

The Catalogue of Testimonies:

THE RELIGION *BEHIND IT*; THE REASONS *FOR IT*; THE RELEVANCE *OF IT*

When I taught at Saint Sophia Ukrainian Lutheran Theological Seminary in Ternopil', Ukraine, from 1995 to 2005, I would occasionally recite, to the delight of my students, a summary of the four tiers of theological authority in our seminary, as follows:

The Scriptures cannot err and therefore they do not err. The Creeds and Confessions can err but they do not err. The orthodox Fathers of the church can err, and they sometimes do err, but they usually do not err. The students of Saint Sophia Seminary can err, and they usually do err, but they sometimes do not err.

This summary – apart from the lighthearted tongue-in-cheek fourth component tacked on at the end – was based on what Robert D. Preus describes more seriously as the “Threefold Tier of Authority in the Church.” Preus writes that

there is a threefold tier of authority in the church, according to our Confessions.

1. “The prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments” are “the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated” (FC SD, Rule and Norm, 3). That statement means two things: (a) Scripture is the one divine source from which, as from a spring or fountain, we draw all our theology; and (b) Scripture is the only norm to judge teachers and teachings in the church.

2. The Confessions, on the other hand, are the “basis, rule, and norm, indicating how all doctrines should be judged in conformity with the Word of God” (*ibid.*, Heading). This means, quite simply, that the Confessions state what we Lutherans believe to be the teachings of Scripture and what we therefore believe, teach, and publicly confess.

3. Other good Christian writings, that is, “good, useful, and pure books, such as interpretations of the Holy Scriptures, refutations of errors, and expositions of doctrinal articles” have their place too. They are not to be rejected or spurned. “If they are in accord with the aforementioned pattern of doctrine [namely, the Confessions], they are to be accepted and used as helpful expositions and explanations” (*ibid.*, 10).

Scripture, the Confessions, other good Christian literature! Scripture’s authority is divine and absolute. The Confessions’ authority is derived from their agreement with Scripture and is binding for everyone who professes to be a Lutheran. Other Christian writings are authoritative and useful too when they agree with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. (*Getting into the Theology of Concord*, p. 22. Emphasis and bracketed text added by Preus.)

The Catalogue of Testimonies, appended to the Formula of Concord, lives within the third tier of authority in the theological life of the Lutheran Church. It is a collection of statements from “good, useful, and pure books” as written by respected and authoritative teachers of the church in the pre-Reformation Christian past, specifically on the subject of the person of Christ and the union of the two natures in Christ.

The Formula of Concord provides a fuller description of this tier of authority, and of how resources from within this category of theological writing may and should be used, when it commits itself to an important distinction that Martin Luther, as the leader of the Reformation, had “drawn up” in and for his own theological work: namely that

God's Word alone should be and remain the only standard and rule of doctrine, to which the writings of no man should be regarded as equal. Everything should be subjected to God's Word. (FC SD R&N: 9, McCain p. 509)

The Formula does recognize that the teachings of the historic catholic Creeds and the Lutheran Confessions of the sixteenth century are in agreement with the teachings of God's Word and are a correct summary of God's Word, so that Confessional Lutherans are expected to subscribe to the doctrinal content of these Symbolical Books without reservation. But beyond this, the Formula of Concord also notes that

Other good, useful, pure books, expositions of the Holy Scriptures, refutations of errors, and explanations of doctrinal articles are not rejected by this point. As long as they are consistent with the above-mentioned type of doctrine, these works are considered useful expositions and explanations. They can be helpful. (FC SD R&N:10, McCain p. 509)

And even within the text of the various Lutheran Confessional documents, quotations from various Fathers of the ancient church are often introduced: to allow Lutherans to benefit from the sound expositions and applications of Holy Scripture that these gifted pastors and teachers of the past offer; and to demonstrate that the Lutheran Reformation is in continuity with the best elements of the pre-Reformation church in its doctrine and practice. Harold Wicke of the Wisconsin Synod explains this more fully:

The Confessions...present evidence that the position of our Lutheran fathers is in full agreement with the ancient church, and thus is ecumenical and catholic in a very correct sense. The Lutheran way is neither a revolt nor a rebellion. Our doctrines are Christian doctrines, not heretical doctrines. Practically all articles of the Augsburg Confession conclude with a paragraph stating: "We condemn all heresies which have sprung up against this article," and then detail both ancient and modern perversions of the sacred truth. Both the Apology and the Formula of Concord appeal to the position of the ancient church and cite it.

