

# Concordia Theological Quarterly



Volume 80:3-4

July/October 2016

## *Table of Contents*

---

<b>Forty Years after Seminex: Reflections on Social and Theological Factors Leading to the Walkout</b> Lawrence R. Rast Jr. ....	195
<b><i>Satis est</i>: AC VII as the Hermeneutical Key to the Augsburg Confession</b> Albert B. Collver .....	217
<b>Slaves to God, Slaves to One Another: Testing an Idea Biblically</b> John G. Nordling .....	231
<b>Waiting and Waiters: Isaiah 30:18 in Light of the Motif of Human Waiting in Isaiah 8 and 25</b> Ryan M. Tietz .....	251
<b>Michael as Christ in the Lutheran Exegetical Tradition: An Analysis</b> Christian A. Preus .....	257
<b>Justification: Set Up Where It Ought Not to Be</b> David P. Scaer .....	269
<b>Culture and the Vocation of the Theologian</b> Roland Ziegler .....	287

<b>American Lutherans and the Problem of Pre-World War II Germany</b>	
John P. Hellwege, Jr.....	309
<b>Research Notes</b> .....	333
The <i>Gospel of Jesus' Wife</i> : An Obituary for a Forgery	
Apology of the Augsburg Confession Comparison Chart	
<b>Theological Observer</b> .....	341
Lutherans and the Lure of Eastern Orthodoxy	
Showing the Mercy of Christ as a Deaconess	
David's Son	
<b>Book Reviews</b> .....	365
<b>Books Received</b> .....	379
<b>Indices for Volume 80</b> .....	381

# Culture and the Vocation of the Theologian

Roland Ziegler

## I. Definitions

### *Which Culture?*

The term “culture” has a wide range of meaning. Originally coming from farming (hence the term “agriculture”), it has to do with working the soil, or in a metaphorical sense, working a human being—to cultivate certain skills and abilities, so that a cultured human being come about. This can be intellectual, artistic, or physical—think of the term “physical culture.” In this sense, culture is the process and the result of human effort on nature. A human being thus can have culture or he or she can be uncultured. Culture is thus a value term.<sup>1</sup> But the term “culture” obtained a wider meaning in anthropology. The antonym to “culture” is not “barbarism” or *Unkultur*, but “nature.” “Culture,” as an anthropological term, describes “everything that people have, think, and do as members of society.”<sup>2</sup> Nature is that which is given to man; culture is that what man makes out of it. In this sense, there is no man without culture. Culture is the world which man has created and in which he finds himself living. Thus, even the concept of “nature” as opposed to culture is a cultural concept. Culture is thus a basic feature of being human, it is also a distinct feature of being human. We do not use the term culture to describe what animals do. To be without culture would be to give up humanity, something man cannot do.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jaques Barzun uses the term in this sense: “In the present discussion I mean by culture the traditional things of the mind and spirit, the interests and abilities acquired by taking thought; in short, the effort that used to be called cultivation—cultivation of the self.” *The Culture We Deserve* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Such is the definition in a recent textbook of Cultural Anthropology: Susan Andreatta and Gary Ferraro, *Elements of Culture: An Applied Perspective* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2013), 34. Compare also the definition by Clifford Geertz (*Interpretation of Cultures* [New York: Basic Books, 1973], 89): “The culture concept to which I adhere . . . denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.”

Culture thus is a comprehensive concept that includes language, social and political structures, economic behavior, religion, the arts, intellectual pursuits, but also habits of eating, etc.<sup>3</sup> Culture gives structure to human life, and thus it determines certain things we do, and can serve man as a help so that there are things he does not have to decide every day. Instead of deciding everything anew every day, we simply do certain things because they are culturally expected, and thus are free to concentrate on important things without suffering a decision overload. Culture with its rules and expectations can also be a straitjacket, however, stifling personal freedom.

Culture, though, is not universally monolithic. First, cultures are regional. One can talk about cultures of different countries, or of different ethnic groups. Even different regions might have different cultures. The midwest United States might not have the same culture as the northeast or the west coast. Secondly, even in the same locale or in the same ethnic group there are different subcultures. Youth culture is an obvious example, which then can be even more subdivided, as an ethnological look at U.S. high schools shows.<sup>4</sup>

Then there is the fact that there is “high culture,” “pop culture,” and “folk culture.” Christianity has an ongoing relationship with “high culture” as the numerous past and present works of art and music show. Classical instruments have been included in the worship of the church, as has the language of classical music. This is also true, of course, of pop music in many churches. To favor the musical idiom of Bach over Andrew Lloyd-Webber is favoring one part of culture over another part of culture. Why and when one should favor one form of music over another is a question that will be differently answered according to the evaluative framework one has.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> It is not “natural,” for example, that there are certain foods that are eaten for breakfast, while not eaten for supper. It is cultural what kind of food is eaten for breakfast. Few Americans start the day with kippers or rice for breakfast.

<sup>4</sup> These groups can appear or disappear. Thus, a German newspaper recently declared the death of Emo. Dennis Sand, “Emo, die verhassteste aller Jugendkulturen, ist tot,” *Die Welt*, 12 December 2014, <http://www.welt.de/kultur/pop/article135309844/Emo-die-verhassteste-aller-Jugendkulturen-ist-tot.html>, accessed 20 January 2015.

<sup>5</sup> For a collection of viewpoints from formal liturgical worship to charismatic, see *Exploring the Worship Spectrum: Six Views* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004). The classical conservative Reformed view has a rather strict view of the “regulative principle of worship,” accusing Lutherans, who do believe that many things in worship fall under

Another such subculture is U.S. church culture: potlucks with Jello salad, cheese balls, and tuna casserole, for example; and as a sub-subculture, there is LCMS church culture, with celebrations of Reformation Day with brats and sauerkraut and enacting communal fellowship with mostly rather thin coffee after services.

