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Sanctification in the Lutheran Confessions

David P. Scaer

Several years back an essay entitled "Sanctification in Lutheran Theology" appeared in an issue of the *Concordia Theological Quarterly* published in honor of the ten years of the seminary presidency of Dr. Robert D. Preus.¹ At first the article received the lack of attention it rightly deserved. During the past academic year, the article was recommended reading for homiletics by two colleagues, one of whom very kindly remarked that the view on sanctification did not revert to moralism. Moralism should not be confused with morality, though the meanings of both concepts are related. Moralism might be defined as living one's life according to certain directives, most of which seem to be negative prohibitions. Another definition might be making morality a goal in itself. Right or proper behavior becomes the end or goal of the philosophical or religious system. It might be presumptuous to say that only the Lutheran position on sanctification, when properly stated, is the only one among the major western religions which offers a doctrine of sanctification which is not intrinsically moralistic. Each failure in understanding sanctification so that it becomes moralism sees sanctification or the Christian life in almost autonomous terms, independent of justification both in regard to content and time. When justification, the doctrine that God saves the sinner freely through Jesus Christ, becomes an item which is now seen through the rear-view mirror as something which has happened and sanctification or the Christian life is seen as something which is viewed through the windshield as a current or future action, sanctification is bound to deteriorate into moralism.

Luther at times hardly appears to be the sanctified saint, at least not in a refined sense which some would like. His off-the-cuff remarks in his *Table Talks* are not infrequently outrageous. But if anyone feels like this, then the problem is not with the Reformer, but with his or her own views of sanctification, which here in America have been contaminated through exposure to the virus to Reformed and Arminian thought. Protestantism—and here reference is to Reformed and

Arminian—unlike Lutheran theology does not see Christology and with it justification as not only the center but the substance and goal of theology. Protestantism sees sanctification or Christian living, if not as central, then at least as the goal of theology. Melvin E. Dieter, provost of Asbury Theological Seminary, said of Wesley that he “declared that the supreme and overruling purpose of God’s plan of salvation is to renew men’s and women’s hearts in his own image.”² For the Reformed the Arminian scheme is reversed so that the goal of theology is no longer the perfection of man but the glorification of God. Sanctification becomes the means through which the goal is reached. Anthony A. Hoekema, professor emeritus at Calvin Theological Seminary, has said, “The final goal of sanctification can be nothing other than the glory of God.”³ Defining sanctification apart from Christology as goal and content will inevitably lead to a moralizing understanding of justification. As soon as sanctification becomes either the goal or the means to attain the goal, it can be qualitatively or quantitatively measured. This can be nothing other than the reintroduction of the doctrine of works which the Lutheran Confessions found so objectionable in their Roman Catholic opponents from the very beginning.

Not only is Christology the center of the Lutheran theology, but it permeates the substance of the other doctrines. Doctrines should not be regarded as separate entities brought together to construct a whole, but perspectives on Christ’s person and work (i.e., Christology). Justification, the chief article of Lutheranism, is only an extension of Christology into the life of the believer in regard to the certainty of salvation. God justifies the sinner for Christ’s sake. In turn sanctification is an extension first of justification and then Christology.

The concept of justification by grace through faith without works could only be viewed as antinomian or at least leading to it by the Roman Catholics. When the Augsburg Confession says in Article XX, “Our teachers have been falsely accused of forbidding good works,” it is responding to the Roman Catholic charge that Lutherans were against good works. The Lutherans countered this charge by saying that instruction in the Ten Commandments has been reinstated in those churches where previously under the Roman Catholics good works were not taught. Thus it must be made clear that Lutherans teach

and require good works, but not as the means to salvation, as in the Roman system, or as the goal of theology as in Protestant thought.

Also essential to the Lutheran concept of good works was that they were performed in society and did not necessarily have a particular religious hue about them. Condemned as “childish and useless works [are] . . . the rosaries, the cult of the saints, monasticism, pilgrimages, appointed fasts, holy days [and] brotherhoods.” Tappert in the footnote speaks of brotherhoods as “societies of laymen for the devotional exercises and good works.”⁴ Here the Lutheran perspective on sanctification or good works is startling both in regard to past medieval practice but also as continuous critique on the aberrations arising later. First of all, good works were part of one’s entire life and not something which belonged to that part of life which could be viewed as religious. Secondly, it is absurd to speak of one person or group as specializing in good works. This is not to say that religious and secular societies cannot be organized for the purpose of the furtherance of the Gospel and the good of society; however, works performed under such organized situations do not indicate that the participants are intrinsically superior to those who do not belong. Good works naturally flow from the preaching of Christ, which is by definition the preaching of the Gospel of justification, and thus they also belong to the totality of the Christian life and not to some compartment of life.

