

## **The Pastor's Prayer and Devotional Life**

### **"The Triangular Shape of the Pastor's Devotional Life" by Dr. John Pless**

Wednesday, May 22 11 a.m.-Noon (Oak Park and River Forest Rooms)

Wednesday, May 22 1 p.m. -2 p.m. (Alumni Room)

Pr. Ralph Tausz, Apostles, Melrose Park

### Questions to Ponder Before our Session

+Early in the Pless essay, he cites Kenneth Korby's distinction between "instinctual prayer" and the "prayer of faith." What's the difference?

+Is there a difference between studying the Scriptures to understand them versus reading them devotionally?

+In the Pless article, he talks about the "busyness of contemporary ecclesiastical life and crowded pastoral schedules" accounting for a decline in the classical disciplines of scriptural study and prayer. Speak to this.

+We vowed at our ordination to be "diligent in the study of Holy Scripture and the Confessions" and "constant in prayer for those under your pastoral care." What are some habits you've cultivated and practices you've developed that help you to be faithful in carrying this out?

+*Oratio* (Prayer) and *meditatio* (meditation) result in *tentatio* (spiritual affliction). What are the benefits of *tentatio*?

+

Besides the linked essay by Dr. Pless, you may want to consult these two excellent articles, which you can find on the web:

Kleinig, John. "*Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio: What Makes a Theologian?*"

Concordia Theological Quarterly (July 2002), 255-268

[http://www.johnkleinig.com/files/1813/2730/7611/Oratio\\_Meditatio\\_Tentatio.pdf](http://www.johnkleinig.com/files/1813/2730/7611/Oratio_Meditatio_Tentatio.pdf)

Von Hagel, Thomas. "*Prayer, Meditation, and Suffering Prepare the Preacher.*"

Logia (Holy Trinity 2006), 45-54. On the web:

[ep.teologi.dk/Tidsskrifter/Logia/Vol-15-3.pdf](http://ep.teologi.dk/Tidsskrifter/Logia/Vol-15-3.pdf)

# Lord Jesus Christ, Will You Not Stay

ESSAYS IN HONOR OF  
RONALD FEUERHAHN  
ON THE OCCASION OF  
HIS SIXTY-FIFTH  
BIRTHDAY

Edited by: J. BART DAY  
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## The Triangular Shape of the Pastor's Devotional Life

JOHN T. PLESS

SPIRITUALITY HAS ACHIEVED RENEWED POPULARITY.<sup>1</sup> If the activism of the 1960s and early 1970s left little room for serious engagement with the pastor's devotional life, the last two decades have been flooded with books, articles, seminars and retreats aimed at guiding and enriching pastoral spirituality. But spirituality is not to be equated with the life of faith that is given birth by the hearing of God's Word, sustained with the Lord's body and blood, and enabled to call upon his name in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. In search of models for the ongoing life of prayer and devotion, Lutheran pastors have often ignored what James Kittelson identifies as the "utterly mundane"<sup>2</sup>

1 Ronald Feuerhahn, "Lutheran Spirituality" (presented at the Faculty Forum at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo, on August 25, 1987). This unpublished paper reflects Dr. Feuerhahn's informed suspicion of what often passes for "spirituality" and his appreciation for a genuine Lutheran piety formed and enlivened by the means of grace. As a pastor and theologian, Dr. Feuerhahn has demonstrated both in his scholarship and life, that piety need not be pietistic. On the topic of contemporary spirituality, see the standard works: Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, eds., *The Study of Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Frank Senn, ed., *Protestant Spiritual Traditions* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1986); also see James Kittelson, "Contemporary Spirituality's Challenge to Sola Gratia," *Lutheran Quarterly* 9 (Winter 1995), 367-90 for a bracing Lutheran critique of contemporary trends in spirituality and Scott Hendrix, "Martin Luther's Reformation of Spirituality," *Lutheran Quarterly* 13 (Autumn 1999): 249-70.

2 Kittelson, 384. Contrast Kittelson with Bradley Hanson, *A Graceful Life: Lutheran Spirituality for Today* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishing House, 2000). Also note the comment of Ronald Feuerhahn, "Lutheran Spirituality," 10: "The false conception of our saintliness must be clearly understood. It is particularly in evidence in the more mystical and platonic based piety. It is essentially an effort to separate man from his world, the environment into which the Creator placed his creature Man. This 'spiritualization' of man does not correctly understand our saintliness. In his desire for an intensified 'spirituality,' Luther saw a recollection of the the temptation, 'You will be like God,' adding to our creatureliness something that is not there. That is a return to the attempt by some medieval mysticism to escape creation, at all time, in all places, that God has promised to be our God and to enable us to be His saints."

nature of Lutheranism's *sola gratia* "spirituality" in search of something that is supposedly more ecumenical, relevant, and fulfilling. In the process of seeking to cultivate a satisfying devotional life the tools that would keep the pastor anchored in the *sola gratia* are ignored or dismissed.