And then, in a way that touches directly on the focus of this paper, Wicke continues:

We would also call your attention to the Catalogue of Testimonies appended to the Book of Concord. ...these testimonies help to vindicate the catholic nature of the Lutheran Confessions. ("An Evaluation of the Lutheran Confessions" Part II, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 2, pp. 118-19)

In his Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul solemnly instructs Christians, within a Trinitarian framework, that "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (4:4-6, KJ2000). A few verses later he explains how Christians are brought ever more deeply into this Trinitarian and sacramental faith when he says, with respect to the Lord Jesus Christ, that "he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ..." (11-13, KJ2000).

The Lutheran theological principle of *Sola Scriptura* privileges the teaching of the apostles and prophets – accessible to us through their inspired writings – as the only infallible

rule and norm of Christian doctrine and practice. But the Lutheran Church does not thereby disparage the ministry of the ordinary “pastors and teachers” whom Christ also raises up in his church, entrusting them with a vocation publicly to teach, unfold, defend, and apply the apostolic and prophetic faith in every generation until the end of the world. The orthodox Fathers of Christendom – who are preeminent examples of these divinely-given “pastors and teachers” – did not and do not have an independent authority in themselves, in addition to the authority of Holy Scripture. But these Fathers faithfully exercised their teaching office, and carried out their divine calling properly, when they were providentially led by *God* to lead *God’s people* into and through the Holy Scriptures; and when they demonstrated – with their expositions and explanations – what the Scriptures do in fact teach. Through their writings, these revered catholic Fathers are still exercising their teaching office, and are still carrying out their divine calling, for *our* benefit.

When Philip the Deacon asked the Ethiopian eunuch, “Do you understand what you are reading?,” the Ethiopian responded, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:30-31, ESV). Faithful pastors and teachers of the church have been sent by God – throughout history and in our own time – precisely for the purpose of guiding his people in their understanding of Scripture.

The principle of the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture likewise does not negate the need for an enduring office of teaching and pastoral oversight in the church, as *Sola Scriptura* is often misconstrued to mean or to imply. The Scriptures are indeed clear in what they intend to teach. Their key emphasis on salvation through faith in Christ can be grasped by anyone with an average level of intelligence who hears or reads the Biblical passages in which the basic message of law and gospel is presented. The Scriptures are not written in an esoteric code that can be deciphered only by an elite class of infallible interpreters. They are written in ordinary human language, according to the ordinary standards and norms of literary composition and intelligible writing that were in place at the various times in history when these sacred documents were penned.

But while Scripture is inherently clear, the mind and perception of mortal man are *not* clear, but are weakened and clouded by humanity’s sin and moral infirmity. Those who lack training in the original Biblical languages, or who lack a comprehensive knowledge of the narrower and broader context of the various passages of Scripture that need to be studied, benefit greatly from the help of those who have had this training and who have acquired this knowledge; and who have also been tested and authorized by the church as a whole to serve as public teachers of the church’s doctrine, and as public confessors of the church’s faith.

Such misunderstandings and misapplications of *Sola Scriptura* – which would seem to give the wrong answer to St. Paul’s rhetorical question “are all teachers?” (1 Corinthians 12:29, KJ2000) – are in fact contrary to the explicit teaching *of Scripture*. These misunderstandings and misapplications are nevertheless often held to and promoted in sectarian circles – and sometimes even in *conservative Lutheran* circles, where people should know better! So, Norman A. Madson’s admonitions, which were necessary in 1948 when he first offered them, are necessary also today, and will continue to be necessary for as long as Lutherans carelessly absorb sectarian attitudes from the sectarian churches that surround them:

Yes, we hear ever so often, even within our Synodical Conference: “Let us forget the fathers, and get back to Scripture.” Again that may sound very pious and praiseworthy. But what if Scripture, to which they appeal, has something to say about those fathers who have spoken unto us the word of God? Can we then do as we please about what they have

spoken? Not unless we want to violate this injunction of the Word itself. And this is what Holy Writ enjoins upon us all: “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.” Heb. 13, 7. (“The Crying Need of our Beloved Conference,” *Preaching to Preachers*, p. 203)

Lutheran theology and Reformed theology each makes use of the *Sola Scriptura* slogan. But the theological method and ecclesiastical identity that stand behind and flow out from that slogan, in each case, are not the same. Hermann Sasse reminds us that