Mainstream culture influences subcultures, and subcultures influence mainstream cultures. Thus, the idea of “a culture” or “the culture” can be problematic if it is taken as an opposition to the individual’s or the group’s position. In 1959, C.P. Snow, British physicist, novelist, and politician, gave his lecture “The Two Cultures,” deploring the fact that in Great Britain there were two cultures: the traditional literary humanist culture, and the scientific culture, each content in their realm, each ignorant of the other’s achievement. Forty years later, in 1999, Gertrude Himmelfarb published “One Nation, Two Cultures,” an analysis of contemporary U.S. culture. According to her, there are two camps: the one originating in the traditional virtues of American republicanism, the other in the counterculture of the 1960s. But in both cases, in spite of the stark dichotomies described, they can also be viewed as facets of one culture, either modern western culture or postmodern western culture. Thus, both are true: there is one culture of a social entity, and there are many cultures in that cultural entity.

What this disquisition on culture means for our topic is this: “culture” is not as monolithic as we may think. While there are certain things people of one country may share, there are also significant differences. Second, a person may be part of several subcultures. In modernity, there is on the one hand a homogenization of culture through mass media and communication, on the other hand a diversification and fragmentation in subcultures that are chosen, not inherited.<sup>6</sup> So, if one asks the question “Culture—friend or foe?” my question is: “Which culture?” Is Bach friend or foe? Is Jello salad friend or foe? Is the English language friend or foe?

---

the category of *adiaphora*, of deserting *sola scriptura* and of inconsistency: Brian M. Schwertley, *Sola Scriptura and the Regulative Principle of Worship* (Southfield, MI: Reformed Witness, n.d.), 47–60. But Lutherans, believing that many questions concerning the form of worship are not divinely mandated, have to first discuss what a true *adiaphoron* is and then apply the test of FC SD X 9–10 to these true *adiaphora*.

<sup>6</sup> The idea, for example, that a young family develops its own traditions would baffle, I surmise, a person from a truly traditional culture. Tradition is that which is handed down, in which one finds oneself *volens nolens*, not that which one invents.

Any discussion of culture has to be mindful of the “radically pluralist world” in which we live.<sup>7</sup>

### *Church and Culture*

We can see how church culture is influenced by the surrounding culture: government flags in the sanctuary are a very U.S. thing. Writing mission statements and vision statements, plus an identity statement is also something that is cultural, just as putting musical notation in hymnals, and especially four part harmonies in the hymnal, is part of the American church culture, as is the end of the parsonage in many congregations, because there has been an IRS ruling that exempts cash housing allowance for the pastor from income tax.<sup>8</sup> Another example would be the fact that parishes of the LCMS are not geographically defined (i.e., one is not automatically a member of a certain congregation because of one’s place of residence, but rather because of one’s choice, especially in urban areas). Lutheran congregations in the southern United States were once segregated—a rather visible cultural influence—and integration happened because of cultural shifts. The influence of culture on churches is complex and unavoidable. Even the Amish are not simply living in eighteenth century Swiss culture. The task of churches is therefore neither to avoid present culture nor to retreat in some supposedly unchanging church culture, since both are impossible. It is rather a reflected relationship with culture. This is more difficult than a radical “yes” or “no” to the culture in which we live. Churches will always be enculturated. Otherwise one would have to say that to be a Christian and to be an American, for example, are mutually exclusive. In modern societies that are religiously pluralistic, churches also will not simply dominate culture—not to speak of something like a “Christian culture,” which is impossible anyway. Christianity, taken broadly, has of course influenced society. True Christianity, known here on earth as Lutheranism, has not been a dominant cultural force in any society since at least the Enlightenment. And even then, one does not have “a Christian culture,” because not everything in a culture is a direct outflow of Christianity. There is, for examples, no Christian food culture, even though books like *What Would Jesus Eat* are published. But the reason lies deeper than the lack of dietary laws in Christianity. As Gene Veith states: “There can be no such thing as a Christian culture as such,

---

<sup>7</sup> J. Wenzel van Huysteen, “Tradition and the Task of Theology,” *Theology Today* 55 (1998/1999), 213.

<sup>8</sup> The German tax code does not allow such an exemption, and thus the parsonage is still an almost universal feature of church life.

because Christianity comes from faith in the Gospel, not works of the law."<sup>9</sup>

### *Culture and the Bible*

"Culture" is an anthropological term, not a theological one. What concept in Scripture would correspond to "culture"? As a contrast to "nature," there is no real term. There is *κόσμος* in the New Testament.<sup>10</sup> *Κόσμος* can mean the whole creation, or it can mean humanity (cf. Matt 5:14; 13:38; 18:7; 2 Pet 2:5; 3:6; 1 Cor 4:13). It also can be opposed to God: the *κόσμος* is that which is opposed to God and that which is reconciled in Christ, that is, sinful humanity (1 Cor 1:20–21; Rom 3:19; 2 Cor 5:19). *Κόσμος* can also be the opposition to the Christian (Col 2:20). Paul is crucified to the "world" (Gal 6:14). Christians are to be undefiled by the world (Jas 1:27). In the Johannine corpus, this dialectical understanding of Christians and "world" is summarized in the formula: Christians are in the world, but not from the world (John 17:11, 14). *Κόσμος* thus does not mean what culture expresses. If *κόσμος* and "culture" are taken as synonyms, then the result is that one puts Christ against culture, which means actually "Christ against the majority culture," and one becomes blind to the fact that one cannot be rid of culture and also that the majority culture is not simply sinful. We are not redeemed from culture—the most obvious point is that Christians do not have a language of their own, but that they use the vernacular. They might have a sociolect, and languages might change due to the influence of Christianity, but unlike in Islam or in Judaism, there is no specific holy language that is privileged against all other languages. Additionally, the world of culture is also the world of the orders of creation: the government and family, which are corrupted by sin, but not simply sinful. Seeing government and family as part of the *κόσμος* (the world opposed to God) leads to a form of asceticism that marred so much of church history.

