on a highway or City Street and a police officer pulls you over. Your first reaction is to justify yourself and give reasons why you were speeding, whether you were aware or not of your transgression. The police officer will be your judge and will decide whether they will be “gracious with the Law” or not. If the police officer judges with grace, they will give you a warning or they will give you a lesser fine. If this happens we are thankful because the officer was merciful and the consequences of our transgressions were not as severe.

This is the way the benefit under the Law works, there is still a consequence, a warning, a lesser fine, or the whole charge of the fine. This is actually a lessening of the Law and its consequences so that we might manage it and not be killed by it. This is not to be confused with the Gospel which raises those who have indeed been put to death by the Law. This lessening of the law is what we call the motivation of a preached grace under the Law: you use the carrot to lure the believer into doing something, but if that does not work, then you hit them in the head with the stick. Therefore people, pastors in specific, think that this is the way the grace under the Gospel works even though this is incorrect. Many times I have heard pastors preach this understanding of grace under the Law and they might say, for example, “since Christ has been gracious and merciful with you, suffering and dying on the cross, now you need to do something for Christ.”

I even heard a sermon when the preacher said that Christ does not carry his cross by himself, you must carry your cross with Jesus to help him out, in reference to Luke 9:23. But we, as Evangelical preachers, reject this kind of preaching and the “support” of the Gospel by the Law because we know that Christ died, “not... according to a legal scheme [where] God has

gotten his ‘pound of flesh’ so that now he *must forgive*, but rather that because *he willed to forgive* he created a new situation by establishing a new righteousness in Christ.”⁶⁶ One of the results of distinguishing the Law and the Gospel correctly is that we are made aware by the Law that we are not able to fulfill the demand of the Law, that we are broken and sinful people, and that we need a Savior.

The Law, then, drives us to Christ to find comfort and peace in him alone. And the Gospel is the good news of this comfort in the forgiveness of sins. Bayer says, “the need that lies deeply within each of us to prove our right to exist – is put to death. This will to achieve and thus to secure recognition by being active and productive has become part of our nature, our second and evil nature.”⁶⁷ This is the work of the Law in our sinful nature. And “the reverse side of this death of the old Adam is a supreme springing to life.”⁶⁸ This being the work of the Gospel in us. Furthermore, Bayer continues, “when I am nailed down to what I have done and do, and let myself be nailed down by others, I am then profoundly not free. But when I am freed from this lack of freedom, then distance and sense of proportion come with the freedom I am granted, and thus comes the room that is needed for action.”⁶⁹ This is what it looks like to be in bondage to the Law: even though we think we are free by doing the works of the Law, we are actually bound, trapped, and oppressed by it. But then, the Gospel comes into play, delivered by a

⁶⁶ Gerhard O. Forde. *The Law-Gospel Debate. An Interpretation of Its Historical Development*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 56-57.

⁶⁷ Oswald Bayer. *Living by Faith. Justification and Sanctification*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 21.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 21.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 21.

preacher, someone external, outside of us to bring us a Word not from within ourselves but from the outside. This Word, Jesus Christ, truly set us free in himself.

So, we can see that we are either bound to our sinful self, sin, death, the devil and the Law or we are bound to Christ, who is true freedom. And this is not something we can believe with reason but by faith. The old Adam and Eve believe that they are free because imagining that they are willingly pursuing to do the works of the Law, that nobody is coercing them. But this is an illusion of the sinner in us. The Law is working the complete opposite; the Law and its demand go very deep into the conscience and torment the hearts and souls of sinners. The Law is an unforgiving lord that crushes one's heart and soul. In contrast, being evangelically bound to Christ is to be set free from Law and its relentless crushing demand. Jesus Christ is an all forgiving and merciful Lord and to have a Lord like this is comforting and, to our amazement and contrary to our reason, is truly freeing. Bayer continues to say that "Luther can thus extol the supreme vitality that faith brings, the work of God within that slays the old Adam: 'What a vital, busy, active, and might thing is faith, the faith that makes it impossible not to be always doing good works.'"⁷⁰

This is where the distinction between Law and Gospel is so important. The third use of the Law preachers say, "See! I told you, you must do works, you must be active and not passive." Evangelical preachers say, "therefore I wish to have the words 'without works' understood in the following manner: Not that the righteous person does nothing, but that his works do not make him righteous, rather that his [granted] righteousness creates works."⁷¹ This is why Jesus himself when at any time he would heal the sick he would simply send them home.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 22.