Lutheran theology differs from Reformed theology in that it lays great emphasis on the fact that the evangelical church is none other than the medieval Catholic Church purged of certain heresies and abuses. The Lutheran theologian acknowledges that he belongs to the same visible church to which Thomas Aquinas and Bernard of Clairvaux, Augustine and Tertullian, Athanasius and Ireneaus once belonged. The orthodox evangelical church is the legitimate continuation of the medieval Catholic Church, not the church of the Council of Trent..., which renounced evangelical truth when it rejected the Reformation. For the orthodox evangelical church is really identical with the orthodox catholic church of all times. And just as the very nature of the Reformed Church emphasizes its strong opposition to the medieval church, so the very nature of the Lutheran Church requires it to go to the farthest possible limit in its insistence on its solidarity and identity with the Catholic Church. It was no mere ecclesiastico-political diplomacy which dictated the emphatic assertion in the Augsburg Confession that the teachings of the Evangelicals were identical with those of the orthodox catholic church of all ages, and no more was it romanticism or false conservatism which made our church anxious to retain as much of the old canonical law as possible, and to cling tenaciously to the old forms of worship. (*Here We Stand*, pp. 102-03)

The Concordists who compiled the Catalogue of Testimonies certainly did not have the attitude of the Reformed with respect to the patristic legacy of Christendom. The Concordists likewise did not share the attitude of those from within the old Synodical Conference who wanted to forget the fathers of the church – and who thereby earned a rebuke from Norman Madson! The authors of the Formula of Concord saw instead the great value of collecting together citations from ancient Christian councils and Fathers which address the issues in Christology – and by extension also in sacramentology – that in the sixteenth centuries were sharply dividing Confessional Lutherans from Calvinists and Zwinglians. The full title of the Catalogue is:

Catalog of Testimonies From Scripture and the orthodox Ancient Church that show what Scripture and the Early Church taught about the person of Christ and the Divine Majesty of His human nature, who is exalted to God’s omnipotent right hand. They also show what forms of speech are used by Scripture and the orthodox Early Church. (McCain p. 622)

An introduction “To the Christian Reader” then explains the theological and historical context, and lays out the contours of the dispute between the Lutheran and Reformed churches, especially as that dispute had been brought to a head and crystalized by the preparation and circulation of the Formula of Concord in 1577. Articles VII and VIII of the Formula of Concord in particular had “smoked out” many Calvinists who were hiding within the ecclesiastical structures of the Church of the Augsburg Confession, and who had been claiming to be adherents of the Augsburg Confession. It was in their interest especially to discredit the Formula of Concord, with its *sacramental* teaching that Christ’s true body and blood are objectively present in the consecrated bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper; and with its *Christological* explanations of why this is possible.

The approach that was taken both by forthright Calvinists, and by Crypto-Calvinists who were still trying to pass as Lutherans, was to claim that the Lutheran teaching in the Formula of Concord, on the communication of attributes from the divine nature to the human nature within the unity of Christ's person, was not only unbiblical, but was also unheard of in the history of Christian theology. The authors of the Formula of Concord, who prepared the Catalogue, firmly rebuffed those claims. They did not dismiss the importance of the accusation that there were no precedents for this form of teaching in Christian history by throwing the *Sola Scriptura* slogan at the Calvinists. Instead, they recognized that this was a serious accusation which, if true, would indeed discredit the Lutheran doctrine. And so they took on this accusation: by reasserting their careful and balanced teaching regarding both the integrity of each nature, and the intimate union of those natures within the one person of Christ; and by demonstrating that their balanced teaching in these respects has always been the teaching of the purer antiquity. So, we are told that

Some people claim that the Book of Concord deviates from the phrases and ways of speaking used by the pure, Ancient Church and Church Fathers, particularly in those articles concerning the person of Christ. They say that new, strange, made-up, unusual, and unheard-of expressions have been introduced. The Book of Concord appeals to the Ancient Church and Church Fathers, but many quotations from the Church Fathers were too long to include in the Book of Concord itself. Excerpts were carefully prepared and delivered to several electors and princes. They are printed here as an appendix at the end of the Book of Concord, in regard to particular points, for the purpose of providing the reader a thorough and correct accounting. A person will easily recognize that when these doctrines are taught in the Book of Concord nothing new has been introduced, either in the doctrinal issues themselves, or in phrases and ways of speaking. We have spoken and taught about these mysteries, first of all, just as Holy Scripture does, and also as the ancient, pure Church did. Therefore, when the Book of Concord teaches about the unity of the person of Christ, the distinction of the two natures in Christ, and their essential properties, it is doing so just as the Fathers and councils of the ancient, pure Church have. They all taught that there are not two persons, but one Christ. In this person there are two distinct natures, the divine and the human, which are not separated or intermingled or transformed into each other. Each nature has and retains its essential attributes, to all eternity, never laying them aside. The essential attributes of the one nature, which are truly and properly ascribed to the entire Person, never become attributes of the other nature.