---

<sup>9</sup> Gene Edward Veith, "Two Kingdoms Under One King: Towards a Lutheran Approach to Culture," in *Christ and Culture in Dialogue*, ed. by Angus Menuge (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 135.

<sup>10</sup> There is no equivalent to *kosmos* in the OT. Hermann Sasse, "*κόσμος*," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, vol. 3 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1938), 867–896, here at 880, line 17.

*The Vocation of the Theologian*

Theology is the God-given aptitude to teach—so goes the definition of Lutheran Orthodoxy.<sup>11</sup> A theologian is a teacher of the faith, and as such he should know two things: what he is to teach and whom he is to teach. What he has to teach, namely the Christian faith, requires the ability first to interpret the Scriptures, and second to understand the doctrines of the Christian faith in their historically developed articulation. This understanding of the vocation of the theologian will suffice for the present.

*Their Interrelation*

*The “What” of Faith.* Culture comes into the theological enterprise already at the beginning: the interpretation of Scripture is done in different cultural settings differently. A history of biblical interpretation will show that there is an interaction between how Scripture is interpreted and general trends in hermeneutics and literary criticism, besides the obvious fact that theology also has had a cultural influence. Not by accident do the names of Flacius and Schleiermacher—two theologians!—loom large in the modern history of hermeneutical thinking. In recent times, for example, discussions about reader-response criticism have entered the exegetical discussions. Reader-response criticism has its origin in literary studies. Whether such an influence from literary criticism is beneficial or not cannot be decided by asking the genetic question, meaning one cannot simply say that since it comes from outside our theological world, therefore it is wrong. After all, literary criticism can help us to be sensitive to the different genres in the Bible. Rather, such a concept has to be evaluated on its own merits.

The challenge for the theologian is thus to reflect on his preconceived notions and to reflect on which hermeneutical approach is the most appropriate to Scripture. The early Missouri Synod saw the problem here when it emphasized that the rules for interpreting the Scriptures must be found in Scripture, taking up the claim of the clarity and sufficiency of Scripture from the time of the Reformation.<sup>12</sup>

What this and other examples show is that culture comes into play in the very heart of the theological enterprise, not simply later when the

---

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, *American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, ed. David W. Loy, trans. Christian C. Tiews (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), ch. 1, art. 1, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> See Charles Philip Schaum, “Biblical Hermeneutics in the Early Missouri Synod” (STM Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2008).



question is asked: “to whom are we talking?” Theology is not done in a cultureless environment, nor is it done in such a way that is completely uninfluenced by culture. This is, like all historical conditions, much more obvious in hindsight than when we reflect on our own situation. To just use one example: Lutheran Orthodoxy (ca. 1580–1700) adopted to a great extent an Aristotelian philosophy. In its analysis of dogmatic topics, it used the distinction between substance and accident, form and matter, and the scheme of the four causes.<sup>13</sup> Most of us do not do theology like that anymore, because Aristotelianism no longer works as a common scientific or scholarly approach. The big question here is if such an adoption of a certain methodology is neutral in respect to content or if it in some sense distorts content. But even the most fervent friends of Lutheran scholasticism might concede that it perhaps prevents one from saying and seeing everything—which is true for any theological unfolding of the teaching of Scripture.

To sum up: the question the theologian has to face is, “In what way has the articulation of the Christian faith been influenced by present or past cultures in such a way that the biblical message has either been faithfully articulated or been distorted?” To ask this question presumes of course that somehow we can evaluate our culture and others versus the biblical text, instead of being completely culturally imprisoned. The task of the theologian in regard to culture is thus one of critical evaluation of church tradition in the light of Holy Scripture and, where appropriate, to show against unjustified attacks and modern heresies the scriptural nature of the church’s teaching.

*To Whom the Faith is Taught.* Regarding the people to whom the faith is taught, the aspect of culture is obvious and undisputed. Non-Christians are part of their culture, a culture that as a majority culture might be influenced to certain degree by Christianity, as is the case in western cultures, or not, as is the case of, for example, India. Certain aspects of the faith have to be stressed in one culture that are not an issue in another. Ancestor worship is an important topic in many traditional Asian cultures; it is not an issue in majority North American culture. Thus, the reflection on culture, what cultural aspects have to be taken into account in teaching

---

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Johann Gerhard, “Method of Theological Study,” part 2, section 2, in *On Interpreting Sacred Scripture and Method of Theological Study*, Theological Commonplaces I–II (St. Louis: Concordia, forthcoming).

the faith and also the question in what way Christianity changes culture, are standard missiological topics.<sup>14</sup>

The present project to revise the synodical catechism is a documentation that catechesis has to change with the times if it wants to address the current situation. And what else is the “current situation” but a subset of culture? All the favorite controversial topics among Missourians have to do with culture: the debate on the roles of men and women in the church are to great extent caused by changing sociological facts. Worship styles always reflect culture, since there is no timeless expression of worship, and thus the question is not whether cultural expressions may be assimilated into worship, but rather which ones and why. The debates on church fellowship, too, have cultural dimensions: decreased institutional loyalty and identification with denominations, greater mobility, and the weakening of the importance of tradition in the lives of people make the teaching on closed communion (as it is the official position of the Missouri Synod), though never popular, increasingly unpopular and increasingly more difficult to communicate.

Thus, we must understand the present culture or cultures in order to understand also what must be emphasized, and in order to understand the challenges we face presently with regard to teaching the full counsel of God. Only in this way can we see where we are in danger of being silent due to cultural pressures. These are the places and times in which we should speak.