⁷¹ Ibid. 22.

Jesus' command to the restored person discombobulates third use of the Law preachers because he neither says, "Go in peace. Serve the Lord," nor does he say, "Go in peace. Remember the poor." Jesus instead says, "your sins are forgiven, stand up, take up your mat, and go home" (Mark 2:11, Luke 5:8, and Luke 5:24). The actions of this man who was forgiven and healed by his Lord will flow out of him to serve his neighbor proclaiming Christ's mercies and being used up by his neighbor.

Gospel as Gift not the Work of the Law

So we can see that the Gospel is a gift, a free gift, there are no expectations or demands from this gift. God is not a God of conditional promises who says, "if you do this for me, then I will do something in return for you" or the other way around. We read in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 when God says "I am the Lord your God," period. Our God is a God of imputation who attributes his mercy and forgiveness upon us because he wills it. God neither does this granting because of something we can give him previously nor posteriorly to being granted his mercy. Paulson writes, "the Gospel is the promise of the forgiveness of sin, and so of God's goodwill toward us, and it is Christ who is the 'yes,' or pledge of all Scripture's promises.... The promise is not love—it is Christ, and Christ is none other than the end of the law, the destruction of the old world, and the creation of the new world that is given to faith alone."⁷² The Apostle Paul in Romans 3:19-20 says that "Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." Therefore God's

⁷² Steve D. Paulson. *Lutheran Theology*. 119.

imputation of grace and mercy comes to be a great gift while at the same time a great distress for those who are bound to the Law.

I found the following to be a good example of the right distinction of Law and Gospel, of vocation and justification, and of proper righteousness and alien righteousness.⁷³ In 18th century colonial America there was a prominent Evangelical theologian and preacher by the name of Henry Muhlenberg. He had two sons, Peter and Frederick, who also became pastors, and by the time Revolutionary War came, they were ready to take on and be part of the political arena. However, Peter and Frederick, left their positions as Lutheran pastors. Peter was serving in “Woodstock, Virginia, but left his position in early 1776 to become an officer in the Continental Army....Peter served for the duration of the war, and entered politics after the war, serving in Congress....Frederick, too, eventually left the ministry to serve in Congress, and they initiated a long line of Muhlenbergs active in national and state politics.”⁷⁴ This is an action to be honored and praised for the right distinction between alien righteousness and proper righteousness was made as well as the distinction of Law and Gospel.

Muhlenberg by comparison, as a theologian and pastor, along with “other Lutheran pastors walked a delicate line here: they were theologically wary of getting too involved (as pastors) in the area of secular politics and governance, but they also recognized the need to protect the rights of their congregants and communities...”⁷⁵ Muhlenberg was urged to take a stand in regards to secular politics and governance. In regard to the “frontier defense, Muhlenberg replied: ‘...we preachers could not permit ourselves to interfere in such critical,

⁷³ Timothy F. Lull. *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. William R. Russell (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2012), 119-120.

⁷⁴ Granquist. *Lutherans in America*. 108.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 107.

political affairs. Our office rather requires us to pray to God the Supreme Ruler for protection and mercy and to admonish our fellow German citizens to fear God, honor our King, and love our neighbor, etc.”⁷⁶

This reminded me of a time that I did pulpit supply for another of my Evangelical preacher friends. After I covered for him he thanked me for delivering the goods (forgiveness of sins) to the congregation he serves, to which I replied, “if as an Evangelical preacher I did not deliver the goods then I would be better off milking cows because I would be of more benefit in that calling.” This was not in order to put down the vocation of the farmer who milks cows so that we can consume it, but to recognize the variety of vocations and, more importantly, that if we as theologians and pastors are not doing what we have been called to do, then it is better to take on another calling.