As noted, the Reformed claim regarding the supposedly innovative character of the Lutheran formulations, was a claim that needed to be taken seriously. Martin Chemnitz, in his *Examination of the Council of Trent*, exemplifies the methodology and assumptions of his generation of Lutheran theologians when he explains that Lutherans “disagree with those who invent opinions which have no testimony from any period in the church, as Servetus, Campanus, the Anabaptists, and others have done in our time.” According to Chemnitz, Lutherans “also hold that no dogma that is new in the churches and in conflict with all of antiquity should be accepted.” This does not mean, of course, that the Fathers of Christian antiquity embody and represent an independent authority above and beyond Scripture. Their authority is conditional and qualified, and is exercised only under the supreme authority of God's Word. And so Chemnitz goes on to say:

But we confess also this, which we have not invented ourselves but have learned from the fathers: that we search out and quote the testimonies of the fathers, not as though the things which are shown and proved from clear testimonies of Scripture were either not

certain or not firm enough in themselves or did not of themselves possess enough strength and authority unless also the consensus of the fathers were added; but the reason why they are quoted Augustine clearly explains in *De peccatorum meritis*, Bk. 3, ch. 7: “This I have mentioned not because we should rely on the opinions of any and all disputers as on canonical authority but that it may be clear that from the beginning until the present time in which this new thing has arisen this teaching about original sin has been guarded in the faith of the church with such great constancy that by those who treated the words of the Lord it was used as the surest way to refute other false things, rather than that anyone should have tried to refute it as false. Besides, the clearest and fullest authority for this statement lives in the sacred canonical books.” ... In *Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum*, Bk. 4, ch. 8, Augustine says: “Not as though the authority of any disputation should be equated with the canonical books but in order that those who believe that the holy fathers say a certain thing may be reminded how the catholic teachers followed the divine oracles concerning these matters before the new idle talk of the heretics; and that they may know that the true and anciently founded catholic faith is being defended by us against the recent audacity and destruction of the Pelagians.” (Part I, pp. 258-59).

The Lutheran reformers did believe in *Sola Scriptura* (properly defined), but others who had gone before them *also* believed in *Sola Scriptura*, and on the basis of Scripture had unfolded and defended God’s truth, and had refuted error, for the benefit and protection of the church of their time. The enduring validity of their exegetical work should not be ignored by the church of later times, either. The great Father St. Athanasius, for example, had written that “The holy and inspired Scriptures are fully sufficient for the proclamation of the truth” (*Against the Heathen*, I:3, quoted in Carl A. Volz, *Faith and Practice in the Early Church*, p. 147). St. Cyril of Jerusalem spoke in a similar way:

For concerning the divine and holy mysteries of the Faith, not even a casual statement must be delivered without the Holy Scriptures; nor must we be drawn aside by mere plausibility and artifices of speech. Even to me, who tell you these things, give not absolute credence, unless you receive the proof of the things which I announce from the Divine Scriptures. For this salvation which we believe depends not on ingenious reasoning, but on demonstration of the Holy Scriptures. (*Catechetical Lectures*, IV:17, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. VII, p. 23)

St. Gregory of Nyssa concurred in this conviction when he also wrote that “we are not entitled to such license, namely, of affirming whatever we please. For we make Sacred Scripture the rule and the norm of every doctrine. Upon that we are obliged to fix our eyes, and we approve only whatever can be brought into harmony with the intent of these writings” (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*, quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, p. 50). Many more Fathers of the early church could be quoted, but for our purposes we will close with St. Augustine and with the explanation of his theological methodology that he penned in a letter to St. Jerome, in which he stated that

it is from those books alone of the Scriptures, which are now called canonical, that I have learned to pay them such honor and respect as to believe most firmly that not one of their authors has erred in writing anything at all. If I do find anything in those books which seems contrary to truth, I decide that either the text is corrupt, or the translator did not follow what was really said, or that I failed to understand it. But, when I read other authors, however eminent they may be in sanctity and learning, I do not necessarily believe a thing is true because they think so, but because they have been able to convince me, either on the authority of the canonical writers or by a probable reason which is not inconsistent

with truth. ...I will read the Holy Scripture with complete certainty and confidence in its truth, founded as it is on the highest summit of divine authority... (Letter 82, *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 12, pp. 392-94)

As an aside, Augustine's stated willingness to be convinced of something "either on the authority of the canonical writers or by a probable reason which is not inconsistent with truth" became enshrined in the theological culture of the western church, and no doubt fed into Luther's famous paraphrase of Augustine at the Diet of Worms in 1521: "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures that I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God."

