

# A Brief Summary of the History of Lutheran Dogmatics

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When we speak of dogmatics we are really speaking of a theological discipline, a way of studying God's Word and organizing the truths of that Word in an understandable way. In reality, throughout the history of the Church, the chief practitioners of systematic theology have been theology professors of one sort or another. This is especially true in the Lutheran Church, since that Church was born at the University of Wittenberg under the leadership of Luther and his co-professors in the theology faculty. Does this mean that dogmatics is something best left at the university or seminary level? Not at all -- it means rather that the pastors and teachers of the Church studied doctrine most intensively when they were in training and then, those that were faithful to what they had learned took those timeless truths of Scripture with them into the ministry and shared them with the people of God. In this monograph, we will briefly trace the development of the teaching of dogmatics in the Lutheran Church.

## I. Roots in the Ancient Church

In a very real sense, the first and greatest dogmatician of the Christian Church (and therefore of the Lutheran Church) was Christ, who sat in the temple questioning and answering the doctors of the Law, who taught in the streets, who lectured on Isaiah (Luke 4), who expounded doctrinal points and used the biblical text to answer false doctrine (Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40). He was without doubt a dogmatic theologian. Being both true God (and therefore omniscient) and perfect man (thus in harmony with God), his doctrinal formulations were without compare.

Next in line, and first among sinful human beings would have to follow St. Paul. His epistles have the most elevated and most carefully elaborated doctrinal portions of all of Scripture. A great many *sedes doctrinae*, or basic texts for the teaching of doctrine, are found in his works. The first 11 chapters of Romans, for example, are a careful and complete treatise on the doctrine of justification. Indeed, the early Lutheran dogmaticians felt that they were following the model of Paul and the apostles when they used the loci method.

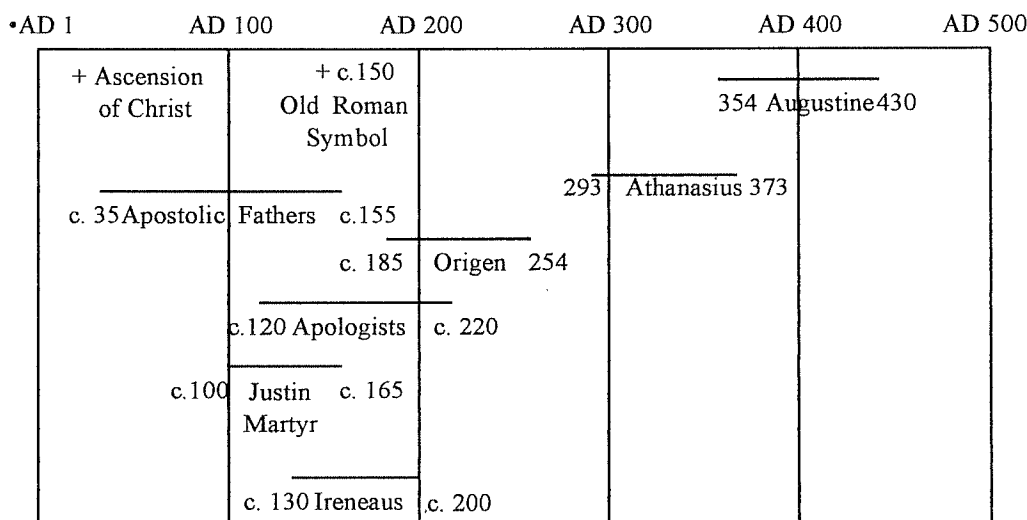
Paul, of course, was not the only doctrinal theologian of the Apostolic Church. Peter and John especially show again and again the importance of the truth and call us to be faithful to that. All the writers of the New Testament spell out carefully the doctrines of Christ upon which all of true theology is based. And let us not forget the great theologians of the Old Testament, whose words Christ, Paul and the apostles lived and breathed. Although much of their theology is written in a form that is very foreign to the modern, Western reader, a careful study of Moses or Isaiah will show that they were theologians on a par with the best of the New Testament. Again, all the writers of the Old Testament Scriptures were both dogmatic and systematic—they wrote doctrine,

teaching from God, and they organized it according to the inspiration of the Spirit in a way that makes sense within the context of their writing.

The biblical writers do present doctrine, but much of the biblical text is not written in a formal, dogmatic way. Nevertheless, all of Scripture teaches doctrine. Consider, for example, the 23rd Psalm. It has a power to it that speaks to the Christian of every age. Careful students of the scriptures have described eight separate doctrines that are taught in the Psalm, although the Psalm could not be characterized as a thesis-antithesis arrangement by any means. Yet, it is organized, and it teaches effectively and specifically these truths about God.

After the death of the Apostles, systematic theology played an important role in the life of the Church. This role is depicted in the following graph:

### I: The Roots of Lutheran Dogmatics



Already in the second century (c. 150), the earliest version of the Old Roman Symbol, the predecessor of the modern Apostles' Creed, shows that a clear and systematic presentation of the truth was necessary and desirable for the Church. Likewise, the writings of a group of men, known as the *Apostolic Fathers* (Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Hermas, Polycarp, Papias and the authors of the Epistle of Barnabas, the Epistle to Diognetus, 2nd Clement, and the Didache) have survived. These are the earliest writings of the Christian Church after the New Testament itself -- indeed, several, if not all, of these men had personal contact with at least one of the Apostles. Their work was from approximately AD 35 until around AD 155. These writers invariably present doctrinal points, as well as deal with issues of Christian life. Several of them openly oppose heresies and present clear testimonies to the Christian faith.

From c.120-220, theological leadership of the ancient church passed to a group of men known as the *Apologists*. Most of these men were not theologians in the proper

sense of the word, yet they undertook a reasoned defense of Christianity in the face of opposition from the Roman state, from pagan philosophy and from Jewish critics. The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* states that “their object was to gain a fair hearing for Christianity and to dispel popular slanders and misunderstandings and to provide for this purpose *some account of Christian belief and practice.*” (p.73). Their writings “devoted much attention to the application of OT prophecy to Christianity, and to the position of the divinity of Christ in relation to monotheism...” (ibid.). The Apologists were especially responsible for preserving John’s use of the term “Logos” (Greek for “Word,” see John 1:1) as a term for the pre-incarnate Christ.

The best known of the Apologists was Justin Martyr (c.100-c.165). Justin wrote three great works: *First Apology* expounds his doctrinal positions and explains contemporary Christian practice; *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* he deals with the Old Testament covenant and with the Gentiles as God’s New Testament people, as well as attempting to prove that Christ is the God of the Old Testament; *Second Apology* rebuts specific charges made against the Christians. Unfortunately, Justin’s Christology is faulty and he blends reason and Scripture, but he presented doctrine in a systematic way.

A contemporary of the Apologists, Irenaeus (c.130-c.200) is called “the first great Catholic theologian” by the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (p. 713). It is clear that the author of the article gives him this title because of his thorough presentation and defense of the Trinity. Like most early theologians, his emphasis is both doctrinal (Christ and the Trinity) and practical (the Canon and the episcopacy), yet he is unmistakably a dogmatic and also a systematic theologian in the sense that he has a clear set of theological beliefs that he presents and defends. His principle work is known as *Adversus omnes Haereses (Against all Heretics)*, its Latin title, even though it was originally written in Greek.

It would be possible to mention many other early dogmaticians, but we will confine ourselves to only a few: Origen (ca. 185-254) is often considered the first systematic theologian, because of his systematic writings on doctrinal topics. He also is among the first to display the weakness of using the system to overturn Scripture, since he attempted to organize his system according to Platonic philosophy and, in many cases, harmonized the Bible with philosophy, thus altering its teachings.

Another early systematic theologian worthy of special mention are Athanasius (293-373), who successfully defended the truth of the Trinity at the Council of Nicea and was a great defender of the faith in an era troubled by heresies. Perhaps the greatest of the early systematic theologians was Augustine of Hippo (354-430), some of whose work we will consider in the next section. Cyril of Jerusalem, Theodoret, John of Damascus, and many, many others wrote systematic treatments of the doctrines of Scripture in the period of the early church. Thus they were dogmaticians. As is always the case, these early systematic theologians focused principally on the issues that faced the Church in their day, and at times gave little or no attention to issues that we consider to be of central importance. But they all attempted, with greater or lesser success, to seriously

study God's Word and accurately and intelligibly proclaim what that Word says to sinful man. Their work is the root from which the modern study of dogmatics eventually grew. Much of their work was written to defend Christianity against the attacks of unbelievers and heretics. The early Church already understood the importance of dogmatics for the adequate defense of the Gospel.

*Summary:*

*Dogmatics as a study is as old as the Christian Church. Indeed, in the Old Testament, God reveals doctrine that is to be accepted and believed, and he does so in an organized (if not modern and western) fashion. This is especially true of Moses and Isaiah. Christ, the greatest of all theologians, used the Old Testament Scriptures to teach and to defend the truth (doctrine). The New Testament writers, especially Paul, continue to operate in a dogmatic fashion: they present and defend the truth in an organized and understandable way. The earliest Lutheran theologians consciously sought to imitate St. Paul with the locus method.*

*After the death of John, dogmatics continued to be an important part of the life of the church, taking the form of confessions, like the Old Roman Symbol, the Apostles' Creed, and the Nicene Creed. The generation after the apostles was led by men known as the Apostolic Fathers who sought to express the faith and defend it from error. They were succeeded by the Apologists, whose best-known representative is Justin Martyr. They Apologists sought to give Christianity a hearing in the face of pagan and Jewish opposition. They especially dealt with questions of Old Testament prophecy and the divinity of Christ.*

*Other theologians also were active throughout the period of the early church. Irenaeus, a contemporary of the Apologists, is called the "first great Catholic theologian" because of his clear presentation and defense of the Trinity. Origen is often considered the first systematic theologian in the sense of writing a systematic presentation of the doctrines of the faith. He also begins the tendency to allow the system to subvert the testimony of Scripture. Athanasius defended the Trinity at the council of Nicea (which wrote the first version of the Nicene Creed). Augustine of Hippo, one of the greatest of all ancient theologians, laid the foundation for medieval theology.*

## **II. Medieval Scholasticism.**

During the Middle Ages, systematic theology was taken to new levels and was further refined as a separate discipline. During this period, two central tendencies became apparent, one was mysticism, and the other was scholasticism.

## II: Medieval Scholasticism

800	900	1000	1100	1200	1300	1400
<p style="text-align: center;">815 <i>John Scotus Erigena</i></p>		<p>1033 Anselm of Canterbury</p>	<p>1109</p>	<p>In 13th century Aristotle's works available in Europe</p>		
		<p>1079</p>	<p>Peter Abelard 1142</p>	<p>1264 John Duns Scotus</p>	<p>1308</p>	
		<p>c. 1050 + dialectic method generally accepted</p>	<p>c.1100 Peter Lombard 1160/4</p>	<p>1224/7 Thomas Aquinas</p>	<p>1274</p>	
			<p>c.1200</p>	<p>Albertus Magnus 1280</p>	<p>1280</p>	<p><i>William of Occam</i> 1349</p>

*Scotus* indicates mystic  
 Anselm indicates scholastic

*Scholasticism* derives its name from its chief setting. It was “the educational tradition of the medieval schools.” After the collapse of the Roman Empire, education was lost to much of the common man, but it was preserved in the monasteries. This situation led to the rise of monastery schools, whose purpose was to educate the monks. Eventually, the need for education of those who worked outside of the monasteries was also recognized. Thus, the cathedral schools were born. From these schools eventually grew the great universities of the Middle Ages. Scholasticism was born and developed within these schools.