John Doberstein recognized the danger over forty years ago when he compiled his classic, the *Minister's Prayer Book*. In his Introduction to this volume, Doberstein expresses his concern: "The theological foundation of evangelical meditation must be free of all synergistic and Pelagianistic concepts. It rejects any mysticism that puts the initiative with the worshiper. Man cannot by searching find out God. Prayer is turning to the Word of God and therefore it is nothing without the Word of God. Prayer is nothing but response to God's Word and therefore nothing without the Word that precedes it. We must avoid the danger of making prayer an independent and autonomous concern of our devotional life."<sup>3</sup>

It is not the lack of pastoral spirituality that is the problem; a spirituality that muddles law and gospel, confusing the longings of the human heart with the voice of God is. Lauding the merits of the *Minister's Prayer Book*, Virgil Thompson writes: "Evangelical devotion, is, then, by its very nature polemical. It rejects the notion that the believer somehow cooperates with God, calling down grace from heaven through spiritual exercises. Evangelical meditation insists that the devotional exercise is not a matter of the believer's doing something for self, much less for God. It is rather a matter of God doing something for the believer, and doing it in the fashion that God has chosen and ordained it."<sup>4</sup>

Thompson's polemic against devotional synergism is best understood in light of Kenneth Korby's distinction between "instinctual prayer" and the "prayer of faith."<sup>5</sup> Instinctual prayer finds its energy in the ego of the one who prays; it is the voice that seeks union with the divine. Instinctual prayer is the prayer of mysticism. The prayer of faith, on the other hand, arises not out of an empty heart, but out of the Word of God who commands prayer and promises to hear his children. Much of what is today called "spirituality" is of instinct rather than faith. Even programs and approaches that are offered to bolster the spirituality of the pastor often miss the mark in this regard.

Yet many pastors admit that their devotional life is in need of attention. This is not a new development, although the busyness of contemporary

3 John Doberstein, *Minister's Prayer Book* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), xiv.

4 Virgil Thompson, "In Honor: The Minister's Prayer Book" *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (Autumn 1987), 362.

5 Kenneth F. Korby, "Prayer: Pre-Reformation to the Present," in *Christians at Prayer*, ed. John Gallen (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 116. Korby's distinction parallels the distinction made by Friedrich Heiler between mystical prayer and prophetic prayer. See Friedrich Heiler, *Prayer: History and Psychology*, trans. Samuel McComb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 135-37.

ecclesiastical life and crowded pastoral schedules may account for a decline in the classical disciplines of scriptural study and prayer. While the last few decades have witnessed the production of any number of prayer books and programs intended to serve as tools for the pastor's devotional life, seminarians as well as seasoned pastors continue to seek guidance as to how they might engage this aspect of their office.<sup>6</sup> Luther's triad of *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio* form a fitting starting point.<sup>7</sup>

In his 1539 *Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings*, Luther identifies *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio* as rules for the study of theology drawn from the whole Psalter (AE 34:285). For Luther, these three words did not so much establish a new technique or method for

6 In 1966 with funding from the Sealantic Fund, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis embarked on a program to develop the spiritual devotional life of its students. The study that resulted was written by Professor George W. Hoyer and published by the seminary in 1970 under the title *Toward a Program of Spiritual Formation at Lutheran and Protestant Seminaries*. The study bears the marks of its time especially in regard to social activism, then current theories of community dynamics, and ecumenical awareness. In 1986, Concordia Publishing House released a five-session video and study guide in its professional development series entitled *Nurturing Personal Spiritual Growth*. The series was intended for use in circuit pastoral conferences and designed to introduce pastors to a variety of "styles" for the devotional life. At least one Lutheran seminary, Lutheran Southern Theological Seminary, has produced a document on this topic: *Spirituality and Spiritual Formation* (Columbia, S.C.: Lutheran Southern Theological Seminary, 1998). However, this document fails to sufficiently ground "spirituality" in the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. For a call for pastors to recover the classical disciplines of Scripture reading and prayer, see Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987). In addition to Doberstein's *Minister's Prayer Book* originally published in 1959, the following books, intended primarily for Lutheran clergymen, have appeared: George Kraus, *The Pastor at Prayer* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1983); A.R. Kretzmann, *The Pastor at Prayer* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1957); and Robert Sauer, *Daily Prayer*, 2 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986). Although not intended for clergy exclusively, the following volumes have probably found usage mainly by pastors: Herbert Lindemann, *The Daily Office* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965); Frederick J. Schumacher, *For All the Saints*, 4 vols. (Delhi, New York: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 1994); and Paul Zeller Strodsch, *Oremus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1925).