So, for St. Augustine in the fifth century, the testimony of the earlier Fathers regarding sin and grace was useful in his refutation of the unbiblical teachings of the Pelagians. For the Concordists in the sixteenth century, the testimony of the earlier Fathers (now *including* Augustine), regarding the personal union and the sacramental union, was useful in their refutation of the unbiblical teaching of the Calvinists. Quoting the biblically-based statements of the Fathers is not diluting the authority of the Bible, but is reenforcing the church's testimony to its recognition and reception of that authority.

Immediately after their introduction "To the Christian Reader," the Concordists, in the Catalogue of Testimonies, begin with citations from the material produced by the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D., and by the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. These councils were key events in the ancient church, for the clarification of Christianity's teaching on the divine and human natures in the person of Christ, and for the clarification of Christianity's teaching on how and why a correct doctrine of Christology is necessary in order to have a correct doctrine of salvation.

Ephesus, which was convened under the influence and leadership of St. Cyril of Alexandria, condemned the heresy of Nestorius, who was understood to teach that the two natures in Christ function as if they were two persons mechanically joined, acting independently and in parallel. A key Ephesian shibboleth was the confession that the Virgin Mary is *Theotokos*: that is, the God-bearer, or mother of God. Nestorius was willing to say only that she was *Christotokos*, with the implication that Mary was the mother only of the human nature and not of the one person of Christ, who has a divine nature from eternity, and who in time took to himself a human nature from Mary. Chalcedon, where the Tome of St. Leo of Rome was influential even though Leo was not present for the council, condemned the monophysite heresy of Eutyches, who was understood to teach that the human nature of Christ had been absorbed into his divine nature – with the implication that Christ is not both purely divine and distinctly human but has a new hybrid nature that blends together the divine and the human.

The Christological debates and controversies that followed these two seminal councils were basically a fine-tuning of the principles that were already clearly established at Ephesus and Chalcedon. These two councils also precipitated the first major splits in Christendom, with the Assyrian Church of the East rejecting the teaching of the Council of Ephesus, and the Oriental Orthodox churches – with their self-styled "miaphysite" Christology – rejecting the "dyophysite" Christology of the Council of Chalcedon.

The separation of the Assyrians from the Orthodox and Catholic tradition, over the teaching of Ephesus, involved real doctrinal differences. In some ways those differences appear to have reemerged at the time of the Reformation: in Zwingli's "alloeosis" exegetical method, and in the heterodox conclusions that he reached by using that method – in comparison to Luther's literal exegesis and his Ephesian and Chalcedonian orthodoxy. Many believe, however, that the separation of the Oriental Orthodox from the Eastern Orthodox and others, over the teaching of Chalcedon, arose from misunderstandings and differences in the definition and use of terms, and not from real doctrinal disunity.

In any case, while the Lutherans warned the Reformed that their doctrine of the person of Christ seemed to be in violation of the canons of Ephesus, the Reformed accused the Lutherans of violating the Definition of Chalcedon. In their Catalogue of Testimonies, the Lutherans include several canons from Ephesus, perhaps as a subtle rebuke to the Calvinists; and they include the text of the Definition of Chalcedon, as a not-so-subtle push-back against the aspersions of the Calvinists. From Ephesus:

Canon 4: If anyone divides the words of Scripture that speak about the two persons, or hypostases, of Christ and apply some of them to Him as a man in such a way that the Word is separated from God, or without the Word of the Father, or takes other statements from Scripture and says they apply only to Him as God, that is the Word from God the Father, let him be accursed.

Canon 5: If anyone dares to say that the man Christ is the Bearer of God, and instead of saying that He is God, truly the Son of God by nature, the "Word made flesh," who was made a partaker of flesh and blood precisely like us, let him be accursed.

Canon 6: If anyone does not confess that Christ is, at the same time, God and man, because, according to the Scriptures, the Word was made flesh, let him be accursed.

Canon 12: If anyone does not confess that the Word of God suffered in the flesh, was crucified in the flesh, and tasted death in the flesh, becoming the firstborn from the dead, although as God He is life and gives life, let him be accursed.

