

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



Volume 66:4

October 2002

Table of Contents

The Theological Symposia of Concordia Theological Seminary	291
Religious Pluralism and Knowledge of the True God: Fraternal Reflection and Discussion Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary	295
Doctrine and Practice: Setting the Boundaries David P. Scaer	307
Confessing in the Public Square Lawrence R. Rast Jr.	315
Death and Martyrdom: An Important Aspect of Early Christian Eschatology William C. Weinrich	327
Divine Providence, History, and Progress in Augustine's <i>City of God</i> John A. Maxfield	339

Theological Observer	361
Lithuanian Aspirations and LWF Ambitions: In Honor of Bishop Jonas Kalvanas (1949-2003)	
Revisiting the <i>Missio Dei</i> Concept	
Looking Behind the Veil	
Book Reviews	370
<i>The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal.</i> By W. Lee Humphreys.	Chad L. Bird
<i>New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Variant Readings Arranged in Horizontal Lines Against Codex Vaticanus.</i> Matthew. Edited by Reuben Swanson.	Charles A. Gieschen
<i>The Archaeology of Early Christianity: A History.</i> By William H. C. Frend.	Charles A. Gieschen
<i>Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture.</i> By Christopher R. Seitz.	Chad L. Bird
<i>Love Taking Shape: Sermons on the Christian Life.</i> By Gilbert Meilaender.	Harold L. Senkbeil
<i>Shepherd the Church: Essays in Pastoral Theology Honoring Bishop Roger D. Pittelko.</i> Edited by Frederic W. Baue, John W. Fenton, Eric C. Forss, Frank J. Pies, and John T. Pless.	Louis A. Smith
<i>Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide.</i> Edited by Troels Engberg-Pedersen.	Holger Sonntag
<i>The Fingerprints of God: Tracking the Divine Suspect through a History of Images.</i> By Robert Farrar Capon.	Timothy Maschke
Indices for Volume 66	381

Doctrine and Practice: Setting the Boundaries: An Abstract Essay with Practical Implications

David P. Scaer

Without September 11 and the subsequent events, we probably would not be addressing the question of how practice relates to doctrine.¹ If the other denominational clergy were customary fixtures at Memorial Day and Independence Day celebrations, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastors were seen less often or not at all. In former times, the American civil religion had a Christian appearance, but with recent population shifts, this is less so. We wish that fateful September day had not come, but we can only play the hand God deals us. If, after the events following September 11, different players had come on the stage or the script had been altered, the outcome might have been different. The ensuing controversy has taken on a life of its own. Ideally, how practice relates to doctrine should be discussed apart from specific events and persons, but the *ecclesia militans* exists in no vacuum. My task is not to analyze this or that event or to interpret another's words, but to relate practice to doctrine.

Matters can be clarified by defining terms and then, where necessary, making distinctions. A church's creeds, confessions, and official beliefs comprise its doctrine, which, for us, are chiefly documents of The Book of Concord. Practice refers to churchly acts carried out by pastors or other leaders acting in the behalf of our congregations. Included in practice are prayers and liturgies, administering the sacraments and pastoral care, and how and where these things are done. Our Lutheran fathers included some traditions among what we call practices, but allowed that others may differ in regard to place and time.² Also excluded from

¹This paper was delivered at a Joint Meeting of the Council of Presidents and the seminary faculties on February 28, 2002, in Saint Louis, Missouri.

²See, for example, the Apology XV, 50-52. Though it takes issue with the Catholic party requiring universal traditions, it also holds that nothing in the customary rites may be changed without good reason (51). In allowing for freedom in our traditions, a word of caution is in order. Some traditions are mandatory, others enjoy long historical precedent and still others are pure fabrications, as Martin Chemnitz says.

Dr. David P. Scaer is Chairman of the Department of Systematic Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Editor of the Concordia Theological Quarterly.

practice is Christian life (sanctification), which in this world is imperfect.³ The Augsburg Confession and the Apology discuss doctrine in the first twenty-one articles and practice in the last seven. This division might suggest that doctrine and practice are two different *things*, but as these confessions show, they are really aspects of one *thing* with each reflecting the other and both deriving their content and form from the same underlying reality, God Himself. So we may begin with doctrine or practice, two sides of one coin. Doctrine expresses itself in certain practices and embedded in our practices is what we believe, often before a particular doctrine is formulated. The church was baptizing infants (practice) long before the Reformation provided the best articulation