Because the culture and religion of our nation has been shaped by the reformations in the Swiss cities of Zurich and Geneva, Lutherans in America have always stood under the threat of being swallowed by a Protestant understanding of sanctification. These reformations under Zwingli and Calvin were so committed to making good works, at least as they understood them, a part of society, that they placed the government under the moral direction of the church, not unlike the style of the Republican presidential aspirant, Pat Robertson. The institutions of society and the government were placed under the rule of Jesus Christ. Whether they succeeded in stamping out sin and encouraging good works is a debatable question, but they made sure that all the poor Christians living under their supervision were totally miserable. This dismal religious philosophy which attempted to control the mind and

body was transported first to England and Scotland and then to the United States by the Puritans. A more joyous form of automated good works came with the followers of Wesley, but the end result was the same. Christianity was reduced to things permissible and illegitimate. A similar movement caught hold in Lutheranism with the Pietists, but mercifully became extinct during the Age of Rationalism. The Calvinists saw sanctification as proper outward behavior as so essential that discipline became one of the marks of the true church. The German Lutheran Pietists along with their English counterparts, the Methodists, had their books of discipline. The first Lutherans in our country bore the stamp of Pietism and then later Rationalism. Though an identification between Pietism and Rationalism should not be made, because the former was committed to a belief in a personal God and the possibility of the miraculous in a way that the latter could never be, both movements saw good works as the goal of life. Pietism does this in ecclesial terms and Rationalism in secular terms. The heritage of Calvin, prospering in the Christian reconstruction movement in the United States, sees as its goal the Christianization of American government and society.

The Lutheran concentration on Christology and justification is often seen as failing to give full attention to the topic of good works and sanctification. Lutherans do not have or at least should not have books describing in detail what are and are not good works. Though we recognize that certain professions are inherently sinful (e.g., an abortionist), we do not say that certain occupations are more Christian than others. A person performing an ordinary occupation at a religious organization is not any more sanctified than one doing the same work for a secular corporation. The phrase "Christian work" should not be applied to those working for Christian organizations, unless they are engaged in the preaching of the Gospel and should, to avoid confusion, be eliminated from our vocabulary. Even when we speak about the holy ministry, we are careful to say that this does not involve the personal sanctification of the clergy. The position of the Augsburg Confession, that the sacraments are not dependent on the faith of the preachers,⁵ is in sharp contrast to the one offered nearly three centuries later by Schleiermacher which made the faith of the preacher a factor

in the efficacy of the sermon. The ministry is holy not because of the good works or the sanctification of the preacher, but rather because through this office Christ is preached and His sacraments administered. The Lutheran concept of good works requires involvement in the world by working for the improvement of society and its protection from evil. The Augsburg Confession claims that the Emperor Charles V in waging war against the Turks is following the example of the good works of King David⁶. But Lutherans do not see the maintenance of society as part of God's sanctifying activity. As long as we have a serious doctrine of original sin, we will not even begin to reform the sinner completely. In fact reforming the sinner as a goal is hardly Lutheran. Somehow the words of *Amazing Grace*, "I once was lost, but now I'm found," still sound strange to Lutheran ears. (I might add here that the older Reformed theologians follow Calvin in denying that the sinful part of man is really ever eliminated, though modern ones like Hoekema believe that the sinful self is really eliminated once and for all.⁷) The goal in Lutheran theology is to preach the Gospel of Christ and that preaching will by itself reform the sinner, but never completely. The sinner is not first justified by the preaching of Christ and then sanctified subsequently by some sort of admonitions to do good works. No, not at all! The preaching of the Gospel in the moment that it is preached justifies the sinners and makes him abound in good works. Since the believing Christian is never completely a believer, but is filled with doubts and the downright unbelief of the Old Adam who lives within him as an unwelcome and uninvited guest, the Christian in so far as he is still unbeliever engages in works which must be labeled as clearly sinful for which he must face the consequences in this world. To make matters even more complex, some of the good works which Christians perform from a good motive can also at the same time be done grudgingly from a bad motive. The Christian finds himself caught in a dilemma. He knows that as a sinner he needs the threats of law to curb his base appetites and that, when he oversteps these boundaries, he must pay the consequences. He not only knows but he wants to engage in good works which flow naturally from his faith in Christ and from Christ dwelling in him. Now here comes the dilemma. The one outward good work comes from both good and bad motives,