And from Chalcedon:

Following the holy Fathers, we confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. With one voice we confess that He is perfect in deity and perfect in humanity. He is truly God and truly man, consisting of a rational soul and body. He is consubstantial with the Father in regard to His deity and is consubstantial with us according to His humanity. He is like us in every way, except He is without sin. He was begotten before the world out of the Father according to His divinity. The same person was, in the last days, born for us and for our salvation from the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to His humanity. We confess that one and the same Jesus Christ, the Son, the Lord, the only-begotten, is known in two natures, without commingling, without changing, without division and without separation. The difference between the two natures is in no way abolished because of the Personal Union. The unique aspects of each nature are preserved. They are not run together into one person and substance, neither divided or torn into two persons. There is one and the same only-begotten Son, God the Word and the Lord Jesus Christ. <We acknowledge one single Lord Christ who is at one and the same time the only-begotten

Son, the Word of the Father and also true man.> The prophets of old and the Christ Himself have taught us these things concerning Him, as well as the symbol that the Fathers have handed down to us. (McCain, pp. 625-26)

The balanced and thorough Christology that came down through the centuries from Ephesus and Chalcedon, together and in tandem, was basically taken for granted by the Christians of the Middle Ages, who saw no compelling need to revisit and reexplore the arguments and conclusions of the Fathers who had participated in, or defended and explained, those councils. But these matters did break open again, when Zwingli backed away from this ancient consensus with his *alloeosis* teaching.

In keeping with the ancient conciliar consensus, the Lutheran Concordists taught that, because of “the union of the divine and the human nature in the person of Christ,”

God is man and man is God. Neither the natures nor their properties are intermingled, but each nature keeps its essence and properties. This personal union does not exist nor can be thought of without such a true communion of the natures. Not just the mere human nature – whose property it is to suffer and die – has suffered for the sins of the world, but the Son of God Himself truly suffered. However, He suffered *according to* the received human nature. In accordance with our simple Christian faith, He truly died, although the divine nature can neither suffer nor die. Dr. Luther has fully explained this in his *Confession concerning Christ’s Supper* in opposition to the blasphemous *alloeosis*, or interchange, of Zwingli, who taught that one nature should be taken and understood for the other. Dr. Luther has committed that teaching, as a devil’s mask, to the abyss of hell. (FC SD VIII:19-20, McCain p. 584. Emphasis added.)

Zwingli’s claim was that the divine nature and the human nature each act independently, and that passages of Scripture that seem to say otherwise must be interpreted as figures of speech. He held that actions which are proper to the human nature, such as dying, are to be attributed exclusively to the *human nature*, even if the text of Scripture says that it was the *divine person* who performed these actions. So, when St. Paul says that God purchased the church “with his own blood” (Acts 20:28, KJ2000), it was *not* actually God’s own blood that was the purchase price for the church (even though this is *exactly* what Paul says), but it was the blood only of the human nature of Christ! The later Calvinists were more subtle than Zwingli, but their basic error of disconnecting the two natures in Christ in Nestorian fashion was the same. The Formula of Concord is taking aim specifically at Zwingli’s false exegesis and false Christology when it condemns the teaching that “The received human nature in Christ has (in deed and truth) no communion whatever with the divine power, might, wisdom, majesty, and glory, but has in common only the mere title and name” (FC SD VIII:95, McCain p. 596).

The Reformed theologians of the sixteenth century were reopening these previously settled matters of Christology, because of their rejection of the classic Christian belief that the true body and blood of Jesus are present in the consecrated bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. They found the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation in particular to be a “horrible” teaching, which led to many superstitions and abuses. One of the weapons in their arsenal that was deployed against transubstantiation was a Christological weapon, namely the assertion that transubstantiation was not only exegetically wrong, but could not possibly be right, since it is not possible for a human nature – including also Jesus’ human nature – to be in more than one place at a time. This is still the view of the Reformed, and of all the sectarian churches that over time

have been spun off from the Reformed tradition: Arminians and Wesleyans, Pentecostals and charismatics, Baptists who admit that they are Baptist and Baptists who call themselves non-denominational. They all still believe this and say this.

Of course, Lutherans do not agree with transubstantiation either – although in the generation of the Reformation, Lutherans were not horrified by it, but dismissed it as an unnecessary and unhelpful example of “subtle sophistry” (SA III, VI:5, Tappert p. 311). Yet in keeping with the Lord’s own words, and in keeping with St. Paul’s inspired commentary in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, Lutherans then and now do confess a very robust doctrine of the Real Presence, without scholastic baggage.