This premier Lutheran theologian speaks of eight kinds of tradition in his *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 4 parts, translated by Fred Kramer (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1971), 4:223-307. First, tradition can refer to doctrines delivered by the apostles (4:223-226). These are words spoken by Jesus and preserved by the apostles before their inscription. A second meaning is the canonical list of the biblical books (4:227-230). In a third sense, it can apply to the oral teachings of the apostles, apart from the Scriptures (4:231-243). The fourth kind is the interpretation of the Scriptures (244-248). A fifth kind of tradition is the dogmas of the church, among which are citations of the fathers speaking of baptizing infants (4:249-255). In the sixth sense, traditions refer to the consensus of the fathers (4:256-266). For example, we also hold that no dogma that is new in the churches and in conflict with all of antiquity should be accepted (4:258). Included in the seventh kind of tradition are rituals like making the sign of the cross, facing the east in prayer, and the threefold immersion at baptism (4:267-271). In the eighth category are unacceptable traditions as chrism, the primacy of the Roman bishop, and legends about the saints that have no support from the ancient church (4:272-307).

³In the Galatians lectures of 1535, Luther speaks of the perfection of doctrine and the imperfection of life. "Doctrine is heaven; life is earth. In life there is sin, error, uncleanness, and misery. . . . But just as there is no error in doctrine, so there is no need for any forgiveness of sins. Therefore there is no comparison at all between doctrine and life. . . . We can be lenient toward errors of life." *Luther's Works*, American Edition [LW], 55 volumes, edited by J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia and Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-1986), 27:41-42. Also in "The Freedom of the Christian" in 1520: "I have, to be sure, sharply attacked ungodly doctrines in general, and I have snapped at my opponents, not because of their bad morals, but because of their ungodliness. . . . I have no quarrel with any man concerning his morals but only concerning the word of truth. In all other matters, I will yield to any man whatsoever; but I neither have the power nor the will to deny the Word of God" (LW 31:335). Also his Table Talk, "Doctrine and life must be distinguished. Life is bad among us, as it is among the papists, but we don't fight about life and condemn the papists on that account. . . . I fight over the Word and whether our adversaries teach it in its purity." (LW 54:110).

(doctrine) for this.⁴ From the other side, doctrine drives our practice. An explicit mission to include non-Jews in the church (practice) came only years (Acts 13:1-3) after Jesus had commanded it (Matthew 28:16) (doctrine). This can be reversed. By including the centurion (Matthew 8:5-12) and Canaanite woman (15:22-28) (practice), Jesus anticipated His own command (doctrine). Both doctrine and practice derive their content from the underlying realities of the inner trinitarian life and the salvific events of Christ's life, which include His sending the Spirit. These divine realities are conveyed through, preserved authoritatively, and are accessible to us in the Scriptures (*norma normans*). In point of time both doctrine and practice existed before the Scriptures, but these inspired writings are our only source of doctrine (Epitome, Paragraph 1). New Testament creedal formulations, which evolved into our Apostles' Creed (doctrine), drew their content from the same underlying trinitarian and salvific realities as did baptism (practice).⁵ The Confession's and the Apology's articles on practice (22-28) are as profoundly doctrinal as the purely doctrinal ones, in some cases more so. The doctrine of creation finds its best exposition in Article 23, The Marriage of Priests. Similarly the doctrine of the atonement, which is at the center of Christian faith, finds its best confessional exposition in the Apology's article on the Mass (24; Article 26, Monastic Vows, condemns the Catholics for giving vows the same value as baptism [Augsburg 26,15] and for denying justification by faith [Augsburg 26,15; Apology 26,11-17]). Since practice and doctrine draw from the same substance, they are inseparably related: two sides of one coin.

Doctrinal formulations arose not only as a response to misformulations, as with Arius, (for example, the Nicene Creed), but also because certain practices like indulgences were judged to contradict the foundation of faith, which then may not have been fully formulated. This controversy

⁴Chemnitz calls baptizing infants a tradition that is necessary. *Examination*, 4:249.

⁵A valuable contribution has been made in *Closed Communion in Contemporary Context*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relation of the Lutheran Church—Canada, January, 1998 (Manitoba: Lutheran Church—Canada, 2000), 7. However, a distinction must be made between tradition that takes the form of various rites and ceremonies on one hand, and the practice of the church catholic on the other hand. Practice, however, is based on what the church professes. Thus, practice is derived from the word of God, either by explicit command or implication from other clear statements of Scripture. Properly understood, practice is not just what we do, but what is required because of what we believe.