7 C.F.W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, trans. John Drickamer (New Haven, Mo.: Lutheran News, 1995), II. Walther writes, "In order to acquire theological ability in general and pastoral theological ability in particular, the three parts are specifically required which are included in Luther's well-known axiom: *Oratio, meditatio, tentatio faciunt theologum*. John H.C. Fritz expands Walther's treatment. See John H.C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 2-9. The most recent pastoral theology published by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod confines comment on *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio* to a single paragraph. See Robert C. Mueller and George Kraus, eds., *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1990). For a more recent appreciation of Luther's triad, see Oswald Bayer, *Theologie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1994) and Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids, 1997), 72-76.

devotional reflection but rather described the life of the student of sacred Scripture. This can be seen from the overall context of the preface as Luther sets all human books, including his own writings, with the holy Scripture. "Firstly, you should know that the holy Scriptures constitute a book which turns the wisdom of all other books into foolishness, because not one teaches about eternal life except this one alone. Therefore you should straightway despair of your own reason and understanding. With them you will not attain eternal life, but on the contrary, your presumptuousness will plunge you and others with you out of heaven (as happened to Lucifer) into the abyss of hell" (AE 34:285).

Luther did not see the pastor's life in the Word and prayer as segregated from his ongoing work as a student of the Scriptures and a preacher of the gospel. Any division between the study of Scriptures in preparation for preaching and teaching and a devotional reading of the Scriptures would be judged as artificial by Luther as though there were two distinct ways to read God's Word. As a servant of the Word, the pastor is placed under the Scriptures to hear them both for himself and as one who is charged with the responsibility of faithfully proclaiming the gospel according to the Scriptures for the well-being of the church. In this sense, then, the pastor's devotional life, while it might be personal, is never private. Even here, the *Ami* bears the man. The pastor reads and studies the Scripture as one who is called to preach in the divine service and to carry its message to all of the places where the Lord's people live, suffer, rejoice, and die.

The first of Luther's rules is *oratio*, prayer. When Luther thinks of prayer in this context, he focuses on the petition of David in Psalm 119. He writes "Thus you see how David keeps on praying in the above-mentioned Psalm, 'Teach me, Lord, instruct me, lead me, show me,' and many more words like these. Although he well knew and daily heard and read the text of Moses and other books besides, still he wants to lay hold of the real teacher of the Scriptures himself, so that he may not seize upon them pell-mell with his reason and become his own teacher" (AE 37:286).

Prayer is the voice of faith; it does not have its origin in the human heart but in the hearing of God's gracious words of life and salvation spoken to sinners in the gospel. The Lord's Prayer is not only the paradigm for Christian praying; it is also the source for prayer in Jesus' name. Luther captures this insight as he explains the introductory words of the Our Father saying, "With these words God wants to entice us, so that we come to believe he is truly our Father and we are truly his children, in order that we may ask him boldly and with complete confidence, just as loving children ask their loving father" (SC III:1-2, KW 356).

Contrast Luther's evangelical articulation of prayer with the definition offered by Henri Nouwen, a Roman Catholic writer whose books have found wide usage among Lutheran clerics: "Praying means breaking through the veils of existence and allowing yourself to be lead by

the vision that has become real to you. Whatever we call the vision: 'the Unseen Reality,' 'the total Other,' 'the Numen,' 'the Spirit,' 'the Father.'<sup>8</sup> Nouwen sees prayer as a mystic quest to find in God the fulfillment of human longings and desires for an unknown spiritual reality. For Luther, prayer is not a search for an unknown diety (*deus absconditus*) but a confident calling on the God who has revealed himself in Christ Jesus. Just as faith comes by the hearing of Christ's words, so prayer, the voice of faith, is created and sustained by God's Word. "Prayer is an echo of God's prior speaking to us in grace."<sup>9</sup>

The confidence is not in the praying heart but in the promises of God. In his classic little study of prayer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes "The richness of the Word of God ought to determine our prayer, not the poverty of our heart."<sup>10</sup> The human heart, that cesspool of sin and unbelief, is hardly the pristine fountain from which the aroma of sweet-smelling prayer arises. Luther, like Jeremiah, knew that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and is desperately wicked" (Jer 17:9). The heart is not to be trusted, for its instincts rob us of the fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Oftentimes prayer is described as a conversation with God. This is a helpful image if it kept in mind that God always has the first and the last word. Eugene Peterson describes prayer as "responding speech"<sup>11</sup> and suggests that the Christian learns to pray by listening to the psalms. Peterson is echoing Luther who learned the psalms as a monk praying the canonical hours and continued to find in them a reliable guide for prayer that lays hold to the promises of God and responds using words given by God himself. In his *Preface to the Psalter*, Luther notes, "The Psalter

8 Henri Nouwen, *With Open Hands* (South Bend, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 1972), 142.

9 Friedmann Hebart, "The Role of the Lord's Prayer in Luther's Theology," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 18 (May 1984), 7.