The Lutheran Reformers and Concordists did not think that the limitations of a true human nature prevented the possibility of a sacramental union of the body and blood of Christ with the bread and wine, because the human nature of *Jesus* – unlike the human nature of every other human being – is united always and everywhere to the *divine* nature of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Christ’s humanity, uniquely, can therefore be wherever the eternal Son of God, in his omnipresence, can be. It was not believed or taught that the human nature had been *absorbed into* the divine nature or had become *a part of* the divine nature, which *Chalcedon* defines as a *heresy*. But it was also not believed or taught that there could ever be any separation or disconnection between the eternal divine nature of the Son of God, and the human nature that the Son of God had taken to himself in time from Mary, and had permeated with the presence and powers of his divinity. *Ephesus* does not allow *that* teaching.

The beliefs and teachings of the ancient Fathers regarding these and related points – which were in complete harmony with the Lutheran position – were documented in the Catalogue of Testimonies by the inclusion of quotations and excerpts from their writings. Perhaps a lot of attention had not previously been paid to these writings, before the Zwinglians and Calvinists had begun once again to teach errors that the ancient Fathers already refuted many centuries earlier. In their claim that the Lutheran teaching was new in the church, the Reformed certainly did demonstrate that *they* were largely unfamiliar with these early patristic witnesses.

In reintroducing these testimonies to the larger church, the Lutherans presented their case to those who were otherwise uninformed and confused, that the Lutherans’ convictions are not only biblical and divinely-mandated, but are, in addition, vindicated and confirmed by the patristic witnesses. In many ways this was an example of what St. Augustine had described in a passage that Chemnitz quotes in his *Loci Theologici*. The Second Martin writes that in a time of doctrinal controversy,

The Scriptures are examined more carefully, and those theologians who had preserved the correct teaching are now noticed with greater appreciation than perhaps had been the case before the controversy. Augustine is correct and truthful when he says in *De Civitate Dei*, 16.2, “Many points pertaining to the catholic faith have been stirred up by the cunning trouble making of heretics, so that we have had to defend these points against them, consider more carefully, define more clearly, and preach more powerfully. The question has been raised by the adversary, and the opportunity is present for better learning.” This point is certainly most true in church controversies. (Vol. II, p. 473)

The Catalogue of Testimonies organizes these patristic citations – together with pertinent quotations directly from the Bible – under ten categories, as here follow:

I. The majesty of the divine nature is communicated to the human nature. When the Holy Scriptures, and also the Fathers, speak of the majesty that the human nature of Christ has received through the personal union, they use the words *communication, communion, sharing, bestowed, and given.*

II. Christ received divine majesty here in time, not according to His divine nature, but according to the human nature that He received, that is, according to the flesh, as man, or the Son of Man.

III. The Holy Scriptures, likewise the holy Fathers of the ancient, pure Church, speak about this mystery in abstract terms, making it very clear that the human nature, by means of the personal union, truly and actually receives and uses the majesty of the divine nature.

IV. The Holy Scriptures, and the Fathers, understood that the majesty that Christ received in time included not only created gifts with their limited qualities, but also the glory and majesty of divinity that belongs to God, to which His human nature, in the person of the Son of God, had been exalted, and thus, the human nature received the power and efficacy of the divine nature that are peculiar to the Deity.

V. Christ, as God, has divine majesty essentially in one way. It is His possession, part of His very essence, in and of Himself. As man He has it another way, as a result of the personal union, not in and of His very essence as a man.

VI. The divine nature powerfully demonstrates and actually exerts its majesty, power, and efficacy (which is unique to the divine nature and always remains so) in, with, and through the human nature that is personally united to it. The human nature has such majesty because the entire fullness of the Godhead dwells personally in the received human flesh and blood of Christ.

VII. The communication of divine majesty occurs also in glory, without mingling, annihilation, or denial of the human nature.

VIII. According to its own nature, and because of the personal union, the human nature is a participant in, and capable of, the divine majesty that belongs to God.

IX. It is well known and undeniable that the Godhead, with its divine majesty, is not locally circumscribed [limited] by the flesh as though it were shut up in a container. Athanasius, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and others correctly state this, and so does the Book of Concord, which expressly rejects it as an error to teach that the humanity of Christ has been locally expanded into all places, or that, by the personal union, the human nature of Christ has been transformed into an infinite essence. Nevertheless, since the divine and human nature in Christ are personally and inseparably united in Christ, the Holy Scriptures and holy Fathers testify that wherever Christ is, He is not there with only half His person, or with only a part of His person, for instance, the divinity alone, separate and bare, minus and without His assumed humanity, or that He is somehow personally united to it or separated from it, outside of the personal union with the humanity. His entire person, as God and man, according to the mode of the personal union with the humanity, which is an inscrutable mystery, is everywhere present in a way and in a measure that is known to God.