simply because he is both saint and sinner. The antithesis between the law and the Gospel is existentially experienced within the Christian in the struggle between the Old Adam and the new man. This problem is addressed in the Formula of Concord (Epitome VI, 2-3): “[The Old Adam] must be coerced against his own will not only by admonitions and threats of the law, but also by its punishments and plagues, to follow the Spirit and surrender himself a captive.”⁸ Thus for the Formula one and the same Christian can perform works of the law and fruits of the Spirit which are identified as good works.⁹ He also recognizes this dilemma which he finds within himself in others, so that the same works may flow from both good and evil motives. On that account outward works can never be the absolute assurance of faith even to the Christian that he is a believer. The Augsburg Confession plainly teaches that good works must be done, but we can never rely on them.¹⁰ Whereas Luther would say that the church is present where the word is preached and the sacraments are administered, Calvin adds that discipline—and he means moral discipline—is a mark of the church. For Calvin and the Reformed tradition sanctification, even if it is defined only in the sense of restraint from sin, becomes measurable. Such a quantitative understanding of sanctification and the Christian life is alien to Lutheranism.

But the Christian cannot let this sense of inward worthiness or the possibility that in performing the greatest good he may fall into sin prevent him from reckless abandon in doing good. In fact, just the opposite is true. Since the Christian is a justified sinner, he is given a *carte blanche* to engage in good works and this, may it be repeated, is to be done with reckless abandon. The good works which make up the subject of sanctification are not simply that the Christian refrains from gross immorality, but the distinctive character of sanctification in Lutheran theology consists in his abounding in good works.

On the surface it could hardly be demonstrated that Lutherans were greater sinners than those who have committed themselves, their theology, and their wishes for society to good works. The Lutheran argument is that they, not their Roman Catholic opponents who made works a part of justification, were more serious about moral behavior. In fact, thanks to Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms which

required obedience to civil rulers, Lutherans lived more peaceable lives than did many of their neighbors and probably still do. Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms comes to expression in Augsburg Confession XVI: "Everyone, each one according to his own calling, is to manifest Christian love and genuine good works in his station of life." This obligates the Christian to obey the civil authorities. Note here that good works or sanctification of the Christian life is given a secular hue. A person working in the mailing room of the American Bible Society has no religious advantage over another performing the same kind of labor for Sears. The followers of Zwingli and Calvin believed that Jesus would bring the final kingdom of God with him on the day of judgment, but as they are waiting, they have been determined to do a little building on earth. In some cases this kingdom building has been politically disruptive and in other cases involved institution-izing Christian principles, as is current in our country, beginning with the election of Jimmy Carter through the work of Jerry Falwell and the candidacy of Pat Robertson. It was the followers of Zwingli who tore the statues down in the churches and whitewashed ancient paintings. John Knox, who out-Calvined Calvin, led the revolt against Queen Mary of Scotland. The first Pilgrim and Puritan settlers who brought the tradition of Zwingli and Calvin to New England were the political revolutionaries of their day. Melchior Muhlenberg, the first significant Lutheran leader in America, in spite of his Pietistic education, was true to his Lutheran heritage in not getting involved in the war for American independence. Lutherans were, in comparison with the Protestants, docile, living out their lives in this world waiting for the next world and the appearing of the Lord Jesus. The reform of society today strangely finds its most virulent expression in the liberation theology among Roman Catholic clergy in Latin America, a point with which the current pontiff is uncomfortable.

It is the fate of Lutheranism to lie between the mammoths of Roman Catholic and Reformed (Protestant) theologies with their doctrines of good works and sanctification which are intrinsically inimical to Lutheran thought. Dividing Lutherans and Protestants is not simply a different sacramental perspective, but an essentially different world view. For

Lutherans the kingdom of God comes in the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, not in the moral improvement of the individual and society.