10 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*, trans. James Burtness (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974), 15. Ronald Feuerhahn, "Healing in the Canticles of the Old and New Testaments," *Christ's Gifts for the Healing of the Soul: Toward Lutheran Identity in the New Millennium*, ed. Daniel Zager (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2008), 35. "We don't always need to be praying 'from the heart.' Sometimes the heart grows weary or has little or nothing 'in' it to commend itself to prayer. In fact, it's a bit presumptuous to suppose that the heart is any better than any other part of our sinful selves to be the instigator or master of our prayers. The prayer sometimes needs to come from outside ourselves. This is stated in the question: Do we pray or does the prayer pray us? Thus, the external discipline of prayers, like the canticles, is a blessing. We are not so comfortable with the external. And especially in the matter of prayer, we are in an age, a spirit of internalizing, 'praying from the heart!' Luther was comfortable with the external in a way that we are not. The external Word and Sacraments, which were, indeed 'for us' but from outside."

11 Eugene Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 5.

ought to be a precious and beloved book, if for no other reason than this:  
it promises Christ's death and resurrection so clearly—and pictures his  
kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom—and it might  
be called a little Bible. In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly  
everything that is in the entire Bible" (AE 35:254). Luther further observes  
that the Book of Psalms tutor Christians in genuine prayer: "... they  
speak these words to God and with God, this, I repeat, is the best thing of  
all. This gives the words double earnestness and life. For when men speak  
with men about these matters, what they say does not come so powerfully  
from the heart; it does not burn and live, is not so urgent. Hence it is that  
the Psalter is the book of all saints; and everyone, in whatever situation he  
may be, finds in that situation psalms and words that fit his case, that suit  
him as if they were put there just for his sake, so that he could not put it  
better himself, or find or wish for anything better" (AE 35:256).

It is only as God opens lips locked by sin that mouths are free for  
the full-throated prayer that delights the ears of the Father. The prayer  
of David in Psalm 51:15, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall  
show forth your praise," becomes the prayer of the church in Matins and  
Vespers. When sinners try to open their own lips in prayer, it is not praise  
and thanksgiving, intercession and supplication that flow from heart  
and mouth but assertions of self-justification and arrogant attempts to  
bargain with God. Prayer then becomes a tool of unbelief that is used  
in a vain and futile effort to pry from the hands of God the answer  
that suits self rather than the gifts that the Father would bestow. When  
prayer becomes unbuckled from the Word of God, it is transformed into  
a weapon that the old man would use to war against God.

Recognizing that prayer has no inherent power apart from the Word of  
the Lord, Luther counseled his barber, Peter, to tie his prayers to the text  
of Scripture, taking a text like a petition of the Lord's Prayer or one of the  
commandments and turning the text into a prayer. "I take one part after an-  
other and free myself as much as possible from distractions in order to pray.  
I divide each commandment into four parts, thereby fashioning a garland  
of four strands. That is, I think of each commandment as, first, instruction,  
which is really what it is intended to be, and consider what the Lord God  
demands of me so earnestly. Second, I turn it into a thanksgiving; third, a  
confession; and fourth, a prayer" (AE 43:200). In this way, Luther suggests  
that prayer remains firmly fastened to God's Word. This Luther teaches in  
*A Simple Way to Pray*, "not in theory but by practice," says M.E.Schild.<sup>12</sup>

12 M.E.Schild, "Praying the Catechism and Defrocking the Devil-Aspects of Luther's Spirituality," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 20 (August 1976), 48. Also note Luther's imagery: "These are the Ten Commandments in their fourfold aspect, namely, as a school text, song book, penitential book, and a prayer book. They are intended to help the heart come to itself and grow zealous in prayer" (AE 43:209).



This essential connection between Scripture and prayer must remain intact lest prayer itself wither and die. Adolph Koeberle observes that “prayer escapes the danger of disorder and confusion only when it is enkindled by the words of Scripture. From the Word proceeds its inner justification, as well as its life giving power and the clearness of its petitions. A prayer that does not stick to Scripture will soon become poor in ideas, poor in faith, poor in love and will finally die.”<sup>13</sup>

As prayer arises from the Scriptures, *oratio* is anchored in *meditatio*. *Meditatio* is not a mystical exercise but a continual study of the biblical text. *Meditatio* is fixed in the *externum verbum*, the external Word. In the *Smalcald Articles*, Luther confesses, “In these matters, which concern the spoken Word, it must be firmly maintained that God gives no one his Spirit or grace apart from the external Word which goes before. We say this to protect ourselves from the enthusiasts, that is the ‘spirits,’ who boast that they have the Spirit or grace apart from and before contact with the Word. On this basis, they judge, interpret, and twist the Scripture or oral Word according to their pleasure” (SA III:3, KW 322).

The external nature of meditation has at least three aspects in Luther. First, the act of meditation itself involves a reading and speaking of God’s Word. It is an oral rather than silent event. Luther explains, “. . . you should meditate, that is, not only in your heart, but also externally, by actually repeating and comparing oral speech and literal words of the book, reading and rereading them with diligent attention and reflection, so that you may see what the Holy Spirit means by them” (AE 34:286).<sup>14</sup>

Second, meditation is not an activity that moves from humanity to God, from earth to heaven. Rather for Luther, the movement is always from God to man, from heaven to earth. This can be seen in his pamphlet of 1521, *A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels*:

When you open the book containing the gospels and read or hear how Christ comes here or there, or how someone is brought to him, you should therein perceive the sermon or the gospel through which he is coming to you, or you are being brought to him. For the preaching of the gospel is nothing else than Christ coming

13 Adolph Koeberle, *The Quest for Holiness*, trans. John C. Mattes (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1938), 176–77.