(practice) allowed both Roman and Lutheran parties to articulate their positions on justification (doctrine).⁶ Let us take this into New Testament terms. Paul can argue from either doctrine or practice. In Romans he argues first from the universality of sin and grace (chapters 1-3) (doctrine) and concludes by asking for monetary support for his mission to Spain (15:23-28) (practice). What is probably the New Testament's first articulation of justification (doctrine) was a response to certain Christians requiring Jewish practices as necessary for salvation (Galatians 2:16). People often did the right or the wrong things (practice) long before theological explanations for doing or not doing them were given (doctrine).

In beginning our theology with the cause (doctrine) and moving to the effect (practice), we follow the examples of Paul in Romans and the Augsburg Confession and the Apology.⁷ Practice flows from our doctrine and reflects it. Sin necessitates salvation and so precedes Christology (who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven [Nicene Creed]), which, in turn, precedes faith and then good works. Justification is the cause and sanctification the effect: We love, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). This biblical order is logical, but it can give the impression that core beliefs can be isolated from practices and so we might conclude that our practice can really be *something different* from what we believe. We might further assume we can be freer with our practices than with our doctrinal formulations. But since both doctrine and practice derive their content and form from the same *reality*, which is the trinitarian God in His saving acts, then the strictures required for one are also required for the other.

⁶See, for example, the 1531, 1580, and 1584 editions of Augsburg Confession XV: "Also rejected are those who teach that canonical satisfactions are necessary to remit eternal punishments." Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, editors, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 47.

⁷Seminary curricula are organized around the model that doctrine comes first, followed by practice. A student is introduced first to biblical studies and dogmatics and then offered what are called the practical courses of preaching, liturgy, pastoral care, and administration. The reason for this arrangement is that theoretical courses provide the content of what he is going to say and do. As traditional as this method is in most seminaries, it is derived from this Rationalistic division of theology in which ethics or practice is a separate discipline. See David P. Scaer, "A Critique of the Fourfold Pattern," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 63 (October 1999): 269-280.

Schleiermacher is notorious for reversing the traditional dogmatical order and beginning with the life of the Christian community (practice; ethics) as the norm of church doctrine. What Christians are observed doing (practice) was key in determining doctrine. Problematic is that he drew from Lutheran and Reformed communities (practice) and the results were an amalgamation of often contradictory beliefs, as is now typical in consciously ecumenically constructed documents.⁸ (He even wanted to include Socinians [Unitarians] in the Christian definition.) In spite of Schleiermacher's negatives, in both our secular and religious lives, we experience the effects before we know (determine) the causes. We observe and do *things* (practice) before we understand the *things* in themselves (doctrine). Many Christians do the right things (practice) without having been given or being able to provide a rationale for doing them (doctrine). Before the terms for justification were set forth in Reformation (Augsburg and Apology IV), Christians were being justified by grace through faith. Those baptized as infants encounter the fundamentals of salvation through church practice, which is later articulated for them in the catechism (doctrine).

If Paul argues from doctrine to practice, he also argues from doctrine to doctrine, and from practice to doctrine. For the resurrection he does both and then some (1 Corinthians 15). First he argues from his own preaching, the Scriptures and then from the apostolic witnesses (1-8). He also argues from Christ's resurrection, the lesser doctrine to the greater (12-13)—or is it the other way around? Amazingly, he argues from the Corinthians' vicarious baptisms for the dead (practice). Their denial of the resurrection logically contradicted their practice, erroneous as it was.⁹ Since no mention of this is made again, Paul, by letter or visit, applied his doctrine of justification by faith to rectify matters; nevertheless, this aberrant practice contained the kernel of truth that baptism promised resurrection (doctrine) (Romans 6:4).

What is true of Paul is also true of the New Testament in general: doctrine and practice do not exist in autonomous spheres. Abraham's

⁸For example, the *Leuenberg Concord* and, more recently, *A Formula of Agreement*, adopted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America (RCA), and the United Church of Christ (UCC).

⁹1 Corinthians 15:29 "Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?"

sacrificing Isaac (practice) was the evidence or the extension of what he believed about God (*fides qua et quae*: doctrine) (James 2:21-25). God's indiscriminate love for His enemies (doctrine) is seen in providing for them as He does for His sons (practice) (Matthew 5:43-45). Since we confess that the sacraments are visible word (Apology XIII, 6), we might call our practice visible doctrine. Doctrine defines why a thing (practice) is the way it is. Practice is what we do. Though tradition has many uses, including doctrine (1 Corinthians 15:1-3), tradition is narrowly used here as how we do what we do. Practice includes receiving Holy Communion. Tradition is how we receive it: standing, kneeling, sitting, or lying down (John 13:23-25; compare Matthew 14:19). A freedom may be allowed in tradition that is not allowed in practice; however, traditions also have doctrinal significance and even here boundaries exist.¹⁰ In refusing to carry out the ordinary civic duty of worshiping the emperor (practice), early Christians confessed that only Jesus was Lord (doctrine). There was a reason (doctrine) for what they did or did not do (practice). We know ourselves and others know us not only by what we say (doctrine), but by what we do (practice). Practice and doctrine derive their form and content from the trinitarian and christological mysteries that are faith's object and foundation.