The chief element of scholasticism was a search for truth using classical philosophic methodology to examine and define the nature of revealed truth. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church states: “As now understood [scholasticism] may be described as a method of philosophical and theological speculation, which aims at a better understanding of revealed truths, that is, as an attempt by intellectual processes, by analogy and by defining, coordinating, and systematizing the data of the faith, to attain to a deeper penetration into the inner meaning of Christian philosophy” (p. 1245). To understand this process, it is essential to remember that in the Middle Ages, classical philosophy was considered to be the most logical way to approach the subject. It was not, at least initially, an attempt to subvert the Scriptures with pagan philosophy; it was rather an attempt to use the best of educational methodology in the service of the truth. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that many times the philosophic system, instead of serving to think clearly about the truth of Scripture, in reality subordinated Scripture to its method. This danger always exists when we systematize revelation, and it must be avoided.

The foundations of medieval scholasticism were laid by Augustine himself, well before the medieval period. In two seminal works, he gave life and form to the method that would later come to dominate the study of theology. In *De Doctrina Christiana*, he

argued for the need to use dialectics in the study of Christian doctrine. In its most basic form, dialectics analyzes ideas in terms of opposite pairs. Augustine also published *De Praedestinatione sanctorum* which really contained the program for scholasticism. As a movement within the church, it began when the truths of doctrine began to be examined using the dialectical method. As scholasticism proceeded, the positions taken by prominent teachers at the universities (called the *doctors*) greatly influenced the movement. Subsequent writers commented on the writings of the doctors and perpetuated and even altered their legacy. A series of schools within scholasticism rose and fell, and different theological systems were advocated by different men at different times.

By the middle of the 11th century, it was universally recognized that the dialectical method, used in moderation, was a great blessing to the church. In general, a strong distinction was made between *authority* (originally Scripture, although eventually tradition was added) and *reason*. An equally important distinction was made between *understanding* and *faith*. This distinction especially belonged to Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), sometimes called the “father of scholasticism.” Although Anselm did not write a complete treatment of dogmatics, he did write on many doctrinal points and his methodology was extremely important for later writers. Peter Abelard (1079-1142) was extremely influential as well, especially regarding the methodology of the scholastics. He wrote the first true synthesis of theological knowledge. He also wrote, *Sic et non*, in which he compared various contradictory statements of the Christian tradition and attempted to reconcile them on the basis of their historical context, their authority (the Bible as the highest) and by the use of reason. He also proceeded on the basis that faith and reason cannot contradict each other, since both were expressions of divine truth. For this reason, he believed that it was possible to subject revealed truth to the examination of reason in order to understand it more clearly. This was one of the basic difficulties of the system, simply because it did not allow for the reality of the sinful nature, at least not in a practical way. While true reason exercised by a sinless being would indeed always accept and confirm the statements of Scripture, no human being is in a position to exercise that kind of reason in that way. Scripture clearly does conflict with human reason. Thus scholasticism was ultimately doomed to subvert the Scriptures.

There were many other important early scholastics, but we will mention only Peter Lombard (ca. 1100-1160/4). Lombard combined various scholastic principles with the more contemplative methodology advocated by the mystics. His work, generally known as the *Sentences*, was the most important textbook of theology of the Middle Ages. Later writers commented on it and even divided it into verses. Even at Luther’s time, its study was still obligatory in the theology department of many universities. Unfortunately, it was studied instead of Scripture, and since it was not doctrinally sound on many points, it only reinforced the prevailing doctrinal errors of the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages.

In the 13th century, Aristotle’s works became generally available in Europe. As a result, three conflicting schools arose within scholasticism, those who followed

Augustine (as they understood him), those who followed Aristotle, even when he differed with Roman Catholic doctrine, and those who tried to synthesize the two. This last school, dominated by the Dominican order, produced the “crowning achievement of scholasticism,” Thomas Aquinas (1224/27-1274). Aquinas followed the lead of his teacher, Albertus Magnus (c. 1200-1280) in writing a comprehensive statement of theological knowledge, called a *summa*. This work was the most important writing of the Middle Ages, and is still influential in Roman Catholic theology today. Those scholastics like Aquinas and Magnus who wrote *summae* are known as the *summists*. Although Aquinas sharply differentiated between faith and reason, his attempts to harmonize Aristotle and Scripture (as represented by Augustine) opened the door for the excess of later theologians.

The greatest rivals of the Dominicans were the Franciscans, and their foremost champion was John Duns Scotus (ca. 1265-1308). Duns was the first to carry the philosophical analysis of theology to an extreme. Thus, his work is the death knell of scholasticism as an expression of Christian theology. After Duns, mysticism becomes more and more important. *Mysticism*, which existed as early as John Scotus Erigena (ca. 815-877), sought to free the participant from this world and to achieve a mystical experience. Its influence is never totally absent during the Middle Ages, but it reaches new heights in the work of William of Occam (ca. 1280-1349). Luther studied Occam’s work. In many respects, mysticism was a reaction to the systematizing of the summists. The mystics wanted a more personal experience of their faith, and found the prevailing scholastic theology to be unsatisfying.

*Summary:*

*During the Middle Ages, two tendencies dominated in dogmatics: scholasticism and mysticism. Scholasticism took its name from its chief setting, the educational institutions of the medieval era. Scholasticism was a search for truth using classical philosophic methodology. While this at times led to a clear departure from Scripture, it was not intentioned originally as such, but rather as the way of analyzing what was being taught.*

*Augustine laid the foundations of scholasticism by endorsing the use of dialectics. Throughout its history, the influence of the doctors, or the great scholastic teachers, gained more and more prominence. Anselm of Canterbury postulated the two essential principles of scholasticism: authority (scripture and eventually tradition) and reason. Peter Abelard subjected the truths of revelation to the examination of reason, because he believed that the two could not be in conflict. Thus, reason subverted Scripture in his system. Peter Lombard’s Sentences served as the basic textbook of theology until the time of Luther. It reinforced the doctrinal errors of the Roman Catholic Church.*

*In the 13th century, Aristotle’s works became generally available in Europe, giving rise to three schools of scholasticism: those who followed Augustine, those who followed Aristotle and those who mediated between the*

two. The mediating school produced the greatest of all scholastic teachers, Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas attempted to produce a comprehensive statement of theological knowledge, called a *summa*. Those writers who did this came to be called the *summists*.

*Mysticism made its appearance as early as the ninth century in the work of John Scotus Erigena. Its greatest champion was John Duns Scotus. Mystics sought a more personal expression of the faith and sought to free the Christian from this world and to achieve a mystical experience. In William of Occam, mysticism reached new heights. His work was studied by Luther.*

### **III. Systematic Theology in the Reformation Period**

In one sense, the Reformation period continues many of the traditional approaches of the medieval period. Even the great Reformers were products of the theological thought that preceded them. Luther, Melanchthon, and Chemnitz were all careful students of the theologians who had preceded them and knew their work well. At the same time, the Reformation represents a radical return to the gospel of the early church. Catholicism lost sight of the essential truth of justification by faith through grace. The great insight of Lutheranism is the centrality of the work of Christ is justification to all theology. Starting with Luther, all theologians who true to the Scripture and to the rediscovery of the Gospel place justification at the center of their dogmatic work.

#### *A. Luther's Work -- the Foundation of Lutheran Dogmatics*

It is often stated that Martin Luther (1483-1546) was not a "systematic theologian." While this statement can be properly understood, it seems as though it is made to undercut the study of dogmatics as being unfaithful to Luther and his theology. In the sense of the systematic study of doctrine (dogma), to say that Luther was not systematic is simply untenable. It is true that Luther never wrote a dogmatics text, but that hardly means that he was not a systematic theologian. Using that argument, one could also say that Luther was not a "pastoral theologian" because he never wrote a pastoral theology text. But his instructions to the Saxon visitors come very close. In the same way, Luther did write many doctrinal treatises in which he explained and defended a great many doctrinal positions. In addition to his approval of Melanchthon's *Loci Communes*, Luther gives us the essence of dogmatics in written form: the Large and Small Catechisms. In reality, these two works are systematic: they lay out and interrelate the various doctrines of Scripture, and they are dogmatic: Luther insists that these are the chief doctrines of Scripture and that the head of the household should teach them to his entire family.

The greatest dogmatician of the Wisconsin Synod, Adolf Hoenecke, makes three points regarding Luther as a systematician. The first two are essentially the same as those we have just made. Hoenecke adds a third point that is worth remembering. He states:



“Above all, Luther has hewn out from the Scripture, as from a quarry, the stones for the construction of dogmatics. There is no article that he does not treat, as Melanchthon praises him” (vol. I, p. 262). Hoenecke’s point is well taken. All subsequent Lutheran theologians who are worthy of the name depend heavily on Luther’s thought and at times, even on his manner of speaking, to teach the truths of Scripture.

Hoenecke goes on to discuss the influence of classical logic, scholasticism, mysticism and the writings of Augustine on the work of the great Reformer. He points out that Luther’s writings are supremely logical, but that logic does not dictate his theology. Luther speaks in an organized and systematic way, with the same great care that the scholastic teachers used, but Luther cannot be accused of being a scholastic theologian. Without a doubt, the mystical element is present in his writings, but Luther does not go down the path of mystical subjectivity. Most clearly of all, the influence of Augustine, Luther’s favorite of the ancient church fathers, is present in Luther’s writings. But in no way is Luther a slave to his great predecessor’s work. Hoenecke rightly points out that Luther used Scripture as a corrective for all the false emphases in all these movements. Luther was, first and foremost, a Scriptural theologian, even as a dogmatician. It was his direct contact with God’s Word that made him the teacher, and even the systematic theologian, that he was (pp. 262-3).

Hoenecke lists the following chief points of emphasis in the theology of Luther. The list is striking, because it represents the chief emphases of Lutheran theology throughout the history of the Lutheran Church. Hoenecke’s list consists of Christology, Scripture, the Church, the ministry, the Antichrist, justification, election, and sanctification (p.263). The Lutheran Church since the time of Luther has dealt with very few issues that are not included in this list.

Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) was a contemporary of Luther’s. He was not a theologian in the sense that he never was ordained nor did he graduate from a theological faculty. Nevertheless, he became Luther’s chief assistant and the second most prominent leader of the Lutheran Reformation. Melanchthon wrote the first Lutheran dogmatics text, the *Loci Communes*, in 1521. Indeed, this was the earliest comprehensive treatment of the Lutheran theological position printed (it predates the Augsburg Confession by nine years). In order to understand Luther and Melanchthon’s work, the following chart is offered:

### III. The Foundations of Lutheran Dogmatics

1500	1510	1520	1530	1540	1550	1560
	1517 + 95 Theses	1521 Orthodox editions of Melanch- thon's Loci Communes	1535  1535 Early synergis- tic phase of Loci	+ 1546, Luther dies  1546  1546		1555  Openly synergistic editions of Loci
		1529 + Luther's Cate- chisms	+ 1530 UAC and Apology  1537 + Smalkald Articles			

Melanchthon's *Loci* went through many editions. They can generally be divided into three groups, which reflect Melanchthon's and the Lutheran Church's historical situations. The earliest editions, from 1521 to 1535, are in complete agreement with Luther. Luther held that the 1521 edition was worthy of being part of the canon. From 1535 until Luther's death in 1546, they begin to show signs of *synergism*, the teaching that man may, in some form, cooperate in his conversion and justification. They also begin to lean toward Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper. In the editions which followed Luther's death until the final edition of 1555, Melanchthon openly espoused synergism and a symbolic understanding of the Real Presence in the Lord's Supper (that is, that Christ was not actually physically present).