A preacher who does not deliver the goods and refuses to do it is not unlike a medical doctor, who is supposed to see to it that their patients receive the correct medical care so that they are restored to health through medicine and different treatments. A medical doctor is to distinguish one illness from another and give the right treatment just as a preacher is to distinguish the Law and the Gospel. The preacher then delivers the Gospel to not only preserve life but also to resurrect the dead, which a medical doctor cannot do, not because they are incompetent but because they are not preaching Christ, they are prescribing medicine and treatments to preserve their patients’ bodies in this Old Kingdom. Moreover, if a medical doctor does not pretend or tries to be a plumber or a policeman, why would a preacher want to be a legislator, a judge, or a social worker? Regrettably, this confusion or outright abdication of the

⁷⁶ Ibid. 107.

office of pastor occurs all too frequently. This is why it is of extreme necessity that we, as the church of Christ and as Evangelical preachers, make the right distinction of Law and Gospel.

The mission of the church then depends on this correct distinction, not because this is a prescription of the Law, but because is our necessity of the Gospel. Without the Gospel we are dead in sin, in the Law, and as the devil attacks us. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans 3:21-25a “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested *apart from the law*, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*,²⁴ and are *justified by his grace as a gift*, through the *redemption that is in Christ Jesus*,²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”

This gift is not given in spite of the fact we have fallen short of the Glory of God, rather, it is because we have fallen short of the Glory of God, that this gift is imputed to us in Christ and by Christ. Paulson explains, “Imputation means Abraham has righteousness not of his own but of Christ....God’s righteousness is to make sinners righteous by giving them Christ’s righteousness.”⁷⁷ We find this in Genesis 15:6 “And [Abram] believed the LORD, and [God] counted it to him as righteousness.” The Apostle Paul explains in Romans 4:1-4, “What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Paulson continues to explain, “what happened to Abraham in this act was that Abraham got a new God, and he was destroyed as an old sinner in order to be created anew. Paul occupies Romans 6 with

⁷⁷ Steven D. Paulson. *Lutheran Theology*. 123.

this anthropological situation, but here in the fourth chapter the central matter is that Christ's righteousness comes

- As a gift
- Freely, without condition or merit
- Externally, outside myself, and so an alien righteousness
- By means of a preached word, which is the promise of the forgiveness of sin
- Daily, repeatedly, since faith does not merely begin—but encompasses the whole life
- The only one who can make and keep such a promise is the one who actually has taken on the sin of the world himself, bodily, who is the true man without sin, crucified for our sakes.⁷⁸

I shall finish this chapter with the *Confessio Augustana* VII & VIII, two of the many central confessions of our Evangelical preaching to demonstrate that this preaching of Christ is “*satis est*,” that is, it is not a foundation that we must then build upon, but the ceiling of what we confess.

Article 7 first addresses what the church is, and Article 8 is the continuation of Article 7 with the indication that there is a clear attack on the church, and as I put it, its mission, which is none other than the preaching of the Gospel. Article 7 says that the church “is the assembly of all believers among whom the *gospel is purely preached* and the *holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel*. For this is enough (*satis est*) for the true unity of the Christian church that there the *gospel is preached harmoniously* according to a pure understanding and the sacraments administered in conformity with the divine Word.”⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ibid. 123.

⁷⁹ AC, Ger. 7:1-3, in BC, 42.

The basis for this article is Ephesians 4:4-5 which says that “there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” To preach the Gospel purely and harmoniously means that we are to distinguish the Law and the Gospel, to kill with the letter and to give the sinner new life with the Gospel (2 Cor. 3:6). Forde asserts that, “it is this proclamation [of the Gospel] that calls the church, the assembly of hearers and receivers, into being. Upon hearing and receiving, the believers undertake to speak again what they have heard, give what has been received, and make appropriate arrangements to do so.”⁸⁰

This shows that the church is not a Non-Governmental Organization, it is not a charity foundation, and much less a social movement platform; “in other words, the church is not just any assembly that happens to call itself by the name of Jesus for whatever reason or purpose.”⁸¹ There are many people I know who have gone into ministry because they feel the burning sensation to fight for justice for the least of society when in reality they should be fulfilling this vocation elsewhere. They not only confuse the Law with the Gospel but they also mistakenly go as far as to say that the church is the people gathered. The problem here is not that they are rejecting the Institution as such, but that they do not even think, acknowledge, or confess that the church is created and gathered by Christ. And the office of the keys, the office of the preacher, is the platform to do nothing else but the unlocking of the prison doors. Forde explains, “the office of ordained ministry is somehow ‘constitutive’ of the church. The office constitutes nothing. The office is called forth and ‘instituted’ by the sheer act of giving. It is the giving of the gift that