## II. Modernity and Postmodernity

One of the grand narratives of our time is the claim that there is a change from modernity to postmodernity.<sup>15</sup> An epochal shift would certainly be of interest to any theologian. The topic is, I admit, not quite as fashionable as it was some time ago. Things seem to have cooled down a bit, after a time where the excitement about the perils of postmodernity caused many a conservative pundit to proclaim dire warnings. Nevertheless, in a recent newsletter of the “National Association of Evan-

---

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), especially 115–235. For an example how the reflection on culture influences missionary strategy, cf. Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Mission from the Cross: The Lutheran Theology of Mission* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 210–213.

<sup>15</sup> That there is such a change is denied by William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 18: “The idea that we live in a postmodern culture is a myth. In fact, a postmodern culture is an impossibility; it would be utterly unliveable.”

gelicals," seven presidents of seminaries articulated their "Top Theological Issues for Seminaries." Three mentioned postmodernism as one of their concerns, two more pluralism, a topic closely associated with post-modernism.<sup>16</sup>

One of the first pundits to criticize the ideas of postmodernism was Allan Bloom and his *The Closing of the American Mind*, published in 1987.<sup>17</sup> Bloom, who was in his private life as a homosexual non-religious person maybe not the poster boy for conservative values, gave a spirited defence of modernity and its belief in universal values against the emphasis on distinct cultures and their right to define right and wrong intraculturally, not interculturally. His heroes were the thinkers of the Enlightenment. In 1994, Gene Veith published a book on postmodernism, and later on an entire cottage industry sprang up among conservative evangelicals providing ammunition in this latest theater of the culture wars. Gertrud Himmelfarb denounced postmodernism in 1999 in her book *One Nation, Two Cultures* as a relativistic manifestation of the other culture in America.<sup>18</sup> But there was and is also the "evangelical left" that did not see post-modernism as the present incarnation of the old evil foe, but rather as an ally to escape the prison of modernity.<sup>19</sup>

The discussion on postmodernism was not only an academic one. The "Emergent Church" is a movement of those in evangelicalism that favored a positive view of the postmodern condition. Even though this movement, too, might have crested, and the next new thing is in the offing, the Emer-

---

<sup>16</sup> "Top Theological Issues for Seminaries," *Insight* (Winter 2014/15), <http://www.nae.net/resources/nae-newsletter/winter-201415/1219-top-theological-issues-for-seminaries>, accessed 20 January 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987). Bloom does not use the language of "postmodern."

<sup>18</sup> "The reluctance to be judgmental pervades all aspects of life. In the university, it takes the form of postmodernism. In scholarly books and journals, 'truth,' 'objectivity,' 'knowledge,' even 'reality,' commonly appear ensconced within quotation marks, testifying of the ironic connotation of such quaint words. If these concepts are dubious, moral judgments are still more so. The language of 'right' and 'wrong,' 'virtue' and 'vice,' are made to seem as archaic as the language of 'truth' and 'objectivity,' 'knowledge' and 'reality.'" Gertrud Himmelfarb, *One Nation, Two Cultures* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 122.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Carl Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004). For a critique, cf. Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997).

gent Church is an interesting example of a very self-conscious embrace of cultural change.<sup>20</sup> Postmodernism was not only simply seen as an inevitable cultural shift one has to accommodate if one does not want to go out of business, but rather as a liberation to a more genuine and biblical form of Christianity.

For clarification's sake, let us narrow down the use of "modern" and "postmodern" to the history of philosophy here. In other areas, these terms mean different things. In literature, for example, modernism starts around World War I and ends somewhere around 1970. Similarly in architecture: modernist architecture is a purely twentieth century phenomenon. Philosophically, though, the modern age starts with Descartes (d. 1650), one of the fathers of postmodernity is Nietzsche (d. 1900). There are significant differences in time, and of course even more so in definitions of what "modern" means in each of these contexts.

### *Modernity*

But before we go to postmodernity, let us first talk about modernity. Modernity is philosophically characterized by the turn to the individual, the preeminence of epistemology, and the belief in the powers of reason informed by experience. Science becomes the dominant paradigm: the pursuit of knowledge for the benefit of humanity by the manipulation of the environment. And modernity has been extremely successful in that. There are, of course, gainsayers. Already in the eighteenth century, the *siècle de la lumière*, Jean Jacques Rousseau saw civilization as the problem, not the solution.<sup>21</sup> But overall, modernity with clean water and indoor plumbing, medical progress, greater life expectancy, and better living through chemistry has been a success story—or so many would say. It has, though, not been an unmitigated success story for Christianity. Certainly, modernity as the "age of exploration" (from a western perspective) and the age of missions brought Christianity to the ends of the earth. But in its traditional strongholds, modernity has been a time of crisis for Christianity. In the '50s and '60s of the last century, the sociological theory of secularization was quite popular. It stated, that with the advance of

---

<sup>20</sup> On the emergent church, see Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones, eds., *An Emergent Manifest of Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007). On the interaction of the emergent church with postmodernism, see Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> For the thesis that the critique of culture reached a new quality against the enlightenment and its view of progress, see Georg Bollenbeck, *Eine Geschichte der Kulturkritik* (München: C. H. Beck, 2007).

modernity, in a society that is built on technology and whose epistemological ideal are the natural sciences, religion will wither away. Europe seemed to be the prime case study for this tendency, whereas the U.S. seemed to lag behind.