Why did this happen to the man who taught Luther Hebrew and who upon Luther's death was universally regarded as the leader of Lutheranism? Melanchthon could never free himself from the spirit of his age. *Humanism*, the prevailing philosophy of the Renaissance, placed reason at the heart of theology. Even Scripture was not so exalted. Melanchthon, despite his heritage as the author of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology could not free himself from the power of reason; thus he could not maintain the Scriptural teachings that the Lutheran Reformation was founded upon.

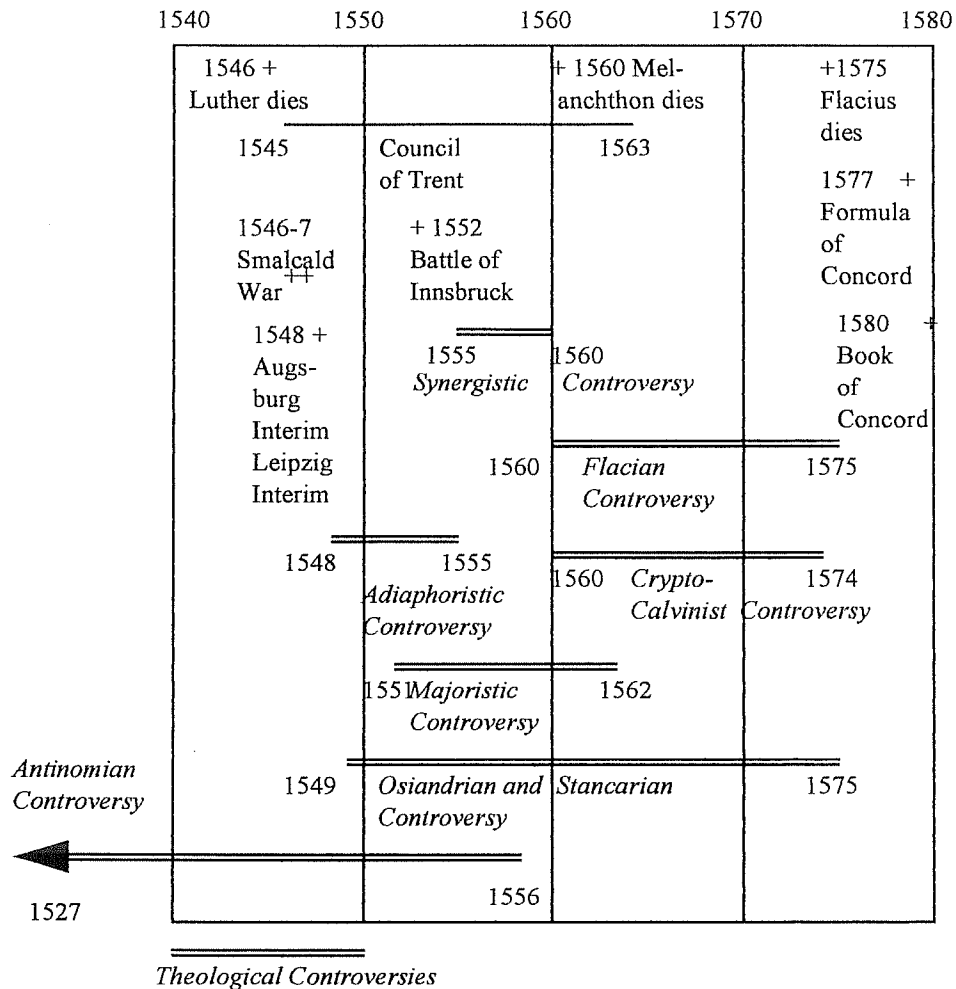
Although Melanchthon failed to maintain his doctrinal integrity after Luther's death, and for this reason was one of the prime causes of the controversies that led to the Formula of Concord, his influence on later theologians was tremendous. Chemnitz' *Loci Theologici* are modeled after, and even contain the text of, Melanchthon's *Loci Communes*. Even synergistic dogmaticians followed Melanchthon's model. Victorinus Strigel published his book of loci from (1581-84), in conscious imitation of the model of Melanchthon, but without the doctrinal clarity of Melanchthon's early editions.

### *B. The Consolidation of the Lutheran Doctrinal Position.*

During the last decade of Luther's life, forces were gathering that would attempt to exterminate the young church at the first opportunity. Luther himself commanded such respect in his day, that while he lived, the enemies of the Lutheran Church did not openly attack. When he died, however, the storm broke over Germany. Humanly speaking, the Lutheran Church was in danger of being exterminated.

The assaults on the Lutheran Church came from several different directions. One was political. In 1546 and 1547, the Charles V went to war against the Lutheran princes, organized into the Schmalkald League. One of the most power Lutheran princes, Maurice, the Duke of Saxony, betrayed the others and invaded Electoral Saxony, the heartland of the Reformation. The Elector of Saxony, John Frederick, was captured and imprisoned. In 1548, two temporary theological documents were imposed upon the Lutheran Church. The first was the Augsburg Interim, the second was the Leipzig Interim. Both documents were essentially Catholic in character and mandated elimination of the principal theological points of the Lutheran Reformation. They were called *interims* because they were supposed to be temporary settlements until the Council of Trent (1545-1563) could make final arrangements. The Augsburg Interim was fiercely resisted and it was impossible to fully enforce, especially in northern Germany. At this moment, the Lutheran Church looked to Melanchthon for clear and forceful leadership. He did not provide it. Although he initially opposed the Interim, he would not attack it. Indeed, at the request of Maurice who could not implement the Augsburg Interim, he wrote the Leipzig Interim to replace it. The Leipzig Interim was supposed to strike a compromise between the Augsburg Interim and the Lutheran position. While the language was less radical, Melanchthon sacrificed Lutheran theology and accepted the theological position of the Augsburg Interim. Thus, the political crisis that faced the Lutherans after Luther's death was translated within two and a half years into a specifically doctrinal and theological crisis.

#### IV: The Consolidation of the Lutheran Position



The Interim was opposed at great cost by many Lutherans. Theological leadership for the pro-Lutheran side came principally from other members of Luther's inner circle. The foremost of these Lutherans was Matthias Illyricus Flacius (1520-1575), a Croatian Lutheran who had been a professor at the University of Wittenberg since 1544. Beginning already in 1548, Flacius condemned the Interims and entered into open conflict with Melanchthon. In 1549, he fled Wittenberg and went to "weeping Magdeburg," the only haven for Lutherans at that time.

At the same time that the Interim and its Catholic theology provoked a crisis in the Lutheran Church, a series of theological crises arose. Melanchthon and several of his co-workers at the University of Wittenberg were really more in sympathy with Calvinistic theology than with Lutheran. By 1550, the University where the Lutheran Reformation had been born was in the hands of professors who were only nominally loyal to Luther's teachings. Seven major controversies (as well as some minor ones) have been identified:

The *Adiaphoristic Controversy* dealt with the re-introduction of Catholic practices to the Lutheran Church. It lasted from 1548-1555.

The *Majoristic Controversy*, named for George Major, concerned the role of good works in salvation. It began in 1551 and ended in 1562.

The *Synergistic Controversy* dealt with the question of whether man can cooperate in his own conversion. It lasted from 1555-1560.

The *Flacian Controversy*, named for Flacius, dealt with his assertion that sin is part of a man's essence. This was one of the longest controversies, beginning in 1560 and lasting until 1575.

The *Osiandrian* and *Stancarian Controversies* dealt with questions about Christ's work for us. They ran concurrently from 1549-1566.

The *Antinomian Controversy* took several forms and dealt with questions of the law's application to the Christian. It actually began in 1527, during Luther's life, and reappeared after his death. It did not come to an end until 1556, thus making it even longer than the Flacian Controversy.

The *Crypto-Calvinist Controversy* dealt with the Real Presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper.

In these controversies, three principal parties emerged among the Lutheran theologians. One party was known as the *phillipists* (because they followed Philip Melancthon) or the *crypto-calvinists* (the "hidden Calvinists," because they were not really Lutheran in their theology). The second party, led initially by Flacius, called themselves the *gnasio-lutherans*, or the true Lutherans, because they held fast to Luther's positions. They taught at a new university founded in 1547 at Jena. Unfortunately, several of their leaders, most notably Flacius himself, fell into doctrinal errors by overzealously defending the truth. Due to the dedication of the Lutheran party to the truth, however, these errors were also condemned. Flacius, unfortunately, would not retract his error, and lost his position at Jena. The third party that arose was of special importance. It is sometimes called the *center party*, because its leaders were not directly involved in the conflict between the Phillipists and the Gnesio-Lutherans. Rather, these men are known for their efforts to secure peace from 1567 until 1577. However, that characterization can be misleading. It is true that these men made peace among the warring parties, but the peace that they made was the Formula of Concord, possibly the most important Lutheran dogmatic writing in history. The Formula of Concord stands firmly on the base of true Lutheran theology and expressly condemns the doctrinal errors of the Interims, of the Phillipists and of those Gnesio-Lutherans who fell into error. As such, it is one of the crowning achievements of the Lutheran Church. It was adopted in 1577. In 1580, the Book of Concord assembled the confessions of the Lutheran Church into one work, and as such, is of enormous importance for all

subsequent Lutheran systematic theology. All confessional Lutheran doctrinal writings take into account the positions of the Lutheran Church adopted in the Book of Concord.

*Summary:*

*Although Luther never wrote a dogmatics text, his work is foundational for the formal study of dogmatics. Luther deals with nearly every article of the faith in his writings, he presents them in an organized fashion, especially in his catechisms and other confessional writings, and he gave the Lutheran church the basic building blocks for her subsequent dogmatic writings. Without a doubt, Luther utilizes the heritage that he inherited from the Middle Ages in terms of scholastic and mystical thought, and especially the work of Augustine. But in Luther we see the essence of a Scriptural theologian who stands first upon the Word of God and uses that Word to correct whatever false emphases exist in the tradition.*