X. Since the article of Christology is especially intended to direct us to where we should seek and apprehend the entire person of the Mediator, God and man, the Book of Concord, as also all other holy Fathers, directs us not to wood, or stone, or anything else, but to that which Christ has pointed and directed us in His Word. (McCain, pp. 627, 629, 633, 638-39, 643-46)

I am not going to include in this paper any of the actual citations that are provided under each of these categories. First, I cannot include here only the *important* ones, since they are *all* important. Second, there would be no reason to cite some or all of them and then to explain with my own commentary which aspect of a biblical and orthodox Christology they teach or unfold, because the heading under which each of them appears already identifies the pertinent Christological point each one is making. And third, I ran out of time in preparing this paper, and did not want to start something that I could not finish. But hopefully this paper will inspire you to read the Catalogue of Testimonies for yourself – and if you have already read it, to read it again. It is included as an appendix in the *Concordia Triglotta* and in the McCain edition of the Book of Concord; and it is in the companion volume for the Kolb/Wengert edition of the Book of Concord: *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord*, edited by Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen.

At the end of the Catalogue of Testimonies the Concordists offer a “Conclusion,” in which the “Christian reader” is once again addressed: with a warning against the theological innovations of Calvinism and against Calvinist misrepresentations of both the Scriptures and the Fathers; and with an encouragement not to allow the patristic witnesses just cited to become an authority unto themselves, but to let those patristic witnesses lead the reader back to the Scriptures and to the sure and certain testimony to the divine doctrine that Holy Scripture provides. Since the Bible has now been published in vernacular translations, the Bible should be read! So, the “Conclusion” states:

Christian reader, these testimonies of the ancient teachers of the Church have been provided here not to suggest that our Christian faith is founded on the authority of men. The true saving faith is not founded on any Church teacher, old or new, but only and alone on God’s Word, as contained in the Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles, an unquestionable witness of divine truth. With his special and uncanny crafts, Satan has caused fanatics to lead men from the Holy Scriptures – which, thank God! even a common layman can now read with benefit – to the writings of the Ancient Church, which are like a broad ocean. A person who has not read the Fathers carefully cannot know precisely whether or not these new teachers are quoting their words correctly and thus they leave a person in grievous doubt. This is why we have been compelled to declare, with this Catalog, and to show everyone that this new false doctrine has as little foundation in the ancient, pure teachers of the Church as in the Holy Scriptures. It is, in fact, diametrically opposed to it. They quote the Church Fathers in such a way as to give them a false meaning, contrary to the Fathers’ will. They do this just as they wantonly pervert the simple, plain, and clear words of Christ’s testament and the pure testimonies of the Holy Scriptures. Because of this, the Book of Concord directs everyone to the Holy Scriptures and the simple Catechism. The person who clings to this basic form with true, simple faith provides what is best for his soul and conscience, since it is built on a firm and immovable Rock (Matthew 7; 17; Galatians 1; Psalm 119). (McCain pp. 647-48)

A properly-understood Christology stands behind a properly-preached gospel, and a properly-taught Christology is embedded within a properly-administered sacrament. The Christology of the apostolic Scriptures, of the catholic Fathers, and of Orthodox Lutheranism, is both preachable and prayable. It comforts us in our fears and sorrows, because it allows us to

know that “we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our weaknesses; but was in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15, KN2000). And we are also able to know, fully and concretely, that

Since then the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the nature of Abraham. Therefore in all things he had to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to help them that are tempted. (Hebrews 2:14-18, KJ2000)

And so we now come full circle, back to what started the controversy in the first place, with deep thanksgiving that this theological battle was fought and won: *by* Christ and *for* Christ; *by* the church and *for* the church:

♪ “This is My body,” thus You say, “Eat orally, so take Me;
All drink My blood; by you I stay, And you shall not forsake Me.”
Thus You have spoken, so ’tis true; Naught is impossible with You, For You, Lord, are almighty.
And though my mind here does not see How in so many places
Your body at one time can be, Yet faith Your Word embraces.
I leave to You how this can be, Your Word, O Lord, suffices me; Faith stands upon it solely. ♪
(Samuel Kinner, trans. Harry Bartels, “Lord Jesus Christ, You Have Bestowed,” ELH 320, 4-5)

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Phoenix, Arizona
April 20, 2022:
Commemoration of Johannes Bugenhagen, Pastor

*Evangelical Lutheran Synod West Coast Pastors’ Conference
Reformation Lutheran Church, Hillsboro, Oregon: April 28-29, 2022*