⁸⁰ Gerhard O. Forde. *Theology Is For Proclamation*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 186. Brackets mine.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 186.

constitutes the church and the office, not vice versa. The office is simply ministry: service called forth by the divine giving. To say more than that is to confuse the giving and the gift.”⁸²

This is why Article 8 is important as well because it says: “Likewise, although the Christian church is, properly speaking, nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints, yet because many false Christians, hypocrites, and even public sinners remain among the righteous, the sacraments—even though administered by unrighteous priests—are efficacious all the same.”⁸³ Forde tells us the following:

It would be foolish to pretend that Luther and the Reformers have solved this problem for us. Many problems have come up in our time for which they have no answer....What we can do, however, is to look at the basic point of view which Luther took on the question of the church and its doctrine....For Luther the work of the church is to be the bearer of good news. Where the gospel is preached and the sacraments rightly administered, there the church gives evidence of its presence.⁸⁴

The church, therefore, has its mission, Christ’s mission, that is. And Christ’s mission is to save, redeem, and bring to life all of us sinners through the *proclamation of the forgiveness of sins*. And as the church has been called by Christ to preach him crucified and risen, “this is the primary business [of the church] and this is what it must see to. The world needs above all to know that in the gospel of the crucified and risen Lord it too comes up against its limit, end, and goal. *Only where and when the gospel is heard will people be set free* to turn back to the world

⁸² Ibid. 187.

⁸³ AC, Ger. 8:1-2, in BC, 42.

⁸⁴ Forde. *Where God Meets Man*. 116-117.

and genuinely care for it.”⁸⁵ This is true Evangelical preaching and the true Evangelical understanding of the mission of the church.

⁸⁵ Forde. *Theology Is For Proclamation*. (Gerhard O. Forde. *Theology Is For Proclamation*. (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1990)190. Emphasis mine.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY AND PROPOSAL

To recapitulate what I have written in the previous three chapters I will summarize what I have discussed in them. In the first chapter I presented my church experience both in Guatemala and in the United States, especially the Roman Catholic and Evangelical American (Enthusiast) theologies I was exposed to for many years until I heard the Evangelical (Lutheran) preaching. These experiences have lead me to write this thesis because after learning to distinguish between the Law and Gospel I can now hear the many problems that have pervaded the Lutheran church, and continue to do so, precisely and most importantly in regards to the mission of the church.

In the second chapter I discussed the chief problem concerning the mission of the church observing both the understanding of Roman Catholic and Evangelical (Enthusiast) theologies. The problem I have identified in regards to this mission is that there is the misconception that the church's mission is to fulfill the Law of God under either: *facere quod in se est*, the basis of love, liberation theology, or ecclesiology. I also fleshed out the erroneous theology that I have seen and experienced in ministry of what people in general from a scholastic perspective, but more specifically the content that pastors and theologians preach and teach. Each of these flawed theologies confuse what the mission of the church is because they confuse the preaching of the forgiveness of sins with the demand of the Law. There is no distinction between the Law and the Gospel, therefore, the Law is preached as the Gospel and the weight of the Law sneaks in upon the church and places the terror of the Law's accusation on people's consciences.

In the third chapter I laid out what the mission of the church is on the basis of Scripture and our Evangelical (Lutheran) theology, teaching, and preaching. My thesis is that the mission

of the church according to Scripture and our Evangelical (Lutheran) understanding is the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins and thus the distinction of the preaching of the Law and the Gospel. In the preaching of the Gospel there is no demand of the Law to show how good Christians are or to “live out” the Gospel. Rather the Gospel lives in us so that we are comforted and created anew. After the Gospel, Christ himself, has been given to us in the preaching of his Word, i.e. the forgiveness of sins, the fruit of the Spirit flows out of us, *spontae* as Luther describes it, into our vocations. In fulfilling our vocations we do not worry whether we are doing enough or not, our vocations will come knocking on our door and we will be used up for the benefit of our neighbor not for the benefit of our salvation. The good works that flow out in our various vocations are the fruit of justification, but are not added to it. However, this is what the Roman Catholic theology and the Evangelical (Enthusiast) and the variety of denominational theologies, e.g. Methodist, Baptist, and Anglican, teach and preach. They make faith a work, if not in whole at least in part, and a conditional promise from God to humanity, which of course is not a promise but only a demand of the Law on Christians.