Through a process of intellectual infiltration, theological transfusion, religious exposure, and direct ingestion and imbibing, the authentic Lutheranism of Luther and the Confessions is lost and views inimical to the heart of our theology are held. Past history shows that, whereas Calvinism and Arminianism have never reached the point of extinction, Lutheranism frequently has. Sanctification is an area where Lutherans are vulnerable to Protestant influences and can be, have been, and are still overtaken by outside influences.

When Zondervan Publishing House published *Five Views on Sanctification*,¹¹ it described this publication on the book-cover as "five major Protestant views on the subject of sanctification." Was it coincidental that the Lutheran view was not presented? Perhaps it was rather that Lutherans are not considered Protestants—for which we can be grateful. Or perhaps, even better, Lutherans do not have a distinctive contribution to make to the understanding of sanctification so far as other Christians are concerned.

The Lutheran position on sanctification is perhaps best known from Luther's Small Catechism. This document more than others has determined the form of Lutheran piety. In point of time it precedes the writing of the other confessional documents and is probably more known and used than the others, though the Preface is rarely used but is still part of our confessional subscription. The Small Catechism, as we learned in confirmation class, is atypically the orderly Luther with its six parts arranged systematically followed by the prayers to be spoken each day. The Preface is vintage Luther as he ranges all over a number of topics.

His explanation in the Preface about the religious poverty of the Germans hardly reflects a Pietistic mind set: "Good God, what wretchedness I beheld." But as free-wheeling as Luther is, as he lashes out against the pope, bishops, and clergy, he is not confused, but operating with a consistent theological position. If the people refuse to learn and believe the Catechism, they must be taught at least the difference between right and wrong if they expect to live in the city and to make

a living there. "For anyone who desires to reside in a city is bound to know and observe the laws under whose protection he lives, no matter whether he is a believer or, at heart, a scoundrel or knave." This is easily recognizable as the first use of the law, which must, according to Article VI of the Formula of Concord, be applied to sinners and Christians in so far as they are sinners.¹² Luther does not want to Christianize Wittenberg and cities of Saxony as Calvin did Geneva and Knox did Scotland, but still for Luther all must conform outwardly to the law, because only in this way can society survive. When it comes to good works which flow from faith, however, Luther does not speak of coercion. In the matter of receiving the Sacrament, which must be classified as one of the holiest good works—if we dare put good works on a scale—Luther speaks of preaching the Gospel in such a way that the people will not have to be forced to go to the Sacrament, but will compel their pastors to administer it more often. Here is an example of how the good work of receiving the Sacrament is brought about by the preaching of the Gospel and not the law. To use the language of the Formula of Concord, the Christian "does everything from a free and merry spirit."¹³ Good works flow from the Gospel and not the law. Luther then inveighs against him who does not receive the Sacrament, because by his behavior such a person "has no sin, no flesh, no devil, no world, no death, no hell!" This is, of course, recognizable as the second use of the law. In speaking of sanctification, we are referring only to those good works which flow from faith in Christ and which are motivated not by the law but by the Gospel. Having said this, we repeat as do the Confessions,¹⁴ that as long as we live we are sinners who must be compelled by the law to do those things which our old natures hate. Even in this the Christian has a magnificent freedom, because of the doctrine of justification. God does not justify us only in so far as we are saints, but he also justifies us in so far as we are sinners. He justifies not only the godly in us, but the ungodly. This must be presupposition for any understanding of sanctification. Without it sanctification will revert to a silly, pedantic moralism which is afraid of performing any good, because it is afraid of falling into sin. Perhaps even worse is the person who believes that he is so sanctified that he identifies everything which he does as a good

work itself and sets his own behavior as a standard for others. This is Pietism at its worse and is no better than the Pharisaism Jesus encountered.