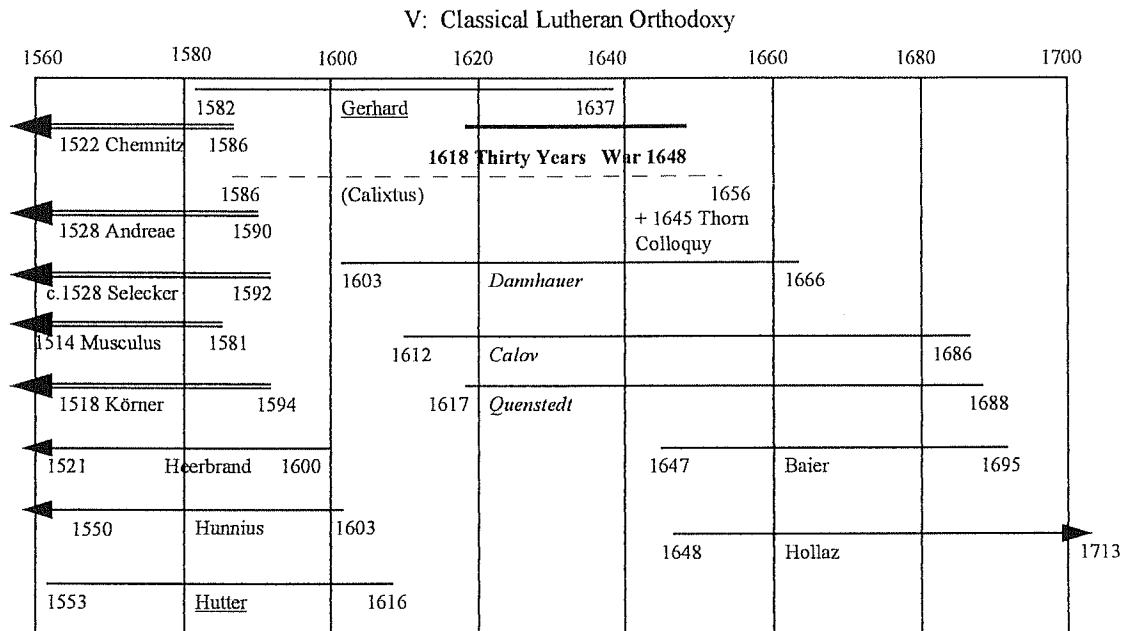
*Philip Melancthon, Luther's closest co-worker, wrote the Loci Communes which served as the first Lutheran dogmatics text. As such it was highly influential for all subsequent Lutheran writers. Melancthon's first edition was highly praised by Luther, but as time went on subsequent editions became less and less orthodox.*

*After Luther's death, the Lutheran Church was attacked externally and internally. Externally, the greatest threat was posed by the political and theological efforts of the Emperor Charles V and the Catholic Church. The Schmalkald War and the interims that were imposed upon the Lutheran territories after the war caused great hardship. Internally, the Lutheran Church was torn apart by a series of controversies that threatened the very heart of the Reformation doctrine. The Church divided into two parties, the Phillipists, who followed Melancthon and tried to moderate Luther's teaching, and the Gnesio-Lutherans, who contended for the truths of the Lutheran Reformation. After the death of Melancthon, the center party arose which achieved peace. They did not achieve that peace by way of compromise, however. They achieved it by placing their doctrine squarely upon the Scriptures. In 1577, the Formula of Concord put an end to the strife. In 1580, all the confessions of the Lutheran Church were gathered into the Book of Concord.*

#### **IV. The Age of Classical Lutheran Orthodoxy.**

For a century after the writing of the Book of Concord, Lutheran Orthodoxy enjoyed a period that can be referred to as its classical age. All confessional and orthodox Lutherans look to the insights of this period as models of the theology. Without a doubt, the study of systematic theology reached levels that have not been equaled since. We will subdivide this period into three sections, the so-called "Golden Age," "High

Orthodoxy” and the “Silver Age.” In order to understand the period more clearly, the following chart is offered:



Writers of the Formula of Concord

Gerhard indicates period of high orthodoxy

Calov indicates fully orthodox theologian from “silver age”

NB: All dates are from birth to death; obviously the time of the theologian’s working life is shorter.

### A. The “Golden Age” of Lutheran Dogmatics

The so-called “Golden Age” of Lutheran Orthodoxy extends from the period of the writing of the Formula of Concord (1577) until the end of the sixteenth century. The primary theologians of this period were those of the generation after Luther and Melancthon. The greatest of them was Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586), of whom the Catholics rightly maintained, “If the second Martin had not come, the first would not have prevailed”. Chemnitz was a prolific writer. His doctrinal works not only include his *Loci*, but also his definitive treatises *The Two Natures in Christ* and *The Lord’s Supper* and the massive *Examination of the Council of Trent*. Chemnitz was, without a doubt, the greatest dogmatician the Lutheran Church has ever produced.

Chemnitz, however, was not the only important orthodox Lutheran theologian of the period. The other principle authors (with Chemnitz) of the Formula of Concord must also be included: Jacob Andreae (1528-1590), Nicholas Selnecker (ca. 1528-1592), Andreas Musculus (1514-1581), Christoph Körner (1518-1594) and David Chytraeus (1531-1600). Most of these men, (except for Selnecker) however, did not write dogmatics texts, although all were active in the Lutheran Church. Two other important early dogmaticians were Jacob Heerbrand (1521-1600), whose *Compendium Theologiae* was published even before Chemnitz’ *Loci* (the first edition in 1575), and Giles

(Aegidius) Hunnius (1550-1603) who did not write a dogmatics, but did write on virtually all the topics of dogmatics. He is heavily quoted by later Lutheran theologians.

Worthy of special mention is Leonard Hutter (1563-1616), who forms the bridge between the dogmatic method of these theologians and those of the next period. He does this in three ways. First of all, chronologically, he is active in both periods. Secondly, he was the teacher of Johann Gerhard, the most important theologian of the next period. Finally, in his writings, he insists on a strong systematic development and interrelation of the doctrinal points. His two chief works were his *Compendium locorum theologicorum* (1610) and *Loci communes theologici* (1619). The first work was a catechism that asked questions and presented answers from Luther and the Confessions. It was intended for use at the high school level, and contained three levels of answers, those for beginners, those for advanced students, and those for their parents. The second work was a university text. It was written in the loci format, but in it, Hutter expresses a desire for a more demanding method, thus anticipating the development of the systema method. Hutter was given a unique designation by his fellow Lutherans: Lutherus *redonatus*, Luther re-given. (Hoenecke, I:267).

During this period, the loci method is most common. Also during this period, the Lutheran Church came under repeated attacks from Catholicism and Calvinism. The Catholic threat, which had manifested itself in the form of overt political aggression in the previous period, and which would do so again in the next period, during this time was primarily theological. The Council of Trent had given birth to an important movement in the Catholic Church known as the *Counter-Reformation*. This movement sought to curb the abuses of the medieval Catholic Church while at the same time re-affirming Catholic doctrine in a forceful and meaningful way. The most important promoters of the Counter-Reformation were the *Jesuit Order*, confirmed by Pope Paul already in 1540. The Jesuits succeeded in winning back large territories, especially southern Germany and Poland, for the Catholic Church. The Calvinistic threat came primarily through internal penetration of the Lutheran Church by nominal Lutherans who really held to Calvinist positions. This was caused, at least in part, by the provisions of the religious *Peace of Augsburg* (1555) under which the emperor ended the obligatory observation of the Interims. He was forced into this position because the same Maurice who had made his victory possible, attacked him at Innsbruck in 1552, and forced him to agree to the Peace of Augsburg. In this treaty, the rights of Lutherans, but not of Calvinists, were recognized under a formula known as *cuius regio eius religio*, "whose territory, his religion." This formula meant that the local prince chose between Lutheranism and Catholicism as the one religion of his territory. Since Calvinism was not recognized and accorded similar rights, crypto-Calvinists, or Calvinists who called themselves Lutherans, penetrated many Lutheran areas. In the end, extensive Lutheran territories were lost to Calvinism. All branches of Christianity began to write extensive doctrinal treatises and dogmatic works during this time period.

The genius of this period, which is seen in the writings of the men mentioned earlier, was driven by controversy. Theological controversy is never pleasant nor is it to



be wished for. But when God allows it to come upon the Church, and faithful men rise to the defense of the Gospel, the Church emerges with a clearer understanding of what God has to say. The men who wrote the Formula of Concord and their contemporaries in the Lutheran Church contributed to our understanding of what God has to say to us in the Bible. In spite of what is often maintained, the theologians of this period were very much concerned with a theology of both the head and the heart. The truth of Scripture was a passion for them.

### *B. The Period of "High Orthodoxy"*

The period of "High Orthodoxy" followed the so-called "Golden Age" and continued through the end of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). During this period, the loci method was still preferred. Also during this period, the polemics became less impassioned and more carefully worked out. A number of important theologians were active during this period, but the giant of this time was Johann Gerhard (1582-1637). Gerhard was a pupil of Leonard Hutter's, and is generally acknowledged as being the third greatest theologian in the history of Lutheranism, after Luther and Chemnitz. Gerhard's chief work was his *Loci Theologici*. This work has two chief characteristics that make it influential for all subsequent Lutheran theologians. It is extremely clear and easy to understand. It also introduces a basic Aristotelian methodology into the loci. This tendency will become more and more pronounced throughout the seventeenth century, although it is relatively mild in Gerhard. During his lifetime, Gerhard was the most influential theologian in Lutheranism, and he wrote many other works besides his dogmatics. Sadly, most of his work exists today only in Latin, and only this year (1997) has a definitive edition of his works been *begun*.

A contemporary of Gerhard's was George Calixtus (or Calixt, 1586-1656). Calixtus presented a serious challenge to Lutheranism that echoes both the efforts of the Leipzig Interim to find a mediating position between Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism, and the modern ecumenical movement's efforts to do the same. Calixtus wanted to reunite Lutherans, Reformed, and Roman Catholics on the basis of the consensus of the first five centuries of the Christian Church. He considered that consensus to be found in the Scriptures and the Apostles' Creed as interpreted by a rule called the *Vincentian Canon*, named for St. Vincent of Lerins, who laid down a threefold test of the *catholicity* (that is, the acceptance by the whole church) of a doctrine: "What has been believed everywhere, always and by all." Calixtus and his followers came to be known as *syncretists* in the sense that they tried to merge Lutheranism with other faiths, and in the process espoused doctrinal positions that were not Lutheran. Eventually, Calixtus was rejected by the Lutheran Church. In 1645, at the Colloquy of Thorn, Roman Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran theologians tried, unsuccessfully, to find a formula for reunion. Calixtus participated as a Reformed representative.

After the Thorn Colloquy, Calixtus continued to teach and write. Syncretism came to be one of the principle issues of the first part of the next period. Arbitrarily, we use the end of the Thirty Years' War to mark the division between the two periods, but in

reality the Lutheran Church passed gradually from one to the next. All three of the leading theologians of the next period were alive and working before the end of this time.

### C. The "Silver Age" of Lutheran Dogmatics

In the second half of the 17th century the final age of classical Lutheran orthodoxy began. This period was marked by a tremendous amount of writing. Many different Lutheran theologians actively defended the faith against the encroachments of Catholicism and Calvinism (especially in the form of syncretism). It was during this period that two important developments were made. One was the replacement of the loci method. In the new method, the dogmatics texts (sometimes called *systema*) attempted to avoid the repetition inherent in the loci method. Additionally, during this time, the Aristotelian influence reached its height. Critics of Lutheran Orthodoxy like to term this time period *Lutheran scholasticism*, and compare it to the late Middle Ages. Pietism, which reached its height during the second half of this period, and brought it to a close, thought especially of this era when it spoke of "dead orthodoxy."

It would be a mistake, however, to dismiss this period. The Lutheran theologians who wrote throughout this century held to the motto *veritas et pietas*, truth and piety. It is true that some writers allowed the philosophical system to lead to doctrinal errors, but on the whole, the theologians of this time were interested in defending the truth in the language of the day. Dogmaticians from the two other principle branches of Christendom also employed this type of language.

The first theologian of this era that must be considered is Abraham Calov (1612-1686). Calov was the leading theologian of this era. He had a difficult childhood and suffered many personal losses during his lifetime (five wives and thirteen children preceded him in death). Yet, he was one of the most productive writers in the history of Lutheranism. As a professor, he was so popular that the elector had to prohibit students from outside his territory from enrolling in his university. Calov's greatest work is actually a commentary on the whole Bible called *Biblia Illustrata (The Explained Bible)*. His chief dogmatic effort was his *Systema Locorum Theologicorum*, which was 12 volumes long.