My Experience

Having been born and raised in Guatemala by both parents who were raised in Christian homes, it was not a surprise that they raised my siblings and me in the same way. Even though both my parents were raised Christians, we know that there are many different “flavors” of Christians, and they were raised in the Roman Catholic and Evangelical (Enthusiast) churches. Therefore, I was influenced from a young age by these two theologies and was taught that the Gospel was my fulfilling of the Law. In the midst of these two theologies, my father was exposed to Lutheran theology later on in his life as he joined the LCMS, and he began to use the

third use of the Law. Therefore he was not able to make the distinction between Law and Gospel and when he was able to make the distinction, he would be threatened by the freedom of the Gospel.

As I moved to the United States and became part of the ELCA I saw a third use of the Law was taught and preached, along with a Liberation Theology, and the Law under the basis of love. I want to come back to the sermon I heard on Luke 4:16-19 at a retreat of first call pastors. It was a sermon that was meant to motivate young and old pastors who are in their first years of ministry. It was a moralistic sermon, delivered for stewardship motives, not only financial, but more specifically to appeal for the use of ones gifts and talents in order to fulfill the “Gospel’s call.” Interestingly enough the words used in the Luke gospel reading (4:16-19) are a sermon from Jesus about himself and about how the Prophet Isaiah had delivered a sermon in regards to how God the Father was delivering his people *through* Jesus Christ *not* through the people. However, the subject of the reading, Jesus Christ, was made into an example for the pastors present, thus, the Gospel was turned into the Law. The Gospel, however, is given to us so that we also preach it to comfort sinners, create them anew through the forgiveness of sins, and to make Christians, as this is the mission of Christ and is therefore the mission of the church.

When Ecclesiology, Liberation Theology, or Love Masquerade as the Mission of the Church

In the second chapter I discussed the mission of the church from a scholastic perspective in Avery Dulles’ portrayal of ecclesiology and missiology through the five different models he presents: 1. The Church as Institution, 2. The Church as Mystical Communion, 3. The Church as Sacrament, 4. The Church as Herald, and 5. The Church as Servant. A secondary theologian I

used for this second chapter is the father of Liberation Theology, Gustavo Gutierrez, and other theological writings from Luther Seminary students, professors, and online quotes. The secondary writings were used to present both positions, the Enthusiastic and Evangelical (Lutheran). The general sense of the mission of the church presented by theologians such as Dulles and Gutierrez is one that is taught and preached across the board in the church. I especially experienced this in Guatemala and also in the United States.

The preaching of the Gospel, according to the Roman Catholic and Enthusiast theologies is a confusion of the Law with the Gospel. When the Law is masquerade as the Gospel is reduced to the earthly goals of the “freedom” from oppression, injustice, and even sin, though this is preached under the premise of love, that is, the Law. Therefore, Dulles suggests that each of the five models of the church he portrays are not the answer as presented individually. He states that the church should adopt a mixture of all five of the models to come up with a consolidated model. The reason why he presents it this way is because they complement each other because they are not all complete. Dulles makes a summary of these five models in the following manner: “In all these models the Church is seen as the active subject, and the world as the object that the Church acts upon or influences. The Church is produced by God’s direct action, and stands as a kind of mediator between God and the world. God comes to the world through the Church, and the world likewise comes to God through the Church.”⁸⁶

We can see that there are both good and erroneous points here. The correct understanding in Dulles’ statement is that God comes to the world through the church. The incorrect statement is to say that the world comes to God through the church. If God has already come to the world through the church, why would the church need to come to God? Moreover, the church and its

⁸⁶ Dulles. *The Models of the Church*. 81.

mission in all these models is based in the Law because there is a work that the church has to realize in cooperation with God. Furthermore, the church is understood as an institution that sanctifies and rules over Christians with Christ's authority, which brings the church to perfection through the means of the Law. This perfection is the humility the church must have and the action it must take in the world as a sign of spiritual growth. Therefore, love must be one of the greatest manifestations of the church.

The one correct point Dulles has, as I pointed out at the beginning of the paragraph, is that God comes to the world. The tricky part in this statement is twofold: one, Dulles has a different understanding of what the church is as explained in the five models of the church, and two, the way in which Dulles believes God is coming to the church is through a particular model of ecclesiology (which is a form of the earthly institution and as such is the law), rather than God coming to the world in mercy through the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins alone (Gospel). This is what the Evangelical (Lutheran) understanding of what church is, that is, the gathering of saints where the Word of God is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered.