14 Luther likened such meditation to a cow chewing its cud. In his commentary on Deuteronomy 14:1 of 1525, he writes, “To chew the cud, however, is to take up the Word with delight and meditate with supreme diligence, so that (according to the proverb) one does not permit it to go in one ear and out the other, but holds it firmly in the heart, swallows it, and absorbs it into the intestines” (AE 9:196). Also see John Kleinig, “Meditation,” *Logia* 10 (Eastertide 2001), 45–50; John Kleinig, “The Kindled Heart: Luther on Meditation,” *Lutheran Theological Journal* 20 (August–November 1986), 142–54; and Martin Nicol, *Meditatio bei Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984).

to us, or we being brought to him. When you see how he works, however, and how he helps everyone to whom he comes or who is brought to him, then rest assured that faith is accomplishing this in you and that he is offering your soul exactly the same sort of help and favor through the gospel. If you pause and let him do you good, that is, believe that he benefits and helps you, then you really have it. Christ is yours, presented to you as a gift (AE 35:121).

Third, Luther does not see meditation as something that takes place in isolation from the community gathered around preaching and the sacraments. In his *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther comments, "Let him who wants to contemplate in the right way reflect on his baptism; let him read his Bible, hear sermons, honor father and mother, and come to the aid of a brother in distress. But let him not shut himself up in a nook . . . and there entertain himself with his devotions and thus suppose that he is sitting in God's bosom and has fellowship with God without Christ, without his Word, without the sacraments" (AE 3:275). Even when the believer prays in private, he is not alone. "Never think that you are kneeling or standing alone, rather think that the whole of Christendom, all devout Christians, are standing there beside you and you are standing among them in a common united petition which God cannot disdain" (AE 43:198).

*Oratio* and *meditatio* result in *tentatio*. God uses *tentatio*, that is spiritual affliction, trial and temptation to drive the Christian away from self and to the promises of Christ alone. Thus Luther says, "Thirdly, there is *tentatio*, *Anfechtung*. This is the touchstone which teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom" (AE 34:266-67).

*Tentatio* happens within the context of a person's vocation. Suffering happens precisely because a person is faithful to his calling. Andrew Pfeiffer observes that "*tentatio* is testing, temptation, and trial which occurs when God and his word intersect with us and our world."<sup>15</sup>

15 Andrew Pfeiffer, "The Place of *Tentatio* in the Formation of Church Servants," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 30 (December 1996), 113. Also note Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 50-63. Cf. Luther in his 1535 lecture on Galatians: "Therefore I admonish you, especially those of you who are to become instructors of consciences, as well as each of you individually, that you exercise yourselves continually by study, by reading, by meditation and by prayer, so that in temptation you will be able to instruct consciences, both your own and others, and take them from law to grace, from active righteousness to passive righteousness, in short from Moses to Christ. In affliction and in the conflict of conscience it is the devil's habit to frighten us with the law and to set against us the consciousness of sin, our wicked past, the wrath and judgment of God, hell, and eternal death, so that he may drive us into despair, subject us to himself, and pluck us from Christ" (AE 26:10).

Using King David as his model, Luther notes that David laments over the fury of the enemies who attack him because he faithfully occupies himself with God's word. "Thus you see how David, in the Psalm mentioned, complains so often about all kinds of enemies, arrogant princes or tyrants, false spirits and factions, whom he must tolerate because he meditates, that is occupied with God's Word (as has been said) in all manner of ways. For as soon as God's Word takes root and grows in you, the devil will harry you, and make a real doctor of you, and by his assaults will teach you to seek and love God's Word" (AE 34:287).

This is what Luther refers to in other places as "cross bearing." In a sermon preached at Coburg on Holy Saturday of 1530, Luther engages this theme by first drawing a distinction between the cross of Christ and that of the Christian. "Therefore we must note in the first place that Christ by his suffering not only saved us from the devil, death, and sin, but also that his suffering is an example, which we should follow in our suffering. Though our suffering and cross should never be so exalted that we think that we can be saved by it or earn the least merit through it, nevertheless we should suffer after Christ, that we may be conformed to him" (AE 51:198). To be in Christ is to be joined to his cross. The holy cross is the mark of Christian existence. Luther maintains ". . . if I want to be a Christian, I must also wear the colors of the court; the dear Christ issues no others in his court; suffering there must be" (AE 51:199).

Yet Luther strives to make it clear that Christians, unlike the eager enthusiasts, do not choose their own cross. It is sheer fanaticism to seek out a cross of one's own design while ignoring the cross of Christ. "So we see that the very ones who boast and teach so much about cross and suffering know the least either about the cross or of Christ, because they make their own suffering meritorious" (AE 51:199).