The New York Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine (Episcopal) hosts a Shinto shrine at the entrance of the nave. Our churches cannot do this (practice). Practices contradicting doctrine are unacceptable. Since both doctrine and practice flow from the same fundamental reality, we can no more be lenient with one than with other. We cannot allow for ourselves a freedom in practice that we would never allow for ourselves in doctrine. Take, for example, the practice of baptism. Trinitarian faith is a given for us, but we could never baptize or perhaps recognize a baptism "in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who is the Mother of us all" — nor could we baptize with sand.¹¹ These practices contradict the foundation of faith, especially as it is expressed in the Lord's Prayer,

¹⁰A change in ordinary practices may signal a change in belief. In March 1615 Lutherans came to the Berlin cathedral church to discover that the crucifix and religious ornaments had been removed and the walls white washed. The people suspected that the Elector of Brandenburg had carried through with his threat of introducing the Calvinistic religion of his family and they were right. For a full account, see Bodo Nischan, *Prince, People and Confession* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 185-203.

¹¹See *Lutheran Forum* 33 (Easter/Spring 1999): 8, 25.

"Our Father . . ." A church that baptizes only those above the age of discretion (Baptists) has a different anthropology, hamatology, soteriology, and sacramentology – just for starters – than a church that baptizes infants (Lutheran, Catholic, Anglican, and Reformed). Churches that practice emergency baptisms have a different view of this sacrament than a church that does not (Reformed). A church without an altar (many Reformed churches) conveys a different message than one with one. The cliché, "what you are doing speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you are saying," has something to do with how practice corresponds to our doctrine.

Rationalists, who had little use for Satan or traditional Christianity, heralded their new faith by omitting the exorcisms, the renunciation, and the creed from the rite of baptism.¹² Even a negligible omission in practice can signal a larger change in doctrine. The Protestant Episcopal Church excluded the Athanasian Creed from its edition of the *Book of Common Prayer*. At the United States' founding, many of its clergy were Deists who believed that Christianity, Judaism, and Islam were equal paths to heaven.¹³ In the age of Rationalistic tolerance, this creed's first verse was intolerable: "Whoever wishes to be saved must, above all else, hold the true Christian faith. Whoever does not keep it whole and inviolate will without doubt perish for eternity."¹⁴ It had to be shelved.

We end our discussion with Jesus. From what He ordinarily did (practice), He expected others to conclude who He was (doctrine). In answer to the Baptist's query, He might have answered "I am the Christ" (doctrine), but instead He pointed to His practice: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up and the poor have good news [the gospel] preached to them (Matthew 11:2-6). This connection is also central to the Fourth Gospel. From His works, Jesus expected His opponents to believe in

¹²Julius August Ludwig Wegscheider, *Institutiones Theologiae Christianae Dogmaticae*, third edition (Halle: Gebauer, 1817), 366-367.

¹³For an example of this Deist belief, see Gottfried Lessings, *Nathan der Weise*.

¹⁴Theodore G. Tappert, translator and editor, in collaboration with Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, Arthur C. Piepkorn, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 19 translates the Latin original. Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord* translates the German (24). "Whoever wants to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic faith. Whoever does not keep it whole and inviolate will doubtless perish."

what would later be articulated in the Trinitarian doctrine: "If I am not doing the works of My Father, then do not believe Me; but if I do them, *even though you do not believe Me, believe the works*, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me and I am in the Father" (John 10:37-38). He considered what He did (practice) more convincing about who He was than what He said (doctrine). In His death (practice), He who alone knows the Father reveals Him to us. From His lowliness (doctrine), He calls all who labor and are heavy laden (Matthew 11:27-30), for example, the poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3) (practice). What Jesus was, *filius dei . . . homo factus est* (doctrine), is seen in what He did, *crucifixus* (practice). He did this *pro nobis* (doctrine). So also what we believe (doctrine) must be seen in what we do (practice). We can hardly require anything less of ourselves, lest what we do contradict what we believe.