

2010

# A Forgotten Word and a Forgotten Woman: A Lutheran Attempt at Regaining the Sacramentality of Scripture by Way of the Annunciation to Mary

Joshua D. Genig

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies)



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Genig, Joshua D. (2010) "A Forgotten Word and a Forgotten Woman: A Lutheran Attempt at Regaining the Sacramentality of Scripture by Way of the Annunciation to Mary," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 61, Article 7.

Available at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies/vol61/iss1/7](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol61/iss1/7)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marian Library Publications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marian Studies by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact [frice1@udayton.edu](mailto:frice1@udayton.edu), [mschlangen1@udayton.edu](mailto:mschlangen1@udayton.edu).

# **A FORGOTTEN WORD AND A FORGOTTEN WOMAN:**

**A LUTHERAN ATTEMPT AT REGAINING  
THE SACRAMENTALITY OF SCRIPTURE  
BY WAY OF THE ANNUNCIATION TO MARY**

*Joshua D. Genig, Ph.D. cand.\**

## **Introduction**

This paper, "A Forgotten Word and a Forgotten Woman: A Lutheran Attempt at Regaining the Sacramentality of Scripture by Way of the Annunciation to Mary," will seek to do a few things. First, I will begin with a brief historical sketch, tracing the development in the definition of the Word of God as it is encased in Holy Scripture. I will start at the point of the Reformation and work back to the time of the early Church. I will then propose that the theological move made at the Reformation, particularly a de-sacramentalizing of Holy Scripture, was a uniquely Protestant mistake. And to demonstrate this point, I will explore some of the more turbulent discussions in my own church body which have promulgated this anti-sacramental perspective. Finally, and most surprising to all of you I am sure, I will propose that the Annunciation to Our Lady is the best way out of such trouble and back to a more sacramental understanding of the Word of God, both written and delivered.

\*At the time of this presentation, Joshua D. Genig was Assistant Pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church in Wheaton, Illinois, and finishing his doctoral work in systematic theology at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. (He has since moved into complete communion with the Catholic Church and now serves on the faculty of SS. Cyril and Methodius Seminary in Orchard Lake, Michigan, as director of lay ministry and assistant professor of systematic theology.)

### The Changing Character of the Word

First things first, though: the historical transformation of Holy Scripture. In its narrow, biblical sense, the Word of God in Christian history has classically been defined as the Sacred Scriptures, particularly those books listed in the Christian canon.<sup>1</sup> This Word of God is written and is regarded by Protestant Christians as inspired and inerrant and, therefore, it is authoritative for both the Church and the faithful. Now, I do not think my Catholic friends would deny this, but would gently add the close connection it has with Sacred Tradition. At least that is my read of *Dei Verbum*.<sup>2</sup> But as for Protestant Christianity,<sup>3</sup> nearly every strain has held to this definition of the Word of God: an inspired text, found within the biblical canon, which is authoritatively binding for both the Church and faithful.<sup>4</sup> An example from my own Lutheran confession might be helpful in illustrating the point:

We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as

<sup>1</sup> The canon, in definitive form, can be traced to A.D. 367 (see Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought, Vol. I: From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon* [Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1987], 150).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Dei Verbum* II:9.

<sup>3</sup> While Lutherans are grouped with the entirety of Protestantism by way of illustration, they are often not considered "Protestant," both in terms of motive at the time of the Reformation and theology both then and now. By way of contrast, one might consider the work of James White, a leading Protestant liturgical scholar, who moves the Anglican/Episcopal tradition to the right of Lutheranism in the 20th century and beyond, signifying a shift in both traditions, with Lutheranism becoming more Protestant than ever before (see James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship* [Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2000], 38, diagram 3).