The cross of the Christian does not merit salvation but rather drives the Christian to find consolation in the cross of Christ alone. In this, then, affliction becomes an instrument of blessing as the Christian despairs of self and clings to the promises of Christ in faith.

So in our suffering we should so act that we give our greatest attention to the promise, in order that our cross and affliction may be turned to good, to something which we could never have asked or thought. And this is precisely the thing which makes a difference between the Christian's suffering and afflictions and those of all other men. For other people also have their afflictions, cross, and misfortune, just as they also have their times when they can sit in the rose garden, and employ their good fortune and their goods as they please. But when they run into affliction and suffering, they have nothing to comfort them, for they do not have the mighty promises and confidence in God which Christians have. Therefore

they cannot comfort themselves with the assurance that God will help them to bear the affliction, much less can they count on it that he will turn their affliction and suffering to good (AE 51:203).

Clinging to the promises of Christ is "the Christian art" says Luther (AE 51:203). It is "the art of looking to the Word and looking away from all the trouble and suffering that lies upon us and weighs us down" (AE 51:203). Learning to look to the Word in the face of satanic assault and hellish despair cannot be mastered as a technique or device for self-help. Luther observes that "the flesh is utterly incapable of this art" (AE 51:203) as it cannot see anything but the present struggle. Satan, in fact, tempts the Christian to let go of God's Word and rely instead on what may be seen or felt.<sup>16</sup> Here Luther illustrates his point by referring to the temptation of Eve who was seduced to surrender the Word for the fruit that she could see. Satan would use *tentatio* to undermine faith; God uses *tentatio* to draw his children ever deeper into the cross of his Son.<sup>17</sup>

Thus Luther sees *tentatio* as the arena in which God displays his gracious favor toward sinners and demonstrates "his honor, power, and strength against the devil" (AE 51:207). Therefore the Christian does not see the cross as an enemy to be avoided or a hurdle to be overcome. The cross is received as gift. "This kind of wickedness our God cannot check except through suffering. Hence he must keep disciplining and driving us, that our faith may increase and grow stronger and thus bring the Savior more deeply into our hearts. For just as we cannot get along without eating and drinking so we cannot get along without affliction and suffering. Therefore

16 Alister McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 168–169. "... Christian life is characterised by the unending tension between faith and experience. For Luther, experience can only stand in contradiction to faith, in that revealed truth must be revealed under its opposite form. This dialectic between experienced perception and hidden revelation inevitably leads to radical questioning on the part of the believer, as he finds himself unable to reconcile what he believes with what he experiences." Also see Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

17 Steven Hein, "Tentatio," *Lutheran Theological Review* 10 (Academic Year 1997–1998), 33–34. "Yet as Luther also recognized, this is a holy *Anfechtung*, an instrument of the gracious God, and part and parcel of living in the cross of Christ. God is behind our *Anfechtung*, and He uses it to crucify our fleshly complacency and self-confidence. And then He uses it to send us running back the other way to the security and confidence of the Word of promise that is given to faith. From faith, we see the righteousness of Christ that is ours; and from faith, hope is renewed in the coming glory of the Kingdom. With faith's vision made ever new in the Gospel promise—again and again—faith is strengthened, the New Creation is renewed and the call of the Christian vocation is revitalized. Here is the central heartbeat of Christian living. The experience of life in the old world that produces a holy anguish from the Devil's *tentatio*, and the transforming power of faith fed by the Gospel. In tension—tacking back and forth between them—Luther believed this to be a common inheritance for all Christians baptized into the cross of Christ."

we must necessarily be afflicted of the devil by persecution or else by a secret thorn which he thrusts into the heart, as also St. Paul laments (cf. 2 Cor 12:7). Therefore, since it is better to have a cross than be without one, nobody should dread or be afraid of it. After all, you have a good strong promise with which to comfort yourself. Besides, the gospel cannot come to the fore except through and in suffering and cross" (AE 51:207).

It is in this sense that Luther could express gratitude even for his enemies. "I myself (if you will permit me, mere mouse-dirt to be mingled with pepper) am deeply indebted to my papists that through the devil's raging they have beaten, oppressed, and distressed me so much. That is to say, they have made a fairly good theologian of me, which I would not have become otherwise" (AE 34:287).

What does this mean for the devotional life of the Lutheran pastor? The pastor is charged with faithfully distributing the gifts of Christ in preaching and the sacraments. He also must be on the receiving end of the Lord's treasures. The shepherd is baptized with the same baptism that he administers, hears the same words that he proclaims to Christ's flock, and eats and drinks the same body and blood that his hands deliver to others. Source and center of the pastor's devotional life is the divine service. Just as the whole of the Christian life flows from font, pulpit, and altar, so also the pastor's life of *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio* is derived from word and sacrament and ever lead back to these life-giving gifts.