To perform this task of showing the Small Catechism's understanding of sanctification and good works, it is easiest to follow the outline of Luther's Explanation of the Ten Commandments, something which I briefly touched upon in the previous essay on sanctification. Sometimes instructors of children for confirmation too quickly pass over the Ten Commandments to the Creed with the right motive that perhaps they should learn more about the Gospel than they do about the law. The motive to concentrate more on the creed and less on the commandments may be proper, but it reflects a failure to recognize the pivotal position Luther gives to the Ten Commandments and his understanding of them. The prohibition of the First Commandment not to worship false gods is given a new twist by Luther. It is literally turned inside out and put on its head. In a sense the original commandment is hardly recognizable. The prohibition against idolatry becomes an invitation to worship the true God: "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." What was clearly recognizable as a statement of the law, when isolated from its context, becomes in Luther's explanation a sweet summons to believe. We are faced here with at least two problems: (1) Has Luther done violence to the original intent of the commandment in its original setting by turning a fierce prohibition into an invitation to faith? (2) Is the First Commandment a statement of the law or Gospel? Up front it looks like the law.

Luther took the First Commandment with the prohibition against the worship of false gods from Exodus 20:3, but in its original setting it is preceded by "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery," a statement of salvation and the Gospel. Israel's right to nationhood is not derived from itself but from God as an act of grace. He chose Israel. Israel did not choose Him. The prohibition against false gods is set forth not as a naked, moralistic command, but against the background that Israel belongs to God, and without God Israel is nothing. Going after false gods is inimical to her own existence. Worshiping false gods is not simply an abrogation of a prohibition, but a denial of her relationship with the God which has given the Israelites

the right to be God's children. The children of the true God cannot by definition worship false gods without losing the right to a divine status among the nations of the world. Luther's explanation is not a free-wheeling exposition of the commandment, but one which recognizes its original setting which in effect gave Israel a heavenly charter. His explanation as an invitation to faith takes this theme into the era of the New Testament church, as he intended this commandment not for unbelievers, but for those who are already Christians. His catechism, including the commandments, is intended for believers, who have already heard the summons of God to believe in Christ. By saying that Christians "should fear, love, and trust in God above all things," Luther is asserting God's total and complete claim on the life of the Christian and the Christian's total commitment to God. Avoiding pagan worship is the presupposition to the commandment. Thus Luther's explanation of the First Commandment presupposes God's activity in Christ for and in the believer and it thus embraces all of Christian behavior including faith and good works.

A critical scholar is forced to ask the question of how Luther can make Israel's release from the Egyptian slavery the basis of his issuing the invitation of the Gospel to believe in God and hence Christ. Some might say that Luther is dealing homiletically with the Egyptian experience. This hardly does justice to Luther, who follows the New Testament in recognizing the release from Egypt as the foundation of God's redemption in Christ.¹⁵

The explanation of each of the nine remaining commandments begins with words taken from the explanation of the First Commandment, "We should fear and love God so we may not . . ." Here follow prohibitions in the remaining nine commandments, with the exception of the sixth. The prohibitions are followed by statements of positive behavior. The Second Commandment reads, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." This is, in effect, Luther's explanation: "We should love God so much that we do not curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon Him in every time of trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks." Luther here is writing not for an unbeliever, but for the man of faith, but a man of faith who realizes that he is not immune from sinning. The Christian is not so totally

sanctified that it is impossible for him to swear and curse. In fact, the old man about which Luther speaks in the Fourth Part (Baptism) is in need of daily destruction. The Christian is a new man, but not in such a way that the Old Adam is completely dead. This old man is inclined to curse and swear by the name of the same God who has redeemed him in Christ. As long as the Christian lives, he must be warned and threatened not to engage in behavior and language unacceptable to God. Luther's method found further explication in Article VI of the Formula of Concord. Those who know Luther's explanations do not need to be reminded of his strong prohibitions against unacceptable behavior, such as despising God's word and its preaching, despising parents and superiors and provoking them to anger, hurting or harming a neighbor, obtaining a neighbor's property by dishonest means, lying, betraying, slandering, or defaming a neighbor, and planning to get hold of his possessions. What is marvelous about Luther's explanations of the commandments is that he involves not only the outward behavior, but the inward motivations of the heart. The attempt and scheming to do evil is also forbidden in the ninth and tenth commandments. The Large Catechism goes more specifically into desire, which is not mentioned explicitly in the Small Catechism. True, all these things bring the wrath of God, but we may not conclude that, if we refrain from such works, we have thereby begun to lead a sanctified life. I doubt if we could even say we were moral. It would be better to describe such behavior which sees as its goal only restraint from sinful behavior as moralistic.