But this thesis has been dismissed by one of its early proponents, the sociologist Peter L. Berger.<sup>22</sup> Berger does maintain, though, that modernity brings significant sociological consequences for religion. In a later essay he states: "Modernity does not necessarily secularize; however, probably necessarily, it does pluralize."<sup>23</sup> In pre-modern times, people lived in rather homogenous societies with "a very high degree of consensus on basic cognitive and normative assumptions."<sup>24</sup> There were, for sure, dissenters, but for the majority their beliefs were taken for granted and hardly questioned. Modernity has increased the pluralization or pluralism, which Berger defines thus: "pluralism is a situation in which different ethnic or religious groups co-exist under conditions of civic peace and interact with each other socially."<sup>25</sup> The reasons are urbanization that brings very diverse people together, general mobility, and mass literacy that spreads the "knowledge of other cultures and ways of life to numerous people."<sup>26</sup> This pluralization accelerates through modern communication and its effect is uncertainty. "Pluralism relativizes. It does so both institutionally and in the consciousness of individuals."<sup>27</sup> For sure, there is a certain consensus necessary in any society. "No society can

---

<sup>22</sup> He wrote in 1999: "My point is that the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. The world today, with some exceptions to which I will come presently, is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. . . . To be sure, modernization has had some secularizing effects, more in some places than in others, But it has also provoked powerful movements of counter-secularization. Also, secularization on the societal level is not necessarily linked to secularization on the level of individual consciousness. Certain religious institutions have lost power and influence in many societies, but both old and new religious beliefs and practices have nevertheless continued in the lives of the individuals, sometimes taking new institutional forms and sometimes leading to great explosions of religious fervor." Peter L. Berger, "The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview," in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 2-3.

<sup>23</sup> Peter L. Berger, "Introduction," in *Between Relativism and Fundamentalism: Religious Resources for a Middle Position* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2010), 3.

<sup>24</sup> Berger, "Introduction," 3.

<sup>25</sup> Berger, "Introduction," 4 (emphasis deleted).

<sup>26</sup> Berger, "Introduction," 5.

<sup>27</sup> Berger, "Introduction," 5.

tolerate a pluralism of norms concerning intracommunity violence.”<sup>28</sup> But one of the consequences for religion is that churches become “voluntary associations.” This is true even for the remnants of state churches in Europe. The Church of England or the Church of Scotland are not disestablished, but nevertheless it is a matter of personal choice if one belongs to the Church of Scotland or the Episcopal Church of Scotland. This is true even more so here in the States. People have “religious preferences.” They go “church shopping.” So, the old distinction between “free church” and “state church” loses its meaning.<sup>29</sup>

### *Characteristics of Postmodernism*

What are characteristics of postmodernism? First, it is a critique of certain features of modernity. Jean-François Lyotard, who wrote “The Condition of Postmodernity,” described it as a distrust of metanarratives.<sup>30</sup> Metanarratives are comprehensive systems of the world that give an explanation of everything and rest on universal principles. This universalism is characteristic of modernity, as is its foundationalism. Postmodernism distrusts both: that there exists one rationality, one way that can be proven to be true, whereas all others are deemed either primitive, irrational, or insane. The concept of foundationalism, that there are certain beliefs indubitable and certain to all, from which all other beliefs receive their justification, is also rejected.

Second, since language is not simply a picture of the world, but rather a form of life (Wittgenstein), our thinking cannot be neatly divided between facts “out there” and a linguistic form that merely reflects them, according to postmodernism. Rather, all facts are interpreted facts. Lan-

---

<sup>28</sup> Berger, “Introduction,” 5.

<sup>29</sup> Christianity can either embrace this pluralism and integrate it and thus relativize itself, or it can react against it and try to recreate a pre-modern environment—the project of fundamentalism. Fundamentalism “is the attempt to restore or create anew a taken-for-granted body of beliefs and values”: Berger, “Introduction,” 7. This is not simply a repositioning, since in fundamentalism there is a certain aggressiveness against the pluralistic world that must be either converted, shunned, or eliminated. Berger, of course, does not want to go either way but projects a way “between relativism and fundamentalism,” as the title of the book says. Berger does not think that postmodernism with its farewell to the project of modernity and its relativistic tendencies is a solution either.

<sup>30</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 10 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward meta-narrative.”

guage determines how man sees the world, and since there is not one universal language, different “language games” mean different perceptions of the world that are not reducible to one ruling “language game.”

Third, since languages are never private, but communal, the individual sees the world not as an isolated individual, but rather as a part of a community. Indeed, the individual only exists as part of the community. This is the end of the Cartesian individual that finds truth and certainty in solitary reflection.

### III. Case Studies

#### *Foundationalism*

In this section I want to look at one aspect of postmodern theology: to bid farewell to a foundationalist theology and establish—no, “establish” sounds too much like a foundationalist term—so, let’s rather say, develop a non-foundationalist theology.

What is Foundationalism? First, we have to see again what the negative foil is. What is meant by foundationalism? Foundationalism sees knowledge like a building: Knowledge—for the moment let us use the definition that knowledge consists of justified true beliefs—starts with the foundation: beliefs that are fundamental or basic. All other beliefs are derived from these foundational or basic beliefs. In classical foundationalism, these fundamental beliefs are, in the summary of Alvin Plantinga, “for a person S, if and only if it is self-evident for S, or incorrigible for S, or evident to the senses for S.”<sup>31</sup> Or, to put it even more comprehensively: “A belief is acceptable for a person if (and only if) it is either properly basic (i.e. self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the sense for that person), or believed on the evidential basis of propositions that are acceptable and that support it deductively, inductively, or abductively.”<sup>32</sup>

*What is the Problem with Foundationalism Philosophically?* Classical foundationalism has come under attack philosophically. Alvin Plantinga, for example, has pointed out that classical foundationalism is self-referentially incoherent, because it is not a basic belief itself nor are there good arguments for it as a statement derived from basic beliefs.<sup>33</sup> Additionally,

---

<sup>31</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 84.

<sup>32</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 84–85.

<sup>33</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 94–97.

many beliefs we hold do not conform to classical foundationalism, for example, memory beliefs: what you ate for breakfast this morning.

There are, nevertheless, different forms of foundationalism that avoid these defeaters and are put forth by philosophers and theologians. This then forms a moderate foundationalism that still believes in universal criteria and a view of knowledge that is the same for all of humanity, if all things go right.