While the words of the *Formula of Concord* are surely descriptive of the life of all Christians, both preachers and hearers, they especially apply to those who are shepherds and teachers in the church:

... after God has made his beginning through his Holy Spirit in baptism and has ignited and effected true knowledge of God and faith, it is necessary to pray unceasingly that day by day, through the same Spirit and his grace, he strengthen this faith and preserve his heavenly gifts in us by means of daily exercise in the reading and use of God's Word, and preserve us until the end. For where God himself is not the schoolteacher, nothing can be studied and learned that is pleasing to him and beneficial for us and others (FC SD II:16-17 KW 546-47).

God teaches the pastor through the Scriptures and exercises him in that life of faith that lays hold of the promises of God, delighting to call upon his name in thanksgiving and intercession.

The words of an ancient pastoral prayer reflects this thought: "Come, Holy Spirit, shepherd him who is to shepherd others; guide him who is to guide others; discover to him [the Scriptures] who is to discover them to others; give to him who is to give to others, Lord Christ, have mercy!"<sup>18</sup> In

<sup>18</sup> Doberstein, 132.

a similar fashion the so-called sacristy prayer attributed to Luther implores God: "But since thou hast appointed me to be a pastor and teacher, and the people are in need of the teaching and instruction, O be thou my helper and let thy holy angels attend me. Then if thou art pleased to accomplish anything through me, to thy glory and not to mine or to the praise of men, grant me, out of thy pure grace and mercy, a right understanding of thy Word and that I may also diligently perform it."<sup>19</sup>

The Evangelical-Lutheran pastor uses three primary books for the life of study and prayer. He uses the Scriptures, the fountain and source of all true doctrine; the *Small Catechism*, which confesses the doctrine drawn from sacred Scripture; and the hymnal as it expresses this doctrine liturgically and doxologically.

A daily lectionary<sup>20</sup> provides the pastor with a disciplined and systematic approach to the reading of Holy Scriptures in the rhythm of the church year. The use of a daily lectionary helps guard against an erratic or selective reading of the Scriptures. It is another way of connecting the pastor's devotional life with the corporate liturgical life of the congregation. In this regard, many pastors print out the daily lectionary in the weekly bulletin so that individuals and families may make use of it in personal or family devotions.

Often overlooked as a book for the devotional life is the *Small Catechism*. This is unfortunate in light of Luther's admonition in the preface to the *Large Catechism*:

But this I say for myself: I am also a doctor and a preacher, just as learned and experienced as all of them who are so high and mighty. Nevertheless, each morning and whenever else I have time, I do as a child who is being taught the catechism and I read and recite word for word the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Psalms etc. I must still read and study the catechism daily, and yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and pupil of the catechism—and I also do so gladly. These fussy, fastidious fellows would like quickly, with one reading, to be doctors above all doctors, to know it all and to need nothing more. Well this, too, is a sure sign that they despise both their own office and people's souls, yes, even God and his Word. They do not need to fall, for they have already fallen all too horribly. What

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>20</sup> The various prayer books previously mentioned (Doberstein, Kraus, Lindemann, Sauer, Schumacher) contain daily lectionaries. Daily lectionaries are also provided in *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 295–99; *Evangelisches Tagzeitenbuch: Ordnung für das tägliche Gebet* (Kassel: Johannes Stauda Verlag, 1979); and Rudolf Spieker, *Lesung für das Jahr der Kirche* (Kassel: Johannes Stauda Verlag, 1950).

they need, however, is to become children and to begin to learn the ABC's, which they think they have long since outgrown (LC, Preface 7–8, KW 380–81).

JOHN T.  
PLESS

Luther then implores his readers to use the catechism as a book for meditation:

I implore them not ever to imagine that they have learned these parts of the catechism perfectly, or that they know them sufficiently, even though they think they know them ever so well. Even if their knowledge of the catechism were perfect (although that is impossible in this life), yet it is highly profitable and fruitful to read it daily and to make it the subject of meditation and conversation. In such reading, conversation, and meditation, the Holy Spirit is present and bestows ever new and greater light and devotion, so that it tastes better and better and is digested, as Christ promises in Matthew 18 (:20), "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them." Nothing is so powerfully effective against the devil, the world, the flesh, and all evil thoughts as to occupy one's self with God's Word, to speak about it and meditate upon it, in the way that Psalm 1(:2) calls those blessed who "meditate on God's law day and night." Without doubt, you will offer up more powerful incense or savor against the devil than to occupy yourself with God's commandments and words and to speak, sing, or think about them. Indeed this is the true holy water and sign that drives away the devil and puts him to flight.

For this reason alone you should gladly read, recite, ponder, and practice the catechism, even if the only advantage and benefit you obtain from it is to drive away the devil and evil thoughts. For he cannot bear to hear God's Word. And God's Word is not like some idle tale, such as about Dietrich of Bern, but, as St. Paul says in Romans 1 (:16), it is "the power of God," indeed, the power of God that burns the devil's house down and gives immeasurable strength, comfort, and help (LC, Preface 9–11; KW 381).