Luther describes the sanctified life, the life which springs from faith and is engaged in good works, in the second part of the commandments, with the exception of the first and sixth commandments, where the positive affirmation constitutes the entire explanation. The Christian is praying to God, praising Him, and giving Him thanks. He is gladly hearing the word of God and believing. While Luther does not say here that receiving the sacraments is a good work, it may be a safe conclusion, since for him the hearing of the Gospel and receiving the sacraments are essential to his theology and the hearing of the Gospel is a good work. The Christian accepts his place in society and loves those who are placed in authority over him. He helps his neighbor in financial and physical need.

He loves his spouse and speaks about the neighbor in the best possible terms, even when the evidence may suggest that other descriptions would be more fitting.

With these seemingly simple descriptions of the Christian life, Luther has moved beyond the first use of the law as curb against outward immoral behavior. He has moved beyond the second use of the law as a mirror to show how far we have fallen from God's good favor. In fact, in these positive affirmations, the old man is no longer in view. Theoretically in the moment of the Gospel the old man becomes non-existent, though as a threat to faith he is always active. The Christian lives his life as belonging to God alone. Negative prohibitions in the moment of the Gospel and of faith are no longer necessary, since the Christian is alive to Christ and dead to sin and the law. By faith Christ is now living in him and he is no longer living, but Christ is living in him. In this moment the separate articles of Christology, justification, and sanctification have indeed become one cloth and one substance. The Christ who died for sins has taken full possession of him. Loving God, praying to God continually, believing His word, and helping his neighbor in every possible situation of distress are those characteristics which distinguish the Christian from every other human being. The Christian or sanctified life is Christological, first of all because Christ lives in us by faith; secondly it is Christ who is doing these works in us; and thirdly these works are clearly recognizable as those which Christ alone can do and which He in fact does in us. Thus when we do theology, we can in a certain sense say we begin with Christology and then proceed to justification and then sanctification; but in another sense sanctification is the continued manifestation of Christology in the world. The Christian does the works of Christ. The Formula describes it in this way: "Fruits of the Spirit, however, are those works which the Spirit of God, who dwells in the believers, works through the regenerated, and which the regenerated perform in so far as they are reborn and do them as spontaneously as if they knew of no command, threat, or reward. In this sense the children of God live in the law and walk according to the law of God. In his epistles St. Paul calls it the law of Christ and the law of mind."¹⁶

In the explanation of the second article Luther speaks of believers in Jesus serving Him in “everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” Here Luther is seeing the broad expanse of the Christian life, beginning with baptism and stretching into eternity, a life which is not even disrupted by death. What the Christian does on earth, he will also do in the next life. But what is that activity which spans heaven and earth? This is described in the first three commandments: he fears, loves, trusts in God, prays to His name, and hears His word. This certainly describes what He does here on earth and what he is always doing in heaven. But how does the Christian serve Christ on earth in all righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. He loves his neighbor as Christ loves the neighbor. This is instigated by the Holy Spirit, not as an independent principle in the Trinity, but as the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit who brought conception to the Virgin Mary and was active in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, remains active in the life of the believer, not only bringing and preserving him in the true faith, but performing in and through him the good works which Christ did on earth. The Spirit-directed life is a completely Christological life, because the Spirit who was responsible for His conception is the same Spirit whom Christ sent into the world.

The third use of the law has been a controverted point, denied by some Lutherans. It is formally held by the Reformed but in such a way that it is defined in a different way. The deniers of the third use of the law are right in the sense that they say that Christians as Christians do not need the law in the sense of negative prohibition. As the Formula says, the regenerated do good works “as if they knew of no command, threat, or reward.” Christians as Christians, however, do not have to hear God say “hands off.” Rather their hands are doing those things which please God. This is true as far as it goes. The Gospel provides the motivation for good works, but without a third use of the law, we are left without a definition or description of what these good works should be. It simply will not do to understand the sanctified life or the third use of the law as simply refraining from sin. The third use of the law cannot be defined as the application of the law as negative prohibition to the life of the Christian. This is the first use of the law. Rather it must be positively defined and understood