The objections of postmodern theologians against foundationalism, though, go in a different direction. It is necessary for a foundationalist epistemology that there are things that present themselves, that there is something like primal beliefs, beliefs in which we simply perceive (or *are appeared to*).<sup>34</sup> Postmodern theologians reject this view. There is no such thing as pure experience, there is no such thing as brute fact, which could serve as a starting point to erect the house of knowledge. Since there is no thinking outside of language and language is not some kind of neutral set of labels that we put on things as they are but a way of life, all experience is already theory-laden. There is no such thing as merely seeing, but rather there is always only “seeing as.” I see the world in the way my language enables me to see the world, but also in the way my language permits me see the world. Here the philosophy of language bears directly on epistemology. As Stanley Grenz and John R. Franke put it: “The simple fact is, we do not inhabit the ‘world-in-itself’; instead, we live in a linguistic world of our own making. As Berger and Luckmann note, human reality is ‘socially constructed reality’.”<sup>35</sup> This view becomes important later for the understanding of what theology is.

This can be seen as a radicalized form of Kantianism. For Kant, the mind does not simply perceive the world as it is. The mind is not some kind of mirror. Rather, the mind shapes what we perceive. But for Kant, all men have the same kind of mind, and thus the way men perceive the world is identical. Now, though, because there is no such universally structured mind, or “transcendental ego,” there is not just one way to see the world; thus also there are no such universally accepted basic beliefs.

---

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Roderick M. Chisholm, *The Foundations of Knowing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 15-18.

<sup>35</sup> Stanley Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 53. The quote is from Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1968), 68.



Additionally, since there is not one language common to all of humanity in time or space, there is not just one way to see the world. People of different languages see the world differently and there is no universal way to adjudicate between them. There is no possibility to argue that one language is better than another to depict the world, for how would one decide that? One would have to stand outside the languages and have a direct access to reality without language—something that is impossible.

This does not mean that there is no reality outside of language. Post-foundationalists are not idealists who believe that there is only language, only mind. Grenz and Franke state: “At the same time, viewed from a Christian perspective, there is a certain ‘objectivity’ to the world. But this objectivity is not that of a static reality existing outside of and coterminally with our socially and linguistically constructed reality; it is not the objectivity of what some might call ‘the world as it is.’ Rather, seen through the lens of the gospel, this objectivity is the objectivity of the world as God wills it to be.”<sup>36</sup>

Parallel with this rejection of basic beliefs that are based on pure perception goes also a rejection of the correspondence theory of truth, most often associated with foundationalism. According to the correspondence theory of truth, a statement is true if and only if it corresponds to the state of affairs to which it refers. The statement “There is snow on the ground” is true if and only if there is snow on the ground. Undergirding such an understanding of truth is obviously a referential understanding of language. But if one rejects this, one also has to reject the correspondence theory of truth. With the understanding of language as a tool comes either an understanding of truth as coherence (hence the preference for the talk of the web of belief) or a pragmatic understanding of truth, in the provocative formulation of Richard Rorty: “Truth is that with which my peers let me get away.”<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology*, 53.

<sup>37</sup> This is the way the oral tradition transformed what Rorty had actually written: “For Philosophers like Chisholm and Bergmann, such explanations *must* be attempted if the realism of common sense is to be preserved. The aim of all such explanations is to make truth something more than what Dewey called ‘warranted assertability’: more than what our peers will, *ceteris paribus*, let us get way with saying,” Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 175–176. For a critique of this view, cf. Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 429–35. For a defense from a postmodern Christian point of view, cf. James K. A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Relativism?: Community, Contingency, and Creaturehood* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 73–114.

*What is the Problem with Foundationalism Theologically?* Postfoundationalist theologians first simply think that foundationalism is philosophically so discredited, that holding on to it is not an option. But they do not bewail the demise of foundationalism, since it had a hold on theology with negative consequences. Once the foundationalist outline of knowledge is accepted, true knowledge in theology has to follow the foundationalist scheme. It either is based on a universal, religious, *a priori*, or a universal religious experience—this is the way Schleiermacher went, and later on Rahner and others; or it has to be based on evidence. The way of evidence can be either liberal or conservative, depending on how much reliable evidence one has found. The conservative way was to build theology on the Bible, but since belief in the Bible was no longer plausible as a basic belief (if it ever was), there now had to be reasons why one trusted the Bible: one had to go to the epistemic bedrock, so to speak, namely “historical facts.” One way to do it is the sensory experience of the witnesses of the resurrection, then from the fact of the resurrection to the reliability of everything Jesus says, and so on. Belief in what the Bible says is derived from certain beliefs about history. In a more liberal way, the foundation is the person of Jesus. What the person of Jesus is like and what he said has to be found out with the tools of historical scholarship—since this is the method to find out the facts about history—and these historical facts are the bedrock of Christianity. Any person who is both of good will and not insane could thus see the truth of Christianity.

Postfoundationalists decry this approach as naïve and Pelagian. It is naïve, because there is no such thing as a “fact” that simply can be seen, nor are there universal rules for what is accepted as truth. It is Pelagian because it assumes that a person can obtain Christian beliefs by the exercise of his noetic abilities.

*What Does a Non-Foundational Theology Look Like?* From the assertion that language is not simply a picture of the world but that it forms our reality, it follows that Christianity in its language also creates a world: the world according to God. “As the community of Christ, we have a divinely given mandate: to be participants in God’s own will for creation, a world in which everything finds its connectedness in Jesus Christ (Col 1:17) who is the *Logos*, the ordering principle of the cosmos as God intends it to be. This mandate has a strongly linguistic dimension. We participate with God as we, through the constructive power of language, create a world that links our present with the divine future, or, should we say, as the Holy

Spirit creates such a world in, among, and through us."<sup>38</sup> The Holy Spirit is thought to do this through the "biblical narrative."