Wilhelm Löhe opines of the *Small Catechism*: "No one can deny that no catechism in the world but this can be prayed."<sup>21</sup> The catechism shapes the piety of Lutheranism as it not only provides a compendium of Christian doctrine but a pattern for praying. Luther uses liturgical elements of the tradition such as the trinitarian name, the sign of the cross, and the literary elements of the prayer offices, but he recasts these items

21 Wilhelm Löhe, *Three Books about the Church*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 170–71.

in the context of daily life.<sup>22</sup> The catechism functions both to tutor the believer in genuine prayer through its catechesis of the Lord's Prayer and to form to the voice of faith within the daily cycle of life. As the pastor is at home in the catechism, this little book sharpens and focuses his prayers.

The hymnal is also the pastor's prayer book. The daily offices of Matins, Vespers, Compline, Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer can also be prayed by the pastor in the solitude of his study.<sup>23</sup> The psalms, the hymns, and the collects are to be prayed. In this way, the language of the Scripture and the church becomes the language of the pastor. Solid hymns and sturdy liturgical prayers function to keep praying on track, providing the pastor with trustworthy words for prayer even in seasons of spiritual drought or at times when satanic assault seems to mute the voice of praise and prayer. As C.S. Lewis says, "ready made forms" keep the Christian "in touch with sound doctrine" and guard believers from falling from the faith once delivered to the saints "into a phantasm called 'my religion.'"<sup>24</sup>

As Luther envisioned it, *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio* embraced the totality of the servant of the Word's life, both in respect to the biblical injunction to "pray without ceasing" and the fact that by alignment with Christ, the pastor is constantly engaged in warfare with the evil one, both for himself and the flock under his care. Yet there remains a need for disciplined occasions of prayer at set times and places. Writing to Peter the Barber, Luther offers his own practice as a model: ". . . when I feel that I have become cool and joyless in prayer because of other tasks or thoughts (for the flesh and the devil always impede and obstruct prayer), I take my little psalter, hurry to my room, or if it be the day or hour for it, to the church where a congregation is assembled and as time permits, I say quietly to myself and word for word the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and if I have time, some words of Christ or of Paul, just as a child might do" (AE 43:193). Here Luther shows a preference for prayer in concert with the gathered congregation rather than private prayer, although he does not discount prayer in solitude.

Luther recommends that "prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night" (AE 43:193), a recommendation that stands behind his instructions for daily prayer in the *Small Catechism*. Realist that he is, Luther also confronts the common temptation to postpone prayer to a more convenient time:

22 See Albrecht Peters, *Kommentar zu Luthers Katechismen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 5:191–204. Also see Charles Arand, *That I May Be His Own: An Overview of Luther's Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 67–70; and Glen L. Borreson, "Luther's Morning and Evening Prayer as Baptismal Spirituality," *Word & World* 22 (Winter 2002), 55–63.

23 Lindemann uses the structure of Matins and Vespers in *The Lutheran Hymnal*; Sauer uses Morning and Evening Prayer from *Lutheran Worship*.

24 C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963), 12.



Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, "Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that." Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day (AE 43:193).

While Luther recognizes that there are emergencies that of necessity break the routine of prayer and that the fear and love of God sanctify the work of the believer, transforming it into prayer, he nevertheless cautions against setting the discipline of daily prayer aside. "Yet we must be careful not to break the habit of true prayer and imagine other works to be necessary which, after all, are nothing of the kind. Thus at the end we become lax and lazy, cool and listless toward prayer. The devil who besets us is not lazy or careless, and our flesh is too ready and eager to sin and is disinclined to the spirit of prayer" (AE 43:194). Here is good advice for pastors today who often work under the pressure of a weighty calendar that leaves little time for the reading of Scriptures, meditation, and prayer.

Einar Billing speaks of the Christian life as lived between two poles—the forgiveness of sins and the calling. Billing writes "The whole process of sanctification goes on thus between those two poles, the forgiveness of sins, which continually restores us to our calling, and our calling, which continually refers us to the forgiveness of sins."<sup>25</sup> The same could be said for the life of the pastor. By virtue of his call, the pastor serves God's people by preaching, administering the sacraments, teaching, consoling, guarding, and admonishing. In this holy work, he is continually dying. The pastor who proclaims the cross lives under the cross. To use the words of the apostle, "For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you" (2 Cor 4:11–12). The pastoral calling becomes the arena for the pastor's dying to self, and there he is driven back to the consolation of Christ in the gospel and sacrament. The devotional practices of the pastor are not a substitute for the divine service but a fruit and extension of the service into his daily life. Here he is recalled to his baptism, comforted by the Scriptures, enabled to call upon God's name in confidence, both for himself and his people, and enlivened to return to the gritty work of his calling as a shepherd of souls.

25 Einar Billing, *Our Calling*, trans. Conrad Bergdorf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 38.