as the performing of the good works of compassion and forgiveness. Article VI of the Formula of Concord would better be entitled "The Three Uses of the Law" and not simply "The Third Use of the Law." This article speaks of the law as a negative in its first two uses; however, in the third use of the law, there is strictly speaking no negative. It is true that the third use of the law never stands alone in the life of the Christian, but the third use of the law is the positive description of Christ and of what the Christian is doing in good works. The law with its prohibitions and threats can never be a motivation for Christian living. It can prevent us from gross sin, but it cannot produce good works. This only the Gospel can do. As the Formula says, only the Gospel creates good works in believers.¹⁷ The problem lies in the double meaning of the word law as both prohibition of immoral behavior and description of Christ-like behavior.¹⁸ This distinction is fundamental to Luther's understanding of the commandments and without it the most erroneous and bizarre interpretations of sanctification are bound to emerge. The law before the entrance of sin was a positive description of God's relationship to the world and in turn man's necessary response to God. The law was as much indicative as it was imperative. Man served God not out of any threats but because it belonged to his nature. In stepping outside of this relationship, the law took on a completely negative hue. "Thou shalt not" now described God's relationship to man. Man's sin and not God was responsible for seeing God as the enemy with His warnings of death for the sinner. In Christ the law has been satisfied. Its requirements have been fulfilled and its penalties suffered. The Christian in Christ is now free from the law. It is at this point that Luther begins his explanations of the commandments. The Christian is standing in Christ, in God's grace, but he is never far removed from the borderline of sin. When he sins, the law's condemnation comes down as severely on him as on anyone else. He prays to God that he may not curse, swear, and defile God's word. He also as a Christian sees God's law as positive affirmation in his life. The Formula is very careful to speak of only one law of God as an expression of His immutable will, which coerces the sinner and by which he does everything according to a willing spirit.¹⁹ Since he loves God, he loves the neighbor and his love of the neighbor is the proof

that he loves God. In a sense he has become like the original pair in Eden who knew God and His law in a positive light; however, such a return to the pristine purity of the primitive situation is not completely possible. Not only have the law as negative prohibition and sin entered the world, but the law has been satisfied in Christ and sin removed by His death. The Christian goes back to Eden in a new and different sense. He is not put back into the place of the first Adam and Eve, but he is made a new creature in the Second Adam, the man from heaven. He does good works which do conform to the original relationship of law as positive relationship between God and His rational creature, but more significantly he does good works which now, not only conform to, but are motivated and, in fact, performed by Christ Himself.

The law and Gospel which stood in antithetical relationship for the world in sin find their perfect harmony and unity first in Christ who has fulfilled the law and given us the Gospel, but also now in the sanctified life of the Christian. The good works which Adam could do before he sinned and could never do as a sinner, we can now do in Christ and as Christ did. This is Luther's understanding of good works in the Small Catechism and in doing this he showed us how Christology, justification, and sanctification belong together.

ENDNOTES

1. CTQ, IL, 1 (April-July 1985), pp. 181-197.
2. Melvin E. Dieter, "The Wesleyan Perspective," *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), p. 15.
3. *Five Views on Sanctification*, op. cit., p. 88.
4. *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 41.
5. Augsburg Confession VIII, 2. "Both the sacraments and the Word are effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ even if they are administered by evil men."
6. XXI, 1.

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7. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-9. Also see p. 243, n. 18, where Calvin, Charles Hodge, and Berkhof are listed as holding to a view which can be seen only as in agreement with Luther's.
 8. *Epitome VII*, 3.
 9. *FC, Epitome VI*, 4-5.
 10. *XX*, 26.
 11. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1987.
 12. *SD VI*, 1.
 13. *FC, SD, VI*, 17.
 14. E.g., *FC, Epitome VI*, 3. The *SD* speaks of the Old Adam as "a recalcitrant donkey [which]. . . must be coerced. . . frequently also with the club of punishments and miseries, until the flesh of sin is put off entirely and man is completely renewed in the resurrection."
 15. See, for example, Luther's hymn, "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands," where Christ is called the Pascal Lamb and bread of heaven.
 16. *FC, Epitome VI*, 5.
 17. *FC, SD, VI*, 10.
 18. The Formula is aware of the twofold understanding of the word "law" in the New Testament.
 19. *FC, SD, VI*, 16-17.