Truth, according to this approach, means to follow the inherent logic of the system. That is, effectively a belief is either true because it coheres with other beliefs, or it is true because it works (pragmatic). Thus, the sentence "Christ is Lord" is true if and only if it shapes the life of believers. Without believers it would make no sense to talk about Christ being Lord.<sup>39</sup>

But if truth is not a correspondence to some objective reality outside of language, why should any non-Christian believe Christianity to be true? For Grenz and Franke there can be an argument: a view of the world and of God that is based on a social understanding of the Trinity "provides the best transcendent basis for the human ideal of life-in-relationship, for it looks to the divine life as a plurality-in-unity as the basis for understanding what it means to be human persons-in-community."<sup>40</sup> Thus, they use communitarian and pragmatic thought to evaluate the truth of Christianity: Christianity is true because it is the basis for the desired outcome. What is assumed is that this desired outcome is somehow a consensus among those who ask. This is of course a difficulty: is there a common interest, a common search for the good community? And if the answer is yes, does this become somehow the new foundation? From a non-foundationalist point, one could probably only say that many in our time will agree that this is a desirable goal.

*Example: Scripture.* Rather than going through theological *loci* to see what is suggested as postfoundational, one example will suffice, staying with that which moderns might think is foundational: Scripture.

Modernity deformed the understanding in two ways, according to the postfoundationalist narrative. Liberals, building theology on experience, saw Scripture no longer in its entirety as authoritative. Scripture reflected authentic religious experience in the language of its authors, though not in all things. Scripture had to be evaluated. In exegesis, the search was what was behind the text, most prominently of course in the case of historical-critical exegesis.<sup>41</sup> The conservative position was not simply the premod-

---

<sup>38</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology*, 53.

<sup>39</sup> Philip D. Kenneson, "There's No Such Thing as Objective Truth, and It's a Good Thing," *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, ed. Timothy R. Philipps and Dennis L. Ockholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 168.

<sup>40</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology*, 54.

<sup>41</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology*, 59–60.

ern position, but also a thoroughly modern position, differing from the liberal view only in what the foundation was, not in the structure of theological thinking.<sup>42</sup> Thus the conservative commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture is not a traditional position: “The foundationalist requirement of indubitability or incorrigibility also accounts for the modern invention of the doctrine of scriptural inerrancy.”<sup>43</sup> There is, however, a difference between liberals and conservatives: conservatives were more interested in history as the anchor of the truthfulness of the text, whereas liberals were interested in the experience encoded in the text, not so much in the text as historical account.<sup>44</sup> Conservatives were also interested in doctrine as proposition and therefore the Bible as a source for doctrine or propositions. This meant that the Bible was primarily seen as a “storehouse of theological facts.” In its effort to systematize the biblical content, the effect was not to exalt Scripture, but to replace it through a doctrinal system. “Why should the sincere believer continue to read the Bible when biblical truth—correct doctrine—is more readily at hand in the latest systematic compilation offered by the skilled theologian?”<sup>45</sup> Grenz and Franke thus accuse conservative theologians of not leaving the text in authority, but the true authority was the doctrinal system.

Thus, postfoundationalist theology claims nothing less than bringing back the Bible from the prison of modernity to its rightful place in the church, as a text through which the Spirit “performs the perlocutionary act of fashioning ‘world’ through the illocutionary act of speaking through Scripture, that is, through appropriating the biblical text. This world-constructing occurs as the Spirit creates a community of persons who live

---

<sup>42</sup> “I suggest, however, that the conservative tradition is not a holdover from pre-modern thought, but is rather a development parallel to the modern liberal tradition.” Nancey Murphy, “Philosophical Resources for Postmodern Evangelical Theology,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* (1996), 184–205; 184.

<sup>43</sup> Nancey Murphy, “Philosophical Resources,” 187.

<sup>44</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology*, 60–61: “Eventually liberal scholars were joined in the critical task by recruits of a more conservative persuasion, who differed with their liberal colleagues only in degree, not in substance. These folks simply had a higher estimation of the amount of ‘real history’ that was reflected in the biblical documents. Like the quest for the religious experiences that lay under the text, the attempts to reconstruct the underlying history treated the Bible as a problem rather than a solution. As a result, the voice of scripture was stifled as the Bible became the means to discover something more interesting than the text itself. In short, conservative biblical scholars often joined cause methodologically with their liberal colleagues, while differing radically with them over the results of that method.”

<sup>45</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology*, 63.

out the paradigmatic narrative of the Bible, that is, who view all of life through the interpretive framework the text discloses.<sup>46</sup> In this, the text “‘absorbs’ the world of the reader.”<sup>47</sup>

The Bible is thus considered authoritative because the Spirit speaks through it to the church. “As Christians we acknowledge the Bible as scripture in that the sovereign Spirit has bound authoritative, divine speaking to this text. We believe that the Spirit has chosen, now chooses, and will continue to choose to speak with authority through the biblical text.”<sup>48</sup> This emphasis on the present speaking of the Spirit through the Bible means, though, that *what* the Spirit is saying now to the church is more than the meaning of the text as it is historically given.<sup>49</sup>

In regard to inerrancy, John Franke will on the one hand affirm the concept as a second order doctrine that “serves to preserve the dynamic plurality contained in the texts of Scripture by ensuring that no portion of the biblical narrative can properly be disregarded or eclipsed because it is perceived as failing to conform to a larger pattern of systematic unity.”<sup>50</sup> He rejects, though, that the Scriptures are doctrinally one: “When notions of inerrancy are connected with the idea of absolute truth as a single system of doctrine revealed by God that can be grasped by human beings, the result is conflict and colonization.”<sup>51</sup> Rather, “the notion of biblical inerrancy, wed to a pluralist notion of truth, functions to ensure that orthodox, biblical faith will be understood not as an entirely coherent, single, universal, and systematic entity but rather as an open and flexible tradition that allows for the witness and testimony of plural perspectives,

---

<sup>46</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology*, 84.

<sup>47</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology*, 89, using George Lindbeck.

<sup>48</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology*, 65.