As I pointed out in chapter two, love is the Law as we read in Matthew 22 when a lawyer asked Jesus, what is the greatest command in the Law? To which Jesus answers, "Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor, 'On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets'" (Matthew 22:35-39). In the same way the Apostle Paul says: "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Galatians 5:14). In the same manner, Gustavo Gutierrez, in his Liberation Theology, portrays the Law as if it were the Gospel. The liberation that Gutierrez searches to achieve through this theology is the freedom that human beings long for in order that they can actualize themselves and their dreams in this world. When we speak about fulfilling ourselves, even as children of God, we are again talking

about the Law not the Gospel, our sinful nature not the new creature of faith, and the Old Kingdom not the New Kingdom. Our fulfillment does not depend on us and not even on God because God does not want to fulfill us, but rather put to death the old sinful self who clings to hope in self-fulfillment in the Old Kingdom, and to create us anew in faith in Christ (who is not the Law) in his New Kingdom of heaven where the Law no longer accuses.

To fulfill oneself is to look for a process that will take us from point A to point B in which, once again, we are dependent on the Law and our will and not in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Moreover, the search to fulfill ourselves is to be *incurvatus in se* (curved in on oneself). Therefore, these theologies are in error in the striving for the Law of Love whether in the form of liberation in the old world or in the form of ecclesiology. Therefore it is of timely importance to reclaim what our Evangelical (Lutheran) preaching and teaching of what the Gospel truly is. It is an evangelical necessity for us to identify what the church is as God has intended it to be, that is, the preaching of the Gospel – the forgiveness of sins. And this is precisely what I discuss and present in the third chapter.

The Evangelical (Lutheran) Understanding of the Mission of the Church

The Evangelical (Lutheran) understanding of the mission of the church is the mission of Christ, which is the forgiveness of sins in the suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is God's imputation of his grace and mercy towards humanity who does not need any addition or help, but works by his own power, will, and election. God is the actor of our life and the operator of our salvation in Christ and the Holy Spirit. Under this understanding of grace and mercy we know that there is nothing that we, as human beings and sinners, can do to actively participate in our salvation, but we receive the favor of God passively. The faith that God gives

us through Christ and the Holy Spirit is neither *our* work nor *our* action. The Law only works first, for the preservation of this old life, second, works our condemnation, and becomes the force that drives us to Christ. The Law is not a guide toward good moral principles so that we neither fall off the path of salvation nor to persevere and retain the gift of faith we have been freely given. We are promised that we shall not lose the salvation that we were granted in baptism.

As Evangelical (Lutheran) preachers we understand the mission of the church to be the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins as we are broken and sinful people. Therefore, we are called to preach according to the distinction of the Law and the Gospel. Otherwise we fall into the horrific error of embedding the Law in the Gospel and the end result is the preaching of the third use of the Law and the Law, in whichever form of love, social justice, or liberation theology, or all of them at once. The end result of the work of all of these is finally the accusation of the Law; there is no eternal comfort or peace that passes all understanding for the hearer. This is why it is very important that we hold on to this Gospel promise in its right preaching and teaching not as the demand of the Law but the gift and benefit of Christ.

Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions are our foundation to keep us grounded in this right distinction. When we preach the Law we not only acknowledge and accept our sinfulness and brokenness, but also our inability of fulfilling the demand of the Law. The only way we can be reconciled with God the Father is through God the Son and the Holy Spirit as we read in 2 Corinthians 5:17-19: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of

reconciliation.” Therefore, reconciliation from God to us and between each other does not come through the Law, it comes through Christ alone who creates these new creatures of faith through the forgiveness of sins. And as we hear in Romans 10:13-17, faith comes to us through the preached Word and not any work we might want to do or any addition as of cooperation with the Word. Faith is not our work, faith is a gift, an external word that is granted to us:

¹³ For ‘everyone who *calls* on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ ¹⁴ *How* then will they *call on him* in whom they have not believed? And *how* are they to *believe* in him of whom they have never *heard*? And *how* are they to *hear without* someone *preaching*? ¹⁵ And *how* are they to *preach* unless they are *sent*? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” ¹⁷ *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