Calov was one of the most controversial theologians in Lutheran history. Those who admire him, consider him to have been a tremendous theologian. Those who criticize him find nothing good in his works. The chief point at issue is the value of his polemic writers. Calov was one of the most polemical writers in Lutheran history. He challenged every heresy of his day, and advocated a strict, confessional Lutheranism. He wrote 28 different books against Calixtus and the syncretists. He also vigorously attacked Pietism (which we will consider in the next section) and *Socinianism*, a philosophy named for an Italian who spent most of his life in Poland. It was a form of *unitarianism*; that is, it denied the Trinity and also the Divinity of Christ.

During his lifetime, Calov was hailed by orthodox Lutherans as a great champion of the faith, but was despised by his opponents. A fair reading of his work, however, would show that his polemical writings do not manifest a bitter spirit, but are relentless in their attacks on false doctrine. It has been said that his continued involvement in polemics has left a distorted image of the man in history. We would classify him as ranking next to Gerhard as a great theologian.

Another prominent theologian of this period was Johann Conrad Dannhauer (1603-1666). Dannhauer was a brilliant theologian who recognized the weaknesses of the church of his day. Dannhauer supported the movement to improve the worship life of the church, and staunchly opposed the main challenge of the day, which came from the Reformed and from syncretists within the Lutheran Church led by or Calixtus.

A contemporary of Calov was Johannes Andreas Quenstedt (1617-1688). Quenstedt was the nephew of Gerhard and unlike Calov and Dannhauer was relatively uninvolved in controversy. Quenstedt has rightly been called "the bookkeeper of Lutheran Orthodoxy." Quenstedt was not a deep original thinker, but he was a very able researcher. He sat at the feet of the Lutherans who had gone before him and quietly absorbed their thought and theology. His life's work, his *Systema*, is one of the longest and greatest dogmatic works in the history of the Lutheran Church. His work gives us an insight into the first one hundred years of Lutheran thought that would be impossible otherwise.

As was the case with the previous period, there are transitional theologians in this period as well. In this case, there are two: Johann Baier (1647-1695) and David Hollaz (1648-1713). Both men wanted to be orthodox Lutherans, but were affected by Pietism. Baier's *Compendium* is of special interest to us because it was later revised by C.F.W. Walther and served for many years as the dogmatics text in the Missouri Synod seminaries, where many of our synod's founding theologians studied. Hollaz wrote what is considered to be the last important dogmatics of the classical period, and in the 18th century, it was the most popular. It is also affected by syncretism.

#### *Summary:*

*The century following the compilation of the Book of Concord is often considered to be the Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy. During this time, the Lutheran Church engaged in the study of systematic theology in a way that surpasses all other periods. The time is often broken into three periods, the "Golden Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy," the "Age of High Orthodoxy," and the "Silver Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy." The "Golden Age" lasts from the time of the writing of the Book of Concord until the start of the Thirty Years War (roughly 1580 to 1618). The chief representatives of this time period are Martin Chemnitz and the other writers of the Formula of Concord. Chemnitz' work is so important and so extensive that the Catholics said of him, "If the second Martin had not come, the first would not have prevailed." During this period, the Jesuit Order*

*is formed, and the Catholic Church undertakes the Counter-Reformation following the principles re-stated at the Council of Trent. The Religious Peace of Augsburg establishes the principal that the prince decides the religion of his territory, thus laying the groundwork for the rise of the territorial church in Germany. This move also paves the way for the loss of several Lutheran territories to Calvinism.*

*During the period of "High Orthodoxy," Johann Gerhard introduces classical philosophy to the study of systematic theology. Also during this time, George Calixtus involves the Lutheran Church in a new synergistic controversy with his efforts to unite the Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic faiths on the basis of the consensus of the early church according to the Vincentian Canon. The controversies continued in the "Silver Age," with Abraham Calov and Johannes Quenstedt defended and collecting the truths of the Lutheran Reformation. This age saw such an increase in the use of classical philosophy that it is sometimes considered to be an age of Lutheran scholasticism, although all branches of the Christian Church used this kind of methodology. A great deal of polemical writing marked this period, which also saw the birth of Pietism. Its final representatives were unable to maintain their orthodoxy in a pure form.*

## **V. The Decline of Lutheran Orthodoxy**

At the end of the 17th and in the 18th century, Lutheranism fragmented into several different schools. These different movements are somewhat confusing for us to follow today for several reasons. One is that the beginning and ending of each movement is approximate. None is born or dies in a vacuum. Related to that is the fact that they are contemporaneous, and the interrelationship is difficult to judge or explain in a short work. Finally, many of the original sources are simply unavailable to us outside of specialized libraries. Most of us will have to rely on the judgments of second and third party critics to evaluate these movements. We will consider several important schools, but in no way can we be exhaustive in our discussion of the 18th century religious scene.

In the first half of the 17th century, the leading threats to Lutheranism were to be found in the efforts of the Roman Catholic Church to reclaim its lost territory, in the form of the Counter-Reformation and the Thirty Years War, and in the efforts of Calvinism to infiltrate the Lutheran territories and win Lutheran princes over for the Reformed position. In the second half of the century, a new series of threats would face the Lutheran Church, some born from within, others born in secular philosophy and imported into the Lutheran Church. To help to clarify the situation, the following graph is offered:

## VI. Decline of Orthodox Lutheranism

	1640	1660	1700	1740	1780	1820	1860	
1635	Spener		+ 1675 <i>Pia Desideria</i>	1705				
			1663	1727	Francke			
			1670	1744	Lange			
			1667	1729	Buddens			
			1679	1754	Wolff			
				1757	1706 Baumgarten			
			1699	1786	Carpov			
1607	J.B. Carpzov the Elder		1725	1791	1771 Wegscheider			
			1749	1849	1768 Schleiermacher			
1639	J.B. Carpzov the Younger		1720	1803	1749 J.B. Carpzov			
			1699	1673 Loescher				

—————  
Pietists

—————  
Rationalists (in loose sense of the term)

—————  
Orthodox Lutherans

### A. Pietism

In 1675, Jacob Philipp Spener (1635-1705) published *Pia desideria, Pious Thoughts*, in which he outlined a program for reform in the Lutheran Church. Unfortunately, the official Lutheran Church had fallen on hard times in many places, and the program that Spener outlined really was not as radical as we sometimes think. Spener himself, although guilty of some doctrinal errors, was not radically un-orthodox. But he opened a door for the movement called Pietism. *Pietism* stressed the subjective and ignored doctrinal formulation. It emphasized the Christian life at the expense of beliefs, and it did so to such an extent, that it failed to recognize Christian freedom on a theological level. This failure translated into legalism on the practical level. Much of modern evangelicalism stems from pietism. The movement swept Germany and the Lutheran lands.

What made Pietism attractive? Its proponents felt that Europe had entered a “post-Christian” phase, especially later in the movement. They felt that the state church was not teaching the people to be personally pious. They felt that the theological leaders of the Lutheran Church were either political officials with no spiritual qualifications to lead or that they were so interested in doctrine that they forgot about real life Christianity. They deplored what they perceived to be a lack of spirituality, and even a lack of faith on the part of the rank and file Christian. The Pietists from the very beginning blamed the problems of the Lutheran Church in the second half of the 17th century on an over emphasis on the importance of true doctrine. In this sense, Pietism had much in common with the mysticism of the Middle Ages. It sought a more personal experience of the faith.

Yet the Pietists were less than fair. It is true that their call for more practicality in the preaching and more piety in the education of pastors was well received -- but strongly orthodox theologians like Calov and Dannhauer endorsed these calls. Spener himself was careful not to connect true doctrine with the problems of the church of his day. But he did feel that pastoral training of his time overemphasized polemics and apologetics. In his view the defense of doctrine undermined true piety. The Pietists should have considered more carefully the effects of the Thirty Years War, which totally disrupted church life, as well as the realities of the state church when they were critiquing the situation of their day.

Pietism, already starting with Spener, was guilty of several doctrinal errors. This is not really surprising, given the emphasis on the subjective and the de-emphasis on the objective. As the movement matured, the situation only worsened. Since the subjective was the most important aspect of theology, Pietists in general were not very concerned about doctrinal drift or doctrinal differences among them. For this reason, very few important doctrinal works were written by the Pietists. Neither of the principle leaders of Pietism, Spener and August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), wrote dogmatic works. Hoenecke considers Joachim Lange (1670-1744) to be the most important pietistic dogmatician. In his work, he is only interested in the basic truths of salvation; all other doctrinal concerns are of no practical interest. For this reason, he was in conflict with both confessional Lutherans and also with rationalists. He opposed confessionalism on the grounds of its insistence on doctrine, and he opposed rationalists due to their lack of faith in the supernatural.

It is difficult to find a specific date to mark the passing of Pietism. Many of its emphases are still alive today. But in general terms, it lasted until at least the middle of the 19th century.

### *B. Rationalism*

Already in the 17th century, the Enlightenment began to sweep Europe. The *Enlightenment* refers to a profound change in the way of viewing the world. It stemmed from the Renaissance and from the revolution in scientific thought that occurred during

the 17th and 18th centuries. It did not immediately enter the field of theology, but even very early theologians began to exhibit ways of thinking that corresponded with the thought of the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment tended to view religion in terms of *natural religion*, which meant that all men have a basic, common religion that they know by nature without revelation. It is short step from this position to *deism*, the view that there is a god and he should be worshipped, but that is basically all we can say about him. Deism openly rejects all specifically Christian doctrines.

Inevitably, when these philosophical propositions assumed a central place in the German universities, Lutheran theology would suffer. The first strong indication of this came in the work of the teachers of what is sometimes called the *transitional theology*. Hoenecke calls it the “historizing school.” These men attempted to combine a conservative Lutheran orthodoxy with Pietism and with the new learning of the Enlightenment. The foremost example of this school is Johann Franz Buddeus (1667-1729). In Buddeus’ attempt to find a common ground between orthodoxy and the other influences of his day, he subjected revelation to the test of natural religion and limited theology to practical topics. Several other prominent members of this school could be mentioned.

Another school that arose and was extremely influential after 1720 was that of *theological Wolffianism*. Christian Wolff (1679-1754) attempted to model his philosophical system on mathematics. When this was applied to theology, it insisted on the objective in all things. Thus the transitional theology’s emphasis on experience and practical ends was denied. The most important of the Wolffian theologians was Sigmund Jakob Baumgarten (1706-1757). Wolffian theology still accepted many Christian dogmas on the basis of its mathematical proofs, following the work of Jakob Carpov (1699-1786) who attempted to demonstrate Christian doctrine mathematically.

Inevitably, Wolffianism led to an even further development, called neology. *Neology* still maintained that it held to the traditional Christian position, but in reality it subjected all Christian teaching to the criticism of modern learning. Neology’s starting point was not Scripture, but rather reason, feeling, and moral consciousness. The leading proponent of this school was probably Johann Salomo Semler (1725-91). In Semler, we see two tendencies that are still very much alive in Lutheranism. First of all, Semler felt that he was still defending traditional orthodoxy, and even attempted to quote Luther in defense of his position—this in spite of his open denial of many Lutheran teachings. Secondly, Semler applied the historical-critical method to the Scriptures and to church history. Thus, miracles were rationalized and re-stated, and doctrine often was not the teaching of Scripture, but rather the conclusion of the Christian Church.