<sup>49</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology*, 74: “The Spirit’s illocutionary act of appropriation does not come independently of what classical interpretation called ‘the original meaning of the text.’ Consequently, we must draw from careful exegesis to seek to understand this ‘original meaning,’ that is, to determine ‘what the author said’ (to quote Wolterstorff’s designation). At the same time, the Spirit’s address is not bound up simply and totally with the text’s supposed internal meaning. . . . The author’s intention has been ‘distanced’ from the meanings of the work, although the ways in which the text is structured shape the meanings the reader discerns in the text.”

<sup>50</sup> John R. Franke, “Recasting Inerrancy: The Bible as Witness to Missional Plurality,” in *Five Views on Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 276.

<sup>51</sup> Franke, “Recasting Inerrancy,” 278.

practices, and experiences as the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ is incarnated in the witness of communities from every tribe, nation, and ethnicity."<sup>52</sup>

#### IV. Postfoundationalism as a Challenge for Lutheran Theology

To proclaim the end of foundationalism has its allure. No longer is there a need to show that Christianity is not irrational, not ahistorical, since there are no universally acceptable canons of rationality or historicity. Rather, the playing field is levelled: everybody, if scientist, Christian, proponent of queer theory, are in the same boat; they tell stories that try to make sense of the world, that try to help people to cope with "things' obduracy," to use Richard Rorty's phrase.<sup>53</sup>

Postfoundationalism is first and foremost a philosophical position. As such it must be philosophically evaluated, a task far too large for this essay. Thus, I only want to raise some theological questions to those who think that postfoundationalist philosophy is not only compatible, but also liberating for Christian theology. The point here is not to make an argument for philosophical foundationalism, be it classic or modified. It is obvious that theology has problems with classical foundationalism (which is now defunct). If it also has difficulties with a modified foundationalism as it is proposed by Alvin Plantinga, for example, seems much less obvious.<sup>54</sup>

Language certainly does more than refer, and to reduce language to propositions would be a great misunderstanding. But even if one accepts that language works as a tool, is one of its uses not to picture the world? Without any referential use of language, how do we understand the phrase

---

<sup>52</sup> Franke, "Recasting Inerrancy," 277.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

<sup>54</sup> For further reading, see *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005); R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian: The Emerging Effects of Postmodernism in the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005); Stewart E. Kelly, *Truth Considered and Applied: Examining Postmodernism, History, and Christian Faith* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2011). For some of the philosophical issues, see R. Scott Smith, *Virtue Ethics and Moral Knowledge: Philosophy of Language after MacIntyre and Hauerwas* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003); Roger Trigg, *Reason and Commitment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Roger Trigg, *Understanding Social Science: A Philosophical Introduction to the Social Sciences*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001); Paul A. Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

in AC I: "Our Churches, with common consent, do teach that the decree of the Council of Nicaea concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons, is true and to be believed without any doubting; that is to say, there is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God"<sup>55</sup> I read this as affirming that when we say that God is triune, we are referring, we are making an ontological statement, we are saying what God is like, we are not just telling people how they should talk about God or that this is the best way to cope with the obduracy of things.

Second, a postfoundationalist view of Scripture focusses on the performative power of Scripture to the detriment of its informative power. The Scripture is more than information about God, certainly, and to reduce it to propositions to believe is an impoverished view of Scripture. Lutherans, in viewing the content of Scripture as Law and Gospel, have always seen the primary purpose of Scripture to convict man of sin and comfort the conscience. But in preaching and teaching there is also a cognitive aspect. I would strongly contend that in our preaching and teaching we must also truly say what God is like, what God has done, and what the condition of man is. Any appropriation of a reader-response hermeneutic is deeply problematic because then the question is "Which community is the best reading?" for there is no true reading. A Pentecostal community will read the Scriptures differently than a Coptic Orthodox community, and if there is no stable meaning of the text, then there is not even the opportunity for the Bible itself to adjudicate the conflict between opposing interpretations. How does this go together with the statement in the Formula of Concord that the Scriptures are the "only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged"?

Third, is there any place for "sound doctrine" that is identical through the ages in a postfoundationalist scheme? To me it seems not, and this does not agree well with the claim of the Lutheran Confessions to articulate the one true faith which is the same since biblical times.<sup>56</sup> It comes as no surprise that John Franke is very critical of creedal Christianity and opines: "As a consequence, the theology that often emerges in such circles routinely is little more than a confessional variety of the foundationalism that typifies modern theology in general. This is particularly the case among

---

<sup>55</sup> W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente, eds., *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church, German-Latin-English* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 43.

<sup>56</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Augustinian Inerrancy: Literary Meaning, Literal Truth, and Literate Interpretation in the Economy of Biblical Discourse," in *Five Views on Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 307.

churches and institutions that maintain theological and doctrinal standards that require a strict confessional subscriptionism.”<sup>57</sup>

### V. Conclusion

The vocation of the theologian is the same through the ages: to preach and teach the full counsel of God. The message stays the same, and its stability is given in the unchanging word of God as it was given in Scripture. As theologians, we are thankful where the cultures in which we serve are reflections of the good orders of creation and the preserving goodness of God in his creation. From the word of God we have to identify corruption and the effects of sin in our cultures. We have to reflect critically on the life of the church, being open to see where corruption has crept into the church, where the word of God has been downplayed due to cultural influences, or where cultural traditions that are truly *adiaphora* have been elevated to the status of divine ordinances—or unedifying and scandalous cultural traditions have been declared to be *adiaphora*. The art of the theologian is to distinguish: to distinguish between law and gospel, of course, but also to distinguish between word of God and word of man, creation and corruption. The word of God that is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb 4:12) does this in faithful preaching and teaching.

---

<sup>57</sup> John R. Franke, *The Character of Theology: An Introduction to Its Nature, Task, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 110. For a critique of Franke from a confessional Reformed point of view, cf. Paul Helm, *Faith, Form, and Fashion: Classical Reformed Theology and Its Postmodern Critics* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).