This is the core of our Evangelical (Lutheran) confession, the preaching of the Gospel that comes through a preacher and this Word of God in Christ Jesus is put in our ears. The Holy Spirit creates that faith in us, and this Word that comes in through our ears goes to our heart which God takes a hold on so that we can trust in him alone. This is why our Evangelical (Lutheran) preaching says that we are “justified by faith alone” as we read in Article IV of *Confessio Augustana* “Furthermore, it is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God through *our merit, work, or satisfactions*, but that we *receive* forgiveness of sins and become righteous before God *out of grace for Christ’s sake through faith.*” ⁸⁷ There is no addition of the Law to give us a boost so that we can do the Law to

⁸⁷ AC, Ger. 4:1, in BC. 38-39.

cooperate with faith. Alone means to have *no one* or *nothing else present*, and in the case of justification by *faith alone* is to have *no* Law or works to cooperate with it.

The Holy Scripture, the whole 28 articles of the *Confessio Augustana*⁸⁸, but in specific articles IV through VIII⁸⁹, the Smalcald Articles,⁹⁰ and thesis from The Heidelberg Disputation⁹¹ that I used throughout this thesis, are our basis as Evangelical (Lutheran) preachers. In this way we can be proclaimers of the Gospel, of the forgiveness of sins, and make the right distinction of Law and Gospel so that the mission of the church is fulfilled by God's will. The right preaching and right administration of the sacraments is not about mixing the Law with the Gospel, they both need to be separated as far as the East is from the West. The preaching of the Gospel is not love, is not social justice, and is not the freedom from oppressive systems by means of the Law. The preaching of the Gospel is the forgiveness of sins, this is the true freedom in Christ. The freedom in Christ and by Christ through the forgiveness of sins bears fruit, good fruit because we are made good trees (new creatures of faith) by the proclamation of the Gospel that is put in our ears by a preacher, not by his or her virtue but by virtue of the Word of God.

Does this mean that we are not to oppose oppression, injustice, hatred, sin, and the like? Certainly not! But not as the demand of the Law, but as the fruit of the Gospel and this fruit will be taken and will be used without us even trying to give it and offering it to be eaten. This fruit is birthed by the Gospel as we read in Galatians 5:22-24 “²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things

⁸⁸ AC, Ger. Lat. 1-28, in BC. 36-105

⁸⁹ AC, Ger. 4-8, in BC. 38-42.

⁹⁰ SA 1-2, in BC, 301-305.

⁹¹ Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*.

there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” It is the Holy Spirit who gives us this gift, this fruit does not come from within ourselves as a holy spark with which we were born, rather is by the external work that the Holy Spirit does in us through the work of the Word as we read in Matthew 7:17-20 ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.” We do not judge the tree by its fruit, in fact, we neither judge the tree nor the fruit at all otherwise we become fruit inspectors and we do not trust that the Word is not doing what it says, that is, creating faith to those who hear the Word. We simply preach the Word and the Holy Spirit will do his work as we read in the Gospel of John 3:8 ⁸ The Spirit blows where he wishes, and you hear his sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Therefore, by Christ authority and command, the declaration of the forgiveness of sins has been given to you and the fruit of this gift is that you will give it to anyone you will come in contact with. And this will not be the advice to live a nice moral life but the freedom that Christ grants which will only look to do good things as a new creature. As this thesis comes to a close, I offer a way to move forward in this evangelical manner by returning to the earlier Scripture lesson of Luke 4:17-19 that had been poorly preached without the Law and Gospel distinction, so that I may propose a way forward in the mission of the church with this example.

An Evangelical Proposal Forward

Since I only communicated in the first chapter the erroneous theology and interpretation of how Luke 4:16-19 was preached I will make the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. My Proposal is: Law and Gospel Preaching of the Forgiveness of Sins as the mission of Christ for his church. Verses 16-19 of the Gospel of Luke goes as follows:

¹⁶ And [Jesus] he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.’