The final development within the nominal Lutheran Church was rationalism in the strict sense of the word. Often we speak of all these developments as “rationalism” because they elevate reason over revelation, and it is legitimate to speak that way.

However, in a more narrow sense, rationalism refers to the thought of the final schools of this progression. Unlike deism, which denied revelation altogether, *rationalism* in this sense accepts a very limited role for revelation. However, the rationalists see a gradual evolution of religion away from a religion based upon revelation and into a religion based entirely upon reason. Thus, revelation is possible, but it is inferior. The best religion is that of reason. The foremost dogmatician of true rationalism was Julius August Ludwig Wegscheider (1771-1849) who denied miracles, the sacraments, the resurrection of Christ, the atonement, etc. Clearly, rationalism left the faith, in spite of the role that it claimed to give to revelation.

### *C. Supernaturalism*

In direct opposition to rationalism rose supernaturalism, led principally Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1864), who was strongly influenced by Semler. Schleiermacher and his followers accepted the supernatural, but they considered Christian feeling to be the basis of all religion. Schleiermacher defined Christianity as a feeling of total dependence on God. Although he attacked rationalism *per se*, in reality his own doctrinal writings very much reflect rationalistic thoughts and conclusions. In this sense, although rationalism as a pure movement was short-lived, its underlying philosophy was fully adopted by many theologians and never again was removed from the churches that call themselves Lutheran. Like rationalism, Schleiermacher's influence also was not lasting, in its pure form. However, he gave new life to subjectivity in all things. Thus, his spirit also still is very much alive in the modern Lutheran Church.

### *D. Orthodoxy and orthodoxism*

Already in the time of Baier and Hollaz, Lutheran orthodoxy was losing ground. All three of the movements just discussed opposed it. But orthodox Lutheranism did not simply disappear. Throughout this period, there were Lutherans who strove to be orthodox. The most important of these men was Valentin Ernst Loescher (1673-1749), who valiantly contended against pietism and rationalism. Loescher is credited with the establishment of the first German magazine for theological articles, which he used to combat heresy. Among his many writings, his chief work against pietism was called *Timotheus Verinus*, in which he clearly explained the theological problems with pietism. But, as Robert Preus says it, "his acute analyses ... were like a small voice muffled in a great storm" (p.45).

Especially during the first half of the 17th century, a number of orthodox Lutherans joined Loescher in his fight to preserve Lutheran Orthodoxy. Especially important was the Carpzov family in Leipzig. Three members of the Carpzov family, all named Johann Benedikt, were professors at Leipzig, in the 17th and 18th centuries (Johann Benedikt the Elder lived from 1607 to 1657, his son the Younger from 1639-99 and his great-grandson from 1720-1803). All of them were strongly orthodox and opposed pietism and rationalism.



Hoenecke speaks of 17th century Lutheran orthodoxy as gradually stiffening into orthodoxy. There were Lutherans who held to the old teachings throughout the century, and Hoenecke lists them. But on the whole, he considers that they do not exhibit the same spirit, even if they do hold to the doctrine of the periods of classical Lutheran orthodoxy. It would appear that Hoenecke is thinking of a strong tendency to resist any and all change and to defend the status quo. Obviously, doctrine does not change, but the Church's situation does. The Lutheran Church might have been better served during this period if the orthodox theologians would have adapted their approach, but not their theology to the new century. By the end of century, the number of voices still advocating Lutheran orthodoxy had dwindled to a very small number. By 1800, Lutheranism was in serious trouble.

*Summary:*

*At the end of the 17th and in the 18th century, Lutheranism fragmented in the face of an internal movement known as Pietism and of opposition stemming principally from the world of secular thought. Pietism sought to re-vitalize the Lutheran Church, which was in need of some spiritual renewal. Some positive contributions of the Pietists were renewed emphases on Bible study and personal piety. However, they failed to recognize the true sources of the difficulties the Lutheran Church faced. They placed little importance on objective doctrine and focused instead on the subjective. Inevitably, they fell into error, and as time went on, became more and more subjective and emotional.*

*Following the advent of Pietism, a series of secular philosophical movements began to enter the church. In a general sense, we can term all of these movements "rationalism," although strictly speaking only the last one is called by this term. The starting point for all of these movements was the belief that all mankind shared a common natural religion. All of these movements either de-emphasized or ignored altogether revelation, seeking to establish the principles of religion on the basis of human reason. Some proponents disregarded the faith altogether, while others attempted to harmonize the faith and the beliefs of secular philosophy. Eventually a theory of the evolution of religion was advanced which enabled many of these men to argue that they were merely carrying on the work of the Reformation, even though they denied its basic truths. The historical-critical method of Biblical interpretation became the norm, thus enabling theologians of this period to disregard all supernatural within the Scriptures but to claim that they still maintained a role for revelation in their theology. Human reason was the guiding principle, however. A reaction to rationalism set in the form of supernaturalism. In reality, however, this movement was not a return a Scripture; rather it was a return to pietism and subjectivity. It placed the emphasis on the person and his feelings, but lacked the confidence of the pietists in Scripture.*

*Throughout this period, orthodox Lutherans opposed the encroachments of pietism and rationalism in all its forms. Valentin Loescher clearly explained the errors involved in these movements, but his work received little attention. As the century wore on, the defenders of Lutheran orthodoxy began to fear any and all change and as such lost the hearts and minds of most of the German people. By the end of the century, Lutheranism was in serious trouble.*

## **VI. The Confessional Awakening.**

At the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, the religious environment in Europe was at its lowest point since before the Reformation. On every front, not only the Lutheran Church, but the Christian Church in general seemed to be in retreat. This was especially true for the Lutheran Church, which was suffering in the heartland of the Reformation, due to the conversion of the kings of Prussia to Calvinism and of the rulers of Saxony to Catholicism. Additionally, the forces of rationalism and pietism had greatly undermined the truths of the Lutheran Reformation even in Germany.

### *A. The Awakening and the Free Church Movement*

But orthodox Lutheranism was not dead. In 1817, on the 300th anniversary of the posting of the 95 Theses, Claus Harms (1778-1855) published a new edition of these theses and added 95 of his own. With this work, the Lutheran Confessional Awakening began. It lasted throughout most of the 19th century and one of its greatest achievements was the publishing of the definitive edition of Luther's Works, called the *Weimar Ausgabe*, in 1883.

To properly understand the Lutheran Confessional Awakening, one must see it in terms of a general Awakening which was sweeping the entire Christian church. Especially in the early decades of the 19th century, the Awakening was not confessional in nature, even though men like Harms were. It was led by men whom we would today term evangelical. The issue that forced a true Lutheran confessionalism to spring to the fore was the *Prussian Union*. The union was an attempt by the Prussian king (who was Reformed) (and later by the Saxon king who was Catholic) to unite the Reformed and Lutheran churches in their realms. The Prussian Union in its earliest form was one of the catalysts of Harms' theses. After 1830, the Union became mandatory in Prussia, and led to an emergence of a truly Confessional Lutheran Awakening.

During this period, a great deal of new dogmatic and doctrinal literature was written. In 1843, Heinrich Schmid (1811-1885) published a compendium from the writings of orthodox Lutherans from the 16th and 17th centuries, entitled, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Exhibited and Verified*. Many German speaking pastors in Europe and the United States read this work and began to return to their heritage.

The confessional movement split into two schools of thought. One, called the repristination school by its opponents, tried to restore historic Lutheranism. The other, called the *Erlangen school* tried to combine confessionalism with the learning of the day, holding that confessionalism must be dynamic, not static (an example of this kind of thinking can be seen in the modern ECLA dogmatics text, *Christian Dogmatics*, under the article "Confessional Principal" in vol. 1). The Erlangen school believed in the authority of Scripture, but they also felt that Christian consciousness was important in the development of Christian doctrine. When the two conflicted, they tended to follow Christian consciousness, due to their weak belief in the inspiration of Scripture.

The term repristination refers to a return to the former teachings. When the opponents of the Awakening applied this term to confessional theologians, they were implying that these men wanted to return to the 16th and 17th centuries. Even today, repristination theology is often disparaged by more liberal thinkers. Hoenecke devotes some time to defending C.F.W. Walther against the charge. The essence of his argument is that Walther was a Scriptural theologian. He accepted the confessional position because it is true. If the Lutheran theologians of the 16th and 17th centuries understood the truth of Scripture, then we accept their truth as true today and always.

In Europe, the chief theologians of the repristination school were E. W. Hengstenberg (1802-1869), J.K.W. Loehe (1808-1872), J.F.K. Keil (1807-1888), and Friedrich Adolf Philippi (1809-1882). All of these men endeavored to be faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, but none of them totally succeeded. The theology that they set forth and the problems that they exhibited were greatly affected by the fact that rationalism, which denied the supernatural, was the dominant theology of the day. Hengstenberg and Keil were chiefly Old Testament commentators. Hengstenberg's most important work is *Christology of the Old Testament*, a four-volume treatment of all the Old Testament prophecies of Christ. Keil, collaborating with Franz Delitzsch (during his early years, when he counted himself among the repristination school) produced a commentary on the entire Old Testament. The attention that the Old Testament especially received from these men is due to the fact that in their day, as in ours, the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation in effect denied the inspiration of the Old Testament, and thus denied that the Old Testament spoke of Christ. Philippi originally denied full inspiration of Scripture and advocated views like millennialism. As he matured as a theologian, however, he publicly retracted many (but not all) of his erroneous views.

The Erlangen school produced a large number of theologians. The more prominent would include F. Delitzsch (1813-1890), Franz Frank (1827-1894), Christoph Luthardt (1823-1902) Gottfried Thomasius (1802-1875), and J.C.K. von Hoffman (1810-1877). These men all considered themselves to be faithful Lutherans, but also regarded historic Lutheranism to be in need of updating to fit their times. For this reason, they advocated applying the tenants of rationalism to the Confessions and to Scripture. In some cases, like Delitzsch, they started out as firmly confessional Lutherans, but as they continued to write, they departed steadily from that position. All denied full inspiration

and all espoused views on the incarnation of Christ that were really Reformed rather than Lutheran.

A direct result of the Confessional Lutheran Awakening was the Free Church movement. The Free Church movement really had two phases, an early phase after 1830, and a later phase after 1870. The Free Churches were necessitated because the churches in Germany were State Churches, whose head was the prince. When the princes began to mandate a union between Lutherans and the Reformed, some Lutherans (as well as some Reformed) formed independent, or *Free Churches*. Francis Pieper maintained that the Free Church is an inevitable result of a true Lutheran Confessional Awakening, but that was only true of the repristination school. The men of the Erlangen school, and even some repristination theologians, like Loehe, although they were deeply disturbed by the events in the official church, did not separate themselves. For nearly a decade after 1830, these churches were illegal in Prussia, and their pastors were arrested. Many Lutherans emigrated in order to remain faithful to their beliefs.

The Confessional Awakening and the Free Church movement led to the founding of confessional Lutheran churches not only in Europe, but also in the United States, Canada, and Australia. At first, many of these new churches were directly supported by pietistic mission societies which established schools for training pastors and then sent them to these countries to serve in the new Lutheran churches. In the course of time, more confessional mission societies arose and established schools that sent out confessional pastors. Several Lutheran synods directly benefited from the confessionalism of these men. Not surprisingly, however, only those men who joined the Free Churches achieved a real confessionalism. By the end of the 19th century, the true home of confessional Lutheranism was no longer in Europe, although there were confessional Free Churches there. The center of Lutheran had orthodoxy moved to the United States.