<sup>4</sup> For prominent examples from the various confessional documents of Scotland (The Scottish Confession of Faith, 1560), England (The 39 Articles, 1563), and France (The Calvinistic Confession of Faith, 1571), see the following, respectively: "The Scotch Confession of Faith," Art. 18, in *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff and Rev. David S. Schaff (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2007), 462-463; "The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England," Art. 6, in Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3:489-490; "Confession de Foy," Art. I, no. 5, in *Bekennnischriften und Kirchenordnungen der nach Gottes Wort reformierten Kirche*, ed. Wilhelm Niesel (Zurich: CHE, 1938), 67, lines 18-21.

it is written in Ps. 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." And St. Paul says in Gal. 1:8, "Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed."

Other writings of ancient and modern teachers, whatever their names, should not be put on a par with Holy Scripture. Every single one of them should be subordinated to the Scriptures and should be received in no other way and no further than as witnesses to the fashion in which the doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved in post-apostolic times. . . .

All doctrines should conform to the standards set forth above. Whatever is contrary to them should be rejected and condemned as opposed to the unanimous declaration of our faith.

In this way the distinction between the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments and all other writings is maintained, and Holy Scripture remains the only judge, rule, and norm according to which as the only touchstone all doctrines should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong.<sup>5</sup>

From this and the other prominent Protestant confessions, it becomes clear that one of the Word's primary virtues, at least since the time of the Protestant Reformation, is that it contains the teaching (the doctrine) necessary for man's salvation. Moreover, if something cannot be proved therein, it is unnecessary, and even unlawful, for the faithful to believe it and practice it. Consequently, this narrowing in *definition* and *use* has transformed the Scriptures into a body of information.

Now, while this may have been the inevitable outcome, especially given the dogmatic strife at that time of the Reformation (where information was needed for debate and critique), along with the invention of the printing press in the middle of the fifteenth century (when that same information could suddenly be spread very quickly), one must wonder if this apparently unavoidable outcome has shifted the eyes of the Church toward doctrine and away from Christ. And in some sense, it seems as though it has, which has led the Church

<sup>5</sup> Formula of Concord, Epitome, Summary, 1-2, 6-7, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia, Penn.: Fortress Press, 1959), 464-465.

(at least the Protestant portion of it) to allow doctrine and not Christ to have the first word. But if this is true, then as Elizabeth Achtemeier has said, the Scriptures are “not very Christian anymore.”<sup>6</sup> And so we must regain their Christocentricity.

For the early Church Fathers, however, the Word of Scripture was understood a bit differently. Certainly, the Fathers would not and did not deny the informational aspect of Holy Scripture, meaning that as the inspired Word of God it bore the standard for Christian doctrine.<sup>7</sup> Yet, the emphasis of the Church Fathers was often focused in a different direction: upon the Word made flesh who, by the power of his Holy Spirit, spoke through the mouth and hand of the biblical authors. In turn, the emphasis was not placed primarily upon the doctrinal content of the Scriptures so much as it was upon the one who gave the content, Jesus Christ, the Word-made-flesh.

To that end, the biblical word-for-word, *logos*, took on a broader meaning than merely dots on a page or an utterance from a mouth. As St. Hilary has noted: “Your plea that the Word is the sound of a voice, the utterance of a thought, falls to the ground. The Word is a reality, not a sound, a Being, not a speech, God, not a nonentity.”<sup>8</sup> For the early Church, Holy Scripture was the standard for divine communication, *and not simply divine information*, for it was the living God himself who was to be found dwelling *in the word*.<sup>9</sup>

In turn, with the voice of a priest, Scripture took on a tangible, incarnational, and even sacramental character, because, in

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Achtemeier, “The Canon as the Voice of the Living God,” in *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 120.

<sup>7</sup> John R. Willis, S.J., *The Teachings of the Church Fathers* (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius Press, 2002), 82. Willis notes that the confession of Scripture’s inerrancy can be traced as far back as the end of the first century in St. Clement of Rome, and it is clear from the history of the Church that Scripture was used in the midst of dogmatic strife.

<sup>8</sup> Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* 2.15, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (14 vols.; Peabody Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004), 9:56.

<sup>9</sup> David P. Scaer, *Law and Gospel and the Means of Grace* (St. Louis, Mo.: The Luther Academy, 2008), 114-115.

it and through it, the fullness of the divine was being conveyed. A few examples might be helpful here as well.

Theophilus of Antioch, of the second century, in speaking about the authorship of the Old Testament, describes the interplay between the writer and the Word in the following way:

For the prophets were not when the world came into existence, but the wisdom of God which was in Him, and His holy Word which was always present with Him . . . And Moses, who lived many years before Solomon, or, rather, the Word of God by him as by an instrument, says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).<sup>10</sup>

Hippolytus, of the third century, spoke this way:

And just as it is with instruments of music, so had they the Word always, like the plectrum, in union with them, and when moved by Him the prophets announced what God willed. For they spake not of their own power (let there be no mistake as to that), neither did they declare what pleased themselves.<sup>11</sup>

Jerome, of the fourth and fifth century, brought out the aural character of the word, when he said:

You are reading? No. Your betrothed is talking to you. It is your betrothed, that is, Christ, who is united with you. He tears you away from the solitude of the desert and brings you into his home, saying to you, "Enter into the joy of your Lord."<sup>12</sup>

And a bit later, Anselm of Canterbury, of the eleventh and twelfth century, highlighted the concrete, tangible quality of the word when he bid the faithful to:

<sup>10</sup>Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus*, Bk. 2 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004), 2:98.

<sup>11</sup>Hippolytus, *On Christ and Antichrist*, Chap. 2 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, 5:204.

<sup>12</sup>*Drinking from the Hidden Fountain: A Patristic Breviary*, ed. Thomas Spidlik (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1994), 16. Along these same lines, see *Ancient Christian Doctrine: We Believe in the Crucified and Risen Lord*, ed. Mark J. Edwards (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2009), xxii: "For Augustine, the written word is, like the incarnate Christ, the embodiment of love." The editor notes that this is the theme of *On Christian Doctrine* 1 (cf. n. 30).

Taste the goodness of your Redeemer [...] chew his words as a honeycomb, suck out their flavor, which is sweeter than honey, swallow their health-giving sweetness. Chew by thinking, suck by understanding, swallow by loving and rejoicing. Rejoice in chewing, be glad in sucking, delight in swallowing.<sup>13</sup>

Clearly, therefore, there was a fleshly, Christological reality wrapped up in the early Church's confession of the Word of Scripture. In other words, as Achtemeier has noted, "God did not stop speaking when his book went to press."<sup>14</sup>

For the Fathers of the Church, Scripture was something that possessed life; it was something that spoke to the Church and the faithful; and it was ultimately intended by the Lord to be taken in through the ear and digested as food for the soul. This may stem from that fact that, for the early Church, *logos* did not just mean word,<sup>15</sup> but instead, it was considered, as Susan Wilson has noted, "the underlying pattern of the cosmic fabric."<sup>16</sup> The "Word" was a reality which brought creation into existence and, according to the Gospel of St. John, subsequently took on flesh and tabernacled among his creation as its creator (Jn 1:14). However, this tangibility of the Word appears to run contrary to the four Protestant confessions, particularly those associated with the controversies surrounding the Reformation, and, understandably so, given both the gravity of the controversy and the ability for mass production of written documents. Yet, it appears that this more Protestant confession of the Word (that it is primarily a body of information) has held sway until the present day. *Simply, the Word of God has narrowed in definition and use from a thoroughgoing Christological reality meant to be consumed (the highest common denominator), to a body of information intended*

<sup>13</sup> Opening of "A Meditation on Human Redemption," in *Anselm of Canterbury*, ed. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert W. Richardson (London UK: SCM, 1974), 137. This meditation was written between 1099-1100 (*ibid.*, n. 1).

<sup>14</sup> Achtemeier, "The Canon as the Voice of the Living God," in *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church*, 122, citing the Lutheran preacher Paul Scherer.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Susan Hinlicky Wilson, "Plato Was Wrong," *Christian Century* (December 28, 2004): 16.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

*to delineate what doctrine was ultimately necessary for salvation (the lowest common denominator).*

### **Turbulent Discussions in the Lutheran Church**

Yet, given all that I have said about the Reformation and the emergence of Protestant theology, it should be noted, as Friedrich Heiler has asserted, that:

[I]t was not Luther's idea to set over against the ancient Catholic Church a new Protestant creation; he desired nothing more than that the old Church should experience an evangelical awakening [. . .]. Luther and his friends wished, as they were never tired of emphasizing, to be and to remain Catholic.<sup>17</sup>

The purpose of the Reformation, specifically from Luther's perspective, was not to destroy the Church catholic, or even to create it anew, but rather to return it to its ancient and faithful confession of Christ who comes as gift (freely, willingly, and joyfully) in order to make wrongs right. And, yet, the divine inspiration and, consequently, the sole authority of Scripture was, in some sense, the driving force behind the Reformation. And to this very day, the children of the Reformation<sup>18</sup> have sought refuge in this *Sola Scriptura* confession. And within the current confessional Lutheran milieu,<sup>19</sup> there is little disagreement over whether or not the inspired Scriptures are the sole rule and norm of faith and life. Moreover, the same can also be said of nearly every strain of Protestant Christianity, precisely because, as Bernard Ramm has written, "the divine inspiration of the Bible is the foundation of historic Protestant

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Heiler, "The Catholic Movement in German Lutheranism," in *Northern Catholicism: Centenary Studies in the Oxford and Parallel Movements*, ed. N. P. Williams and Charles Harris (London, UK: SPCK, 1933), 478, as cited in *The Catholicity of the Reformation*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), viii.

<sup>18</sup> Here, specifically confessional Lutherans, but also many Protestants.

<sup>19</sup> "Confessional" Lutheran is here a reference to those who hold a *quia* subscription to the Book of Concord, confessing that the confessions therein are correct *because* they are in accord with God's holy Word.



hermeneutics and exegesis.”<sup>20</sup> Yet, as David Scaer, a very Catholic Lutheran, noted: “questions concerning the Scriptures have not been the same in every generation.”<sup>21</sup> Those things asked at the time of the Reformation are not the same questions being asked by the faithful today. However, even amid changing questions, the adamant confession in Lutheran circles remains that of scriptural authority. But this obstinate, and oftentimes stagnant, confession of the sole authority of Scripture, has not always been a positive emphasis for the Lutheran Church.<sup>22</sup> One should note well that as a Lutheran I am not proposing that this confession is intrinsically incorrect. Instead, I am proposing that the *overemphasis* of such a confession may have led some in recent years to lose the true essence of the Holy Scriptures, namely the *living Word*, Jesus Christ.<sup>23</sup> In other words, because of an overemphasis on the supremacy of the Scriptures, confessional Lutherans may have swayed into the realm of fundamentalism, thereby forsaking their sacramental and Christological nature.<sup>24</sup> In turn, Holy Scripture has taken precedence over Christ and his gifts, making the “Formal Principle” (that which gives form to

<sup>20</sup> Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3rd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1970), 93.

<sup>21</sup> David Scaer, *The Apostolic Scriptures* (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1979), 7.

<sup>22</sup> What follows is an attempt to heed the exhortation of Gerhard Forde (*The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, ed. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007]), 170, where he admonishes: “It is crucial for the church to assess its history in terms of its own internal problematics rather than simply to accept judgments from without.” Here Forde is making reference to the Church catholic, yet the same rules apply to the local church body.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Robert Benne, “A Confessional Lutheran Voice in the Contemporary Scene” (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Concordia Theological Seminary Symposia, 2007), 11. There, Benne addressed the future of both the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the liberal church body which left her, now the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, when he said, “What we need in the future is a Missouri with a freer and more pacific spirit and an ELCA that is more seriously centered on its confessional heritage. The former has to free itself from *quasi-fundamentalist foundational formulations* while the latter has to free itself from the seductions of liberal Protestantism.” (Emphasis my own.)

<sup>24</sup> See David P. Scaer, *The Apostolic Scriptures* (St. Louis Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 7: “The question of the exact nature of the Holy Scriptures continues to be acute in the church today.”

theology: Holy Scripture) also the "Material Principle" (that which gives content to theology: classically Christ/Justification, but now Holy Scripture).<sup>25</sup>

Yet, as mentioned previously, this was never the intention of Luther and the Lutheran reformers. Although the reformers (Luther in particular) may have attempted to return the Church of the sixteenth century to the confession of divine inspiration and scriptural authority, their attempt to do so was not intended to be at the expense of the Christological nature of the word of God as an organic whole.<sup>26</sup> For, as Gustaf Wingren has written, an authoritative Bible

whose main characteristic is that it is verbally inspired is a book without a Master and consequently a book with a doctrine instead of a message, its only task to relate what God has already done instead of having to bring men into the sphere of God's continuing activity.<sup>27</sup>

Although there were many forces at play which led to the Reformation, all things in question could be boiled down to this one question: Does Christ do all things pertaining to man's salvation, or is man responsible for some or all of his own

<sup>25</sup> See Oswald Bayer, *Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 50, n. 19: "For many years Protestant theology has inappropriately distinguished between its formal principle (the authority of the Bible) and its material principle (the doctrine of justification)." In many respects, Lutheranism has fallen prey to this Protestant authoritative principle, relying more upon the canon of Scripture than upon Christ and his gifts (justification).

<sup>26</sup> See Gustaf Wingren, *The Living Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church* (Eugene, Ore: Wipf and Stock, 1960), 47, n. 1: "It is a very important fact that Luther, who was occupied all his life with the text of the Bible and had the task of opposing that Word to the authorities which had been growing up for almost a thousand years, was uninterested in the question of the inspiration of the Bible and, without any embarrassment, could talk about how poorly the Biblical authors order and relate the historical material. Luther resembles a man who is awaiting a sentence of death, but instead hears his acquittal being read aloud. Such a man is eager for the news that is to be made known to him and that will decide whether he is to live or die. It is the decision that is vital to him, and even if he observes that, for example, a place name or something like that which is mentioned in the announcement is incorrect he will pay no attention to it. He who is irritated by such a thing must be unharassed and sure of himself."

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 56, n. 1.

redemption? Luther let Christ do the great verbs of salvation, taking merit from man and instead placing it upon Jesus and his sacramental gifts. And it was precisely for that reason that the Reformation was begun in the first place: to refocus the eyes of the Church upon Christ.

So is it not sad, then, that in our biblical theology, Christ has played second fiddle? Moreover, it was Martin Luther who claimed on more than one occasion that "the entire Scripture deals only with Christ,"<sup>28</sup> which makes it quite clear that Luther took his cue from the early Church Fathers since, as Gerald Bray has noted, "in all probability, the first Christians looked on every part of Scripture as Christological, and were prepared to see Christ in it by whatever exegetical means would produce the desired result."<sup>29</sup> Or, as Robert Louis Wilken has asserted, "exegesis was not about novelty but about finding the triune God in new and surprising places within the Scriptures."<sup>30</sup>

For both Luther and the early Church, the Holy Scriptures were, first and foremost, Christological, and flowing from that ongoing reality, they were then divinely inspired,<sup>31</sup> thereby making them the sole rule and norm of faith and life. It is Christ, then inspiration, then authority, *and not the other way around!* And when Jesus gets the first word, the pastoral acts of the Church, beginning with the act by which one is put into the Holy Ministry (Ordination), and culminating in the delivery of the gifts through the celebration of the sacred liturgy and preaching, those acts are intrinsically and explicitly sacramental acts.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Ed. (AE, 55 vols.), vol. 25, trans. Jacob A. Preus (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 405. See also AE 22:339, where Luther asserts that "all the stories of Holy Writ if viewed aright, point to Christ."

<sup>29</sup> Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ: Did the Early Christians Misrepresent Jesus?* (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1992), 51.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Louis Wilken, "How to Read the Bible," *First Things*, no. 181 (March 2008): 27.

<sup>31</sup> See David Scaer, *The Apostolic Scriptures*, where he discusses the inspiration of the Scriptures in relationship to the apostolicity of the Scriptures, giving credence to the inspiration of the New Testament precisely on account of the apostles' relationship with Jesus, therefore making Jesus the center and source of scriptural authority and all other things periphery. As Scaer notes, "The critical question which the earliest Christian congregations asked of these writings was one of apostolicity. What was apostolic was a product of the Holy Spirit. The reverse was not necessarily true" (37).

So given all of the foregoing, the danger for the Church today, specifically the confessional Lutheran Church, is to unnecessarily overemphasize the inspiration and sole authority of Holy Scripture, as though the sixteenth century were reincarnating at the present time! Yet, in the last half-century, many who would call themselves confessional Lutherans have done just that.

During the 1970s, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was engaged in a synodical civil war of sorts, often referred to as the "Battle over the Bible." Although there were many peripheral forces at play, the debate played itself out in a discussion over the nature of the Scriptures and the proper method for interpreting them.<sup>32</sup> Specifically, were the Scriptures the inspired and inerrant word of God and the sole rule and norm of faith and life, or could they be read as any other man-made document? Those deemed conservative gave a resounding Yes to the question of authority and the centrality of Scripture, while those deemed liberal took the other side of the coin. The end result was a split in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod of cosmic proportions.<sup>33</sup> (In fact, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the liberal Lutheran body which has made headlines as of late, was a product of this split.) Yet, the aftershock was almost worse than the initial blast. In reaction to the liberal theologians of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the conservatives who remained in the synod, many of whom are Bishops (i.e., District Presidents) in my Church today, those pastors were pushed into making an over-adamant confession

<sup>32</sup> See Kurt E. Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion: Missouri in Lutheran Perspective* (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977), 37-42. Liberal Lutheran theologians advocated the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation, whereas conservative Lutheran theologians accepted the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture and, consequently, believed that the Scriptures could not be in error.

<sup>33</sup> For views from the conservative side of the split, see Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion: Missouri in Lutheran Perspective*, 35-48, and Paul A. Zimmerman, *A Seminary in Crisis: The Inside Story of the Preus Fact-Finding Committee* (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 2007). For views from the liberal side of the split, see Frederick W. Danker, *No Room in the Brotherhood: The Preus-Otten Purge of Missouri* (St. Louis, Mo.: Clayton Publ. House, 1977). For a brief synopsis of the entire crisis from a non-theological source, see "Lutherans at War," *Time Magazine* (September 9, 1974).

of divine inspiration and inerrancy, and further, the sole authority of Holy Scripture.<sup>34</sup> (Scripture became information and not a living voice. And, in terms of preaching, sermons became dogmatic and didactic, rather than kerygmatic.) While this confession was necessary at the time of controversy, just as it may have been at the Reformation, such a confession has left the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in a rut which extends even to this very day, namely, elevating Scripture above Christ and leaving her headed toward a neo-biblicism.<sup>35</sup>

Regrettably, inspiration, inerrancy, and the authority of Scripture got the first word, and then, only secondarily, was the person of Christ allowed to speak. Indeed, Christ *was* allowed to speak, but not on account of the fact that he was revealed as the *viva vox*, the living voice of the Father. Rather, he was allowed to speak only because the inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Scriptures spoke of him, and therefore, necessitated that he be given a voice. But one must ever remember that, "inspiration, inerrancy, or authority are not, and indeed *cannot* be the first things said."<sup>36</sup> Moreover, "the confession of inerrancy or verbal inspiration does not suffice to guarantee full confessional truth, as witnessed by the veritable host of

<sup>34</sup> The natural progression in Lutheran theology is from inspiration and inerrancy to the authority of Scripture. Notice the progression in Walther's thought in *Walther and the Church*, ed. Theodore Engelder (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publ. House, 1938), 14, as cited in Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion: Missouri in Lutheran Perspective*, 41: "It is absolutely necessary that we maintain the doctrine of inspiration as taught by our orthodox dogmaticians. If the possibility that Scripture contained the least error were admitted, it would become the business of *man* to sift the truth from the error. That places man *over Scripture*, and Scripture is *no longer* the source and norm of doctrine. Human reason is made the *norma* of truth, and Scripture is degraded to the position of a *norma normata*. The least deviation from the old inspiration doctrine introduces a rationalistic germ into theology and infects the whole body of doctrine.

<sup>35</sup> This was often the criticism of the founding father of what is now the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, C. F. W. Walther. See Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion: Missouri in Lutheran Perspective*, 41, where he states the following, citing C. S. Meyer, "Walther's Theology of the Word," *Concordia Theological Monthly* (April 1972): 262: "In light of such statements [i.e., previous Walther citations], it is perfectly clear why it had to seem to the latter-day 'moderates' of Missouri that Walther's doctrine of the Word 'was not wholly Christocentric but tended toward Biblicism.'"

<sup>36</sup> Scott A. Bruzek, "A Five-Word Faith: The Eucharistic Theology of Martin Chemnitz' *Fundamenta Sanae Doctrinae*" (Ph.D. thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1995), 35.

positions that appeal to it."<sup>37</sup> Just look at all the Church bodies that confess inerrancy and inspiration, and how different we actually are.

In sum, confessional Lutherans of the recent past were convinced that the Word of God was the Word of God *because* of divine inspiration and inerrancy rather than because of Christ. Jesus gave way to Holy Scripture, creating a theological conundrum which has continued to affect the Church, specifically the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, to this very day. No longer is Christ, the divine gift-giver and living Word, read, preached, and delivered, but rather the Scriptures are, but only as the container of Protestant doctrine, with little or no attachment to the flesh of Jesus. What is desperately needed is a renewed look at the Christocentricity of both Holy Scripture and the pastoral and liturgical acts of the Church, specifically presiding and preaching, where Christ becomes the first thing said, coming as the Word made flesh, encased in the word written, and delivered homiletically in the word proclaimed.<sup>38</sup> *So what can Mary show us about all of that?*

### **Mary as the Icon of Sacramental Hearing**

There is always a bit of risk involved when a Lutheran proposes to use Mary as the icon for anything sacramental, particularly the Scriptures, which are the foundation of Protestant theology and practice.<sup>39</sup> This is, in part, because it

<sup>37</sup> Horace D. Hummel, "The Influence of Confessional Themes on Biblical Exegesis," in *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, ed. John Reumann, Samuel Nafzger, and Harold Ditmanson (Philadelphia, Penn.: Fortress Press, 1979), 222.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. John 1.14.

<sup>39</sup> See Timothy George, "The Blessed Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective," in *Mary, Mother of God*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 117: "To be an evangelical meant *not* to be a Roman Catholic. To worship Jesus meant *not* to honor Mary, even if such honor were biblically grounded and liturgically chaste." The same can be said of Lutherans. One of the few exceptions, however, might be the little book by the Lutheran pastor Charles Dickson, where he notes that a "rereading and enlightened understanding [of Catholic teaching on Mary] on the part of the Protestant community will help to refocus the attention of the entire Christian world on Mary, not as a point of division, but as a real bridge to unity for us all" (Charles Dickson, *A Protestant Pastor Looks at Mary* [Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1996], 109-110).