The way this sermon was preached was that the pastor said that as Jesus was given the task to proclaim good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, and so forth, was now our task. The active subject being Jesus, our Savior, Redeemer, and Lord who can do all things, becomes now our activity. Even though this is true, it is taken under the premise of the Law rather than the Gospel, which I will address below. The pastors gathered listening to the sermon were told that our calling from Jesus was to now go into the world, in our congregations, and our communities to liberate the captives, to give sight to the blind, to free the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor as we did all of these. This is where the matter of the Law rules our lives and our consciences. This is not comforting, it is rather accusing and condemning. This way of preaching and “proclaiming the Gospel” attempts to motivate the “will” and makes faith into a work, making us the active subject before God rather than the passive receiver of God's promises. The preaching of the Law tries to

increase the “flame within” so that the Christian is motivated to help the neighbor. And this is what the mission of the church has become: a work of the Law by Law abiding Christians.

Now the Word of the Gospel sounds very different from the Law. The Gospel forgives our iniquities, creates us anew in Christ as we hear in Romans 6:1-4 and on, as Paul says:

¹What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might *walk in newness of life*.

We are, therefore, *dead in sin*, without a “flame within,” which is why we need the Gospel preached to us. With the forgiveness of sins we are created anew by Christ in his death and resurrection. As Jesus was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father we too are raised, definitely *not* with the Law and not only in a future moment, but now as Christ raises us up by the forgiveness of our sins.

Therefore, we can see in that the Gospel of Luke 4:16-19 is not the prescription of the Law, rather the gift of the Gospel in Jesus Christ as the Prophet Isaiah also states this. This is why Jesus says in Luke 4:21 “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your *hearing*,” not only because he was preaching this word but because he was the completion of it. The subject is Christ who does the verb. We can see this when the Spirit of the Lord is upon *Jesus* and as he is the one being anointed. To do what? To realize the verb, that is, to proclaim news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

The *newness of life* we walk in, as we are raised by Christ, as the Apostle Paul says in Romans 6, is first, to preach the Gospel to others so that they too may be resurrected from the dead (being dead in sin that is) not as the demand of the Law but the gift of the Gospel. And, second, to be strengthened by Christ because whether we look for it or not, we will be used up by our neighbor and their benefit. Will the fulfillment of our vocations kill us? Oh yes. Will the fulfillment of our vocations give us life and salvation? Oh no. But thanks be to Christ that through *his* suffering on the cross and the glory of *his* resurrection we are given new life every day and forever more.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bayer, Oswald. *Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapid, MI, 2003.

The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

Brecht, Martin. *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation*, trans. James L. Schaaf. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

The Concord. Luther Seminary. Volume 45, Issue 7. April 2016.

Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Pew Edition. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2006.

Forde, Gerhard O. *The Law-Gospel Debate: An Interpretation of Its Historical Development*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

_____. *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*. Michigan/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997.

_____. *Theology Is For Proclamation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

_____. *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life*. Mifflintown: Sigler Press, 1999.

- _____. *Where God Meets Man: Luther's Down to Earth Approach to the Gospel*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972.
- Gutierrez, Gustavo. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustavo_Guierrez. (Accessed May 5, 2016).
- Granquist, Mark. *A New History: Lutherans in America*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015.
- Groody, Daniel G. *Gustavo Gutierrez: Spiritual Writings*. Orbis Books: Maryknoll, NY, 2011.
- Jenkins, Philip. *The Next Christendom*. 3rd. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011.
- Keller, Timothy. *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*. <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/16321346-the-meaning-of-marriage-facing-the-complexities-of-commitment-with-the>. (Accessed May 1st, 2016).
- Kittelton, James. *Luther The Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986.
- Lull, Timothy F. *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. William R. Russell 3rd. ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012.
- Luther, Martin. *The Bondage of the Will*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1972. LW 33:53.
- _____. *Lectures on Galatians: Chapters 1-4*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House. LW 26:310.
- _____. *The Small Catechism*, by Martin Luther in Contemporary English. Minneapolis and Philadelphia: Augsburg and Concordia Publishing Houses, 1979.

Skinner, Matthew. Article published on November 3, 2014. An article on the gospel of Matthew 25:1-13. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-l-skinner/we-better-get-to-work_b_6093642.html. (Accessed May 1st, 2016).

@Sonofbaldwin. Online activist. <https://twitter.com/sonofbaldwin/status/633644373423562753> (accessed May 1, 2016)

Justification Is for Preaching. *Essays by Oswald Bayer, Gerhard O. Forde, and Others, ed. Virgil Thompson*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012.