### *B. Confessionalism in America*

Lutheranism had been in the United States for generations before the Confessional Awakening reached the new world. During the early years of its existence, it suffered a chronic shortage of pastors. In 1742, when the most important early Lutheran pastor in America, Henry Melchior Muehlenberg (1711-1787), arrived from Germany, the Lutheran Church had suffered from lack of English materials and from fraternal relations with non-Lutheran bodies. Muehlenberg, who was a pietist sent out by the University of Halle, one of the principle seats of pietism, tried to steer a middle course, and retain some of the distinctive character of the Lutheran Church, but also to modify it to the American situation, which included fellowship with non-Lutherans. Muehlenberg preserved the Lutheran Church in the New World, but he also set the stage for the great controversy that shook it in the next century.

Several independent Lutheran synods formed the General Synod, a federation of independent synods, in 1820. The leaders of this body, Samuel Schmucker (1799-1873)

and Benjamin Kurtz (1795-1865), believed that orthodox Lutheranism could not survive in the new world. In their view, it needed to become more "American," thus they wanted to de-emphasize the distinctive nature of Lutheranism and make it more generically "Protestant." This effort was summarized in 1855 in a work called the *Definite Platform*. Their movement is known as *American Lutheranism*. Their program, which was designed to add the "vigor of presbyterianism" and the "warmth of methodism," sought to remove Lutheranism's "destructive tendencies." Specifically, they sought to end liturgical worship, incorporate revivalism and exalt personal piety above all else. This was an extremely pietistic movement. Schmucker issued a revision of the Augsburg Confession that made at least six major doctrinal concessions to the "Protestant" views of 19th century America.

Schmucker also published a dogmatics text, called *Elements of Popular Theology* in 1834. The chief emphasis of this work is that doctrine must be rational. The largest part of the work sets out to prove that the Trinity is a reasonable doctrine. Along side of this emphasis, the chief emphasis of the work is on social issues. Christology and justification do not have separate chapters, but are limited to brief explanations, while issues such as slavery, civil government and the millennium all receive longer treatments.

Just at this time, Lutherans were arriving in America from Germany in large groups. Many either were confessional Lutherans from the State Church or were Free Church Lutherans who were leaving to avoid the Prussian Union, the mandatory unification of the Lutheran and Reformed churches in Prussia. Additionally, two confessional Lutherans, Friedrich Conrad Dietrich Wyneken (1810-76) and Loehe (see above), worked to bring confessional Lutheran pastors to the New World. A reaction to American Lutheranism (sometimes called the Second Confessional Awakening) set in, led by Charles Porterfield Krauth (1823-1883), and several other important voices. Krauth wrote *The Conservative Lutheran Reformation and Its Theology*, one of the most important doctrinal works of the 19th century. Also worthy of note was a family of Lutheran pastors and publishers, the Henkels. One member, Ambrose Henkel (1786-1870), published the first American edition of the Book of Concord in 1851.

From 1849 until 1867, the confessional and American Lutherans struggled to present the defining vision of Lutheranism in America. The confessional Lutherans were unable to defeat American Lutheranism within the General Synod, so in 1867 they broke with that body and formed a new one, the General Council, which again was a federation of independent synods. This body aimed to be more confessional, but finally was unable to live up to its goals. Already at its first convention, the Ohio Synod raised the issue that would eventually keep the General Council from becoming the truly confessional body that it wished to be. The so-called "Four Points" that divided the synod were millennialism, pulpit fellowship, altar (i.e. communion) fellowship, and the lodge (secret societies). The truly confessional bodies argued with the more moderate bodies over whether these issues were "Open Questions" (that is not decided in Scripture) or not. Initially, all three bodies that later made up the Wisconsin Synod were members of the General Council. All three, and several other confessional bodies, eventually left the

General Council. In the final analysis, the General Council was able to adopt many correct statements on the four points. But they were not able to put them into practice.

### *C. The Synodical Conference*

Krauth, the Henkels and the other confessional Lutherans in the General Council were born in America. Their church bodies were combinations of Lutherans who had just arrived from Europe (who were generally more confessional) and others who had been in the United States for generations (who were generally more liberal). The Synodical Conference was founded principally by immigrants. Originally it was made up of several different Synods, but two interest us especially: the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod.

The Missouri Synod was founded as a Free Lutheran Church when its leaders and founding members emigrated to the United States in 1839. Her founder and her greatest theologian -- perhaps the greatest American Lutheran theologian ever -- was C.F.W. Walther (1811-1887). Walther was a systematic theologian of great importance for the American Lutheran church. Rather than publish his own dogmatics, he reworked Baier's *Compendium*. This version is generally known as *Baier-Walther*. He also published several important doctrinal works. His most important work (which has been translated into Spanish) is *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*. He is also the author of *Church and Ministry* and several other works. He founded two important periodicals, *Der Lutheraner* (the *Lutheran*) and *Lehre und Wehre* (*Doctrine and Apology*), to which he regularly contributed many exegetical and doctrinal articles. Walther founded Concordia Seminary in St. Louis and gave the Missouri Synod and its seminary the strong emphasis on dogmatics that it would maintain until the 1960's.

Walther faced three great doctrinal issues during his time as the chief theologian of confessional Lutheranism in the world. Chronologically speaking, the first was the question of the Church and her ministry. This was the question that established his leadership in the Missouri Synod. Throughout his career, he labored to expound the Scriptural position that God has given the ministry to the Church, and not to an Apostolic succession of bishops. The second great question was that of election. As a result of this issue, Walther broke with Loehe in 1853. Later the Election Controversy tore apart the Synodical Conference and ended Walther's relations with the churches the Loehe's mission society had founded in the United States and with many (but not all) Lutherans in Germany. The third, and of course most important, question was the basic teaching of justification and atonement, which he presented in the face of non-Lutheran sects in the United States throughout his career.

The Wisconsin Synod was founded in 1850, as the result of different Lutheran groups coming together and needing pastors. Initially, it was not a confessional organization, but it came to be. The greatest dogmatician of the Wisconsin Synod was Adolf Hoenecke (1835-1908), the founder of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, who wrote

the only complete dogmatics ever published in the Wisconsin Synod. It is still only available in German.

*Summary:*

*At the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries, Lutheranism was at the lowest point in its history. But it did not die. In 1817, God raised up Claus Harms who began the Lutheran Confessional Awakening. Initially, the Awakening was part of a broader Protestant awakening that was led and centered upon the evangelical movement. But the efforts of the kings of Prussia and Saxony to unite the Lutheran and Reformed churches within their realms lent a specifically Lutheran and confessional character to the Awakening, especially after 1830, when the king of Prussia mandated the Union.*

*The Lutheran Confessional Awakening split into two schools, the repristination school, which sought to return to the truths of the Lutheran Reformation and the Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy and the Erlangen school which sought to maintain Lutheranism, but to update it according to the new learning of the Enlightenment. The repristination school in Europe strove to be truly confessional, but was not altogether successful. A direct result of the Confessional Awakening was the Free Church movement, which separated from the State Church to form truly Confessional Churches.*

*Many confessional Lutherans of this time period left Europe and went especially to the United States. Lutheranism in that country experienced the same division over the confessions that existed in Europe. Within the General Synod, a movement known as American Lutheranism tried to erase the distinctively Lutheran elements of the Lutheran Church and make it more generically Protestant. The Confessional Awakening in America led men like Charles Porterfield Krauth to oppose these efforts and establish the General Council. Over time however, the General Council was not able to maintain its confessionalism.*

*The true heart of the Lutheran confessionalism was to be found in the Synodical Conference. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was founded and led by the C.F.W. Walther, who clearly proclaimed the truths of Scripture especially regarding justification, church and ministry and election. Alongside the Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Synod eventually took her place as a confessional synod under the theological leadership of Adolf Hoenecke.*

## **VII. Lutheranism in the Twentieth Century.**

In the twentieth century, much of Lutheranism, especially that portion which is not strictly confessional, found itself in a situation in which it could no longer act or

think independently. Throughout this century, Lutheranism has been, in many respects, no more than an expression of the general tendencies of society. It has been deeply influenced by theological leaders from the Reformed and the radical schools and by secular philosophy. By and large, Lutheranism today has adopted a decidedly anti-dogmatic and anti-systematic bias.

#### *A. European Lutheranism*

At the beginning of the century, Lutheranism in Europe was overwhelming liberal in its thinking. Only the Free Churches and a few confessional mission societies maintained any commitment to the ancient truths of Scripture and the Reformation. By and large, liberal theology placed man at the center of the universe, regarded Scripture as the testimony of pious thought, and considered true religion to be concerned primarily with how one acts over against his neighbor. The years before World War I were years of optimism, years in which it was believed that science and technology would make the world better and better. In many church bodies, *post-millennialism* was the rage. It held that the world would improve to the point where it was nearly perfect, and then Christ would return and complete the process. Alongside this thinking, *social gospel* overtook the work of the church and reduced many churches to no more than charitable institutions.

World War I changed everything. The inhuman slaughter caused by weapons that had far outstripped medical science shattered the optimism of the west. Liberalism was bankrupt, and in the years that followed the war, it could not recover. The economic chaos of the great depression was followed by the rise of the Nazis and World War II. In the face of these disasters, neo-orthodoxy was born. Its founder was not a Lutheran, but it influenced the Lutheran Church in Europe dramatically. Its founder was a Swiss Reformed theologian named Karl Barth (1886-1968). Barth had served for thirteen years as a parish pastor and in the wake of World War I, he ached to find a solution to the despair of the human situation. Liberalism simply could not provide that solution, so Barth turned to the Scriptures. Throughout his life, Barth would conscientiously study the Scriptures, and he openly repudiated theological liberalism. But he did not accept the solution of Scripture. Barth established the basic methodology of neo-orthodoxy by approaching the Scriptures existentially. For that reason, Barth consciously rejecting the concept of a "Lutheran type assurance of salvation." That the Lutheran Church in Europe by and large followed Barth shows the extent of the ravages of liberalism of the previous century.

*Neo-orthodoxy* is difficult to define. It's chief practitioners in Europe were Barth, Emil Brunner (1889-1966), and Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976). Neo-orthodoxy differs from liberalism in that it accepts the sinfulness of man, although in varying degrees. It recognizes the need for revelation, but differs as to how much revelation can be found outside of Scripture. It sees the Bible not as merely the witness of the pious thinking of privies generations, but rather as the medium through which God may speak to you. Thus Scripture is not objectively the Word of God; it subjectively can become the Word



of God when it provokes a “crisis” or an “eschatological Christ event.” Neo-orthodoxy has little time for true confessional orthodoxy, because it does not admit to a supernatural worldview. Many of its proponents deny the basic truths of Scripture. Thus, although Barth wrote a multi-volume dogmatics work, entitled *Church Dogmatics*, on the whole, neo-orthodoxy rejects specific doctrinal formulation.

After the end of World War I, the Lutheran Church in Germany was primarily concerned with questions of organization (the old territorial church system was abolished in the new republic) and with the ecumenical movement. With the rise of the Nazis, all the Protestant churches in Germany wrestled with their relations with the Nazi government. After the war, the Lutheran Church in Germany took a leading role in the ecumenical movement.

### *B. American Lutheranism*

In many respects, the developments of the Lutheran Church in Europe had a parallel in the United States. Neo-orthodoxy was advocated in the U.S. principally by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) and Paul Tillich (1886-1965). Neither can really be called a Lutheran, however, but their theology was influential. In the United States, the twentieth century show a great movement toward unification of the dozens of Lutheran synods in the US. Eventually, two large Lutheran bodies emerged; the Lutheran Church in America was formed from bodies within and near to the old General Synod. For that reason, the LCA was liberal in its practice and theology. The American Lutheran Church was formed from bodies within and related to the old General Council. It was more conservative than the LCA, but it lacked a strong confessional commitment. In 1930's, the ALC began fellowship discussions with the Missouri Synod. In the 1960's, the most liberal portion of the Missouri Synod left and formed the American Evangelical Lutheran Church. In the 1980's, the three churches merged to become the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In all cases, these unions were undertaken without regard to existing doctrinal differences. Thus, in addition to the basic question of Scripture, unionism and fellowship became important issues in the twentieth century.

Despite the fact that the ELCA stems from an anti-dogmatic root, a very significant dogmatics text has emerged from that body. *Christian Dogmatics*, edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jensen, was written to serve as the dogmatics textbook of the ELCA seminaries. It is the joint effort of six different theology professors and it makes no attempt to harmonize their views. In accordance with their theological presuppositions, *Christian Dogmatics* openly dismisses the possibility of arriving a theological agreement on the basis of the biblical text, because the authors simply do not believe that the Scriptures contain one unified theology.

### *C. The Synodical Conference*

The Synodical Conferences theological history in this century is somewhat different from that of the rest of Lutheranism. Late in the 19th century, the *Election*

*Controversy* broke up the Conference. The synods that agreed upon the biblical teaching and remained within the conference under the leadership of Hoenecke and especially Walther enjoyed a high degree of harmony between them.

By the end of the 19th century, and the beginning of the 20th, two brothers came to dominate the study of dogmatics within the Synodical Conference. They were Francis Pieper (1852-1931) and August Pieper (1857-1946). Francis Pieper was a professor at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. He wrote *Christian Dogmatics* (the German edition was published from 1917 to 1924; the English edition was published from 1951 to 1953, with a comprehensive index published in 1957). This text is the most important contribution to systematic theology of 20th century confessional Lutheranism. It is widely used in our seminaries. August Pieper was the president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Although he did not write a dogmatics text, his many articles in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* cover most of the doctrines of the Lutheran Church.

After the death of Francis Pieper in 1931, the relations within the Synodical Conference deteriorated substantially. In the 1930's, the Missouri Synod and the ALC undertake fellowship discussions and produced one of the most significant theological writings of the century: the *Common Confession* which was presented as the solution to the theological differences that had existed between the two church bodies. The Wisconsin Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, a body of Norwegian Americans, disagreed. In the same decade, the Missouri Synod adopted the *Brief Statement*, a confession that was immediately acceptable to the WELS and the ELS and is still held in high regard. From the 1930's until 1963, the three church bodies discussed their relations. During this time, no new dogmatics texts were written within these bodies, but a huge amount of doctrinal literature appeared regarding the basic questions of Scripture and fellowship. In 1963, the WELS and the ELS left the Synodical Conference. In 1967, the Missouri Synod absorbed the only other remaining member, and the Synodical Conference came to an end.

#### D. *The Wauwatosa Theology*

An interesting development arose slowly in Lutheran theological writings. Because of the charge that was often made by the Catholics that Luther was inventing a new religion, Luther and his co-workers often quoted the ancient church fathers. Luther's personal favorite was Augustine, but he knew the church fathers very well, and he cited them often. Melancthon followed suit. In his commentary on Romans, Melancthon gives his appraisal of a number of the most important ancient church fathers. Chemnitz includes an introductory chapter on reading the church fathers in his *Loci*, and often cites them in his works.

When the Formula of Concord was written (after both Luther and Melancthon had died) Chemnitz, Andreae and their co-workers cited not only the ancient church fathers, but also cited regularly both Luther and Melancthon. Throughout the period of classical Lutheran orthodoxy, each writer added more and more citations from those who

had gone before. At the time that Calov and Quenstedt wrote their *systemae*, they quoted at great length from many different sources. During the Silver Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy, a new type of dogmatics text arose: the compendium. A *compendium* attempt to bring to bear various testimonies of the Church, and especially the Lutheran Church on a particular question. Generally speaking, these compendia have theses, Scriptural testimony, testimony from the Confessions and citations from the Lutheran fathers. During the Confessional Lutheran Awakening, the men in Europe appear to have depended heavily on this kind of writing. When Walther founded Concordia Seminary, he revised Baier's compendium, but it did remain a compendium. Several of his other works (for example, *Church and Ministry* and *Pastorale*, a pastoral theology text) follow this same method. It has been maintained that at St. Louis, even exegetical courses were studied on the basis of citations from the orthodox Lutheran fathers. Hoenecke's and Pieper's dogmatic works, which are more properly *systemae*, quote many different ancient and Lutheran church fathers (Pieper regularly cites even Walther and Hoenecke).

Already at the time of the Awakening, and right up to the present, the compendia and the writings of men like Walther have been disparaged as *Zitatstheologie*, "citation theology," and *Vätertheologie*, "theology of the fathers." August Pieper tells us that Walther required intensive study of the Lutheran dogmatists in Latin and that this and pastoral theology were in their essence the only courses of study offered at St. Louis during Walther's lifetime. But to be fair to Walther and to the men of the reformation school, we need to remember that they rediscovered orthodoxy through the writings of the orthodox teachers of the 16th and 17th centuries and through the confessions of the Lutheran Church. It was only natural that they would lead their students back to the well which they had drunk from. At the same time, it must also be understood, as Hoenecke already recognized in his dogmatics, that Walther was a scriptural theologian. He accepted and approved of the orthodox Lutheran fathers because in their writings, as in no other contemporary literature, he found the truths of Scripture expounded. Without a doubt, through his student Francis Pieper he perpetuated the scholastic approach of the earlier time, as even Hoenecke recognizes. But above all else, Walther perpetuated the truths of the Word of God.

Already during Hoenecke's lifetime, a new development began to occur at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. It was called the *Wauwatosa Theology*, because the seminary was located in the city of Wauwatosa, Wisconsin at that time. The *Wauwatosa Theology* is a somewhat misleading term. There was no new theology taught at Wauwatosa, what was new was the method of teaching theology. The chief architects of this methodology were August Pieper, J.P. Koehler (1859-1951) and John Schaller (1859-1920). Among other things, the *Wauwatosa* theology stressed that biblical dogmatics must be based upon exegesis. As August Pieper stated: "Walther ... was the teacher of dogmatics, which was regarded as the queen of theological disciplines." (WLQ 84:112). In *Wauwatosa*, exegesis was the queen of theology. A careful study of the development of Lutheran dogmatics will show that all confessional Lutherans always understood this reality. Especially during the age of orthodoxy, the great theologians often stressed exegesis in their explanations, with Quenstedt having the greatest breadth of exegesis.

However, especially after the Confessional Awakening, there was a notable tendency to seek truth first in doctrinal writings and the Confessions. In Wauwatosa the Confessions and the previous writers were clearly returned to their rightful place. J.P. Meyer, who continued the heritage of the Wauwatosa theology, carefully documents each point with Scriptural support. Even Chemnitz was not always careful to cite Scripture for each and every passage (which in not to say that he couldn't, he simply didn't). Meyer does not ignore the Lutheran heritage, and quotes many of the principal Lutheran dogmaticians. But his work is not in any way a compendium.

The Wauwatosa Theology did not develop in a vacuum. Pieper tells us that they owed a profound debt of gratitude in the formation of their theology to Georg Stoeckhardt (1842-1913). Stoeckhardt was a pastor of the Saxon Free Church, who co-edited the periodical *Freikirche*. After being imprisoned for his strong censure of practices in the state church, he emigrated and served as a pastor and eventually professor at the St. Louis seminary. His doctrinal writings are confined to articles in *Lehre und Wehre*, but his exegetical writings were extensive and directly influenced the professors of the Wisconsin Synod.

The Wauwatosa Theology finds its expression in the writings of its architects, especially in the *Theologische Quartalschrift (Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly)*. Here, Koehler, Pieper, and Schaller again and again sound the distinctive notes of scriptural truth, dogmatically, and especially exegetically. Koehler and Pieper were exegetes and employed their knowledge of Scripture to again and again give witness to the truth, for this reason they are usually most prominently remembered in connection with the Wauwatosa Theology. Schaller however was specifically charged with teaching dogmatics at the seminary. As a result he wrote one excellent work in this field, his book *Biblical Christology*.

After Schaller's untimely death, J.P. Meyer (1873-1964) was called to fill his position and he continued his efforts and that of the Wauwatosa Theology. Meyer was asked to write a dogmatics text, and began it, but was troubled with the prospect of becoming another father who would be quoted. For this reason, he completed only the locus on theology. Nevertheless, he did write an outline, known as the *Dogmatics Notes*, which is based on Hoenecke's and Schaller's works. This outline still serves as the basis for dogmatics instruction at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. It has been translated into Spanish and will serve as part of our later dogmatics courses. Finally, we should mention Siegbert Becker (1914-1984) and Carl Lawrenz (1908-1989), professors at our seminary, who although they did not write a dogmatics text, wrote widely on various doctrinal topics. Lawrenz provided theological leadership during one of the most difficult periods of our synod's history, the break with the Synodical Conference. Becker, a Missouri Synod theologian, left that church somewhat after the break, and was instrumental in making clear to the Missouri Synod the reasons for that break. Above all, his writings focus on the inspiration of Scripture.

We are heirs of this renewed emphasis on exegesis in systematic theology. The Confessions and the heritage of Lutheran orthodoxy are extremely important, but in the modern world few people care what Calov or Krauth or even Luther thought about a given point. Scripture is the key, and exegesis is the heart and soul of our dogmatic method. We don't want to forget the insights of the great Lutheran teachers who have gone before us, but we dare not let them replace the Scripture as our principle guide in matters of doctrine and life.

*Summary:*

*In both the United States and Europe, the 20th century began with an expectation of continual improvement in world conditions. Theological liberalism was dominant, especially in Europe. The events of World War I, followed by the Great Depression and World War II put an end to that optimism. Neo-orthodoxy arose as a reaction to liberalism. It did not, however, embrace the old orthodoxy of Scripture and the Reformation. Rather, it turned to existentialism as the source of spiritual solace. Thus it turned away from systematic theology as a source of objective truth, even when it writes dogmatic texts.*

*Within the Synodical Conference, the century began with a strong element of harmony and saw the production of Francis Pieper's Christian Dogmatics. After Pieper's death, however, the unity of the Conference began to deteriorate. The issues that divided the member synods produced a great deal of theological study and writing, but in the end the Conference could not be saved.*

*At the Wisconsin Synod seminary, the Wauwatosa theology was developed which, in the twentieth century, renewed the emphasis on exegesis as the heart of all theology, even dogmatics. That legacy continues today.*

## **VIII. Conclusion.**

Dogmatics has gone through a great deal of development, and we are heirs of all that has gone before. For five hundred years, Lutherans have striven to define and explain what God has said to us in his Word. Perhaps the most important lesson of the history is the need to seriously study God's Word and seriously study the time in which we live so that we can speak to our era. A second lesson would be the importance of knowing and preserving our theological heritage.

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