is commonly understood among Protestants that, as Giovanni Miegge has noted, "the cult of Mary is disquieting and perplexing."<sup>40</sup> And the perception today is that Reformation theologians were out to reject any and all Marian excesses.<sup>41</sup> Yet, it should be noted that while some reformers were doing just that, one must acknowledge the special reverence with which the Lutheran Confessions and confessions speak of the Blessed Virgin Mary.<sup>42</sup>

The Smalcald Articles (1537) speak of Mary's fleshly condition during the conception and birth of Christ this way: "The Son became man in this manner: he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, without the cooperation of man, and was born of the *pure, holy, and virgin Mary*."<sup>43</sup> The Formula of Concord (1577-1580) speaks of Mary's subsequent role as Mother in the following ways:

Therefore we believe, teach, and confess that Mary conceived and bore not only a plain, ordinary, mere man but the veritable Son of God; *for this reason she is rightly called, and truly is, the mother of God.*<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Giovanni Miegge, *The Virgin Mary: The Roman Catholic Marian Doctrine*, trans. Waldo Smith (London, UK: Lutterworth, 1955), 9.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Beth Kreitzer, *Reforming Mary: Changing Images of the Virgin Mary in the Lutheran Sermons of the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4. Kreitzer's work is especially helpful as it examines the sermons of the Lutheran fathers of the sixteenth century on Mary and the Marian feasts. Beginning with Luther, she traces the concerted attempt by Lutheran pastors to "completely recast the image of Mary" (141) from active participant in the redemptive act to passive vessel and model for Christians, particularly women and girls (140). See also Paul Haffner, *The Mystery of Mary* (Chicago Ill.: Liturgy Training Publications, 2004), 7: "The majority of Protestants have drifted away from the proper attitude towards Mary, which Martin Luther had indicated on the basis of Holy Scripture."

<sup>42</sup> For a helpful look at the Virgin Mary in reformation Germany, see Bridget Heal, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Early Modern Germany: Protestant and Catholic Piety, 1500-1648* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge, 2007). The following is of note: "While the Protestant reformers were unanimous in their condemnation of the invocation of saints, some, in particular Martin Luther, still had many positive things to say about Mary... Indeed, some of Luther's statements were so traditional that his writings were cited by contemporary Catholic commentators seeking to defend Mary's cult."

<sup>43</sup> Smalcald Articles, Part I.4, in Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, 291-292. (Emphasis mine.) The footnote in Tappert inserts "ever" as a connotation for the Virgin Mary from the Latin text.

<sup>44</sup> Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article VIII:7.12, in Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, 488. (Emphasis mine.)

On account of this personal union and communion of the natures, Mary, *the most blessed virgin*, did not conceive a mere, ordinary human being, but a human being who is truly the Son of the most high God, as the angel testifies. He demonstrated his divine majesty even in his mother's womb in that he was born of a virgin without violating her virginity. Therefore *she is truly the mother of God* and yet remained a virgin.<sup>45</sup>

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1530-1531) speaks of Mary's saintliness this way: "Granted that blessed Mary prays for the church" and, while "she is worthy of highest honors, she does not want to be put on the same level as Christ but to have her example considered and followed."<sup>46</sup> And Luther, in his final sermon at Wittenberg in 1546 (and late Luther, you might know, is almost regarded as inspired and inerrant among the Lutherans!), confessed Mary's ongoing intercession on behalf of the Church this way: "Is Christ only to be adored? Or is the holy Mother of God rather not to be honored? This is the woman who crushed the Serpent's head. Hear us. For your Son denies you nothing."<sup>47</sup> There, you might hear both intercession and co-redemptrix (the latter, a very hot topic at present, especially after the Holy Father's recent trip to Fatima in May 2010).

According to Luther and the Lutheran Confessions, Mary is the pure and holy mother of God, who at this very moment is in heaven, doing precisely what her Son does: offering prayers for the Church. Her purity and holiness come as a gift from God, who took her flesh, purified it, and made it the blameless sanctuary for her son.<sup>48</sup> Now, we might discuss the timing of

<sup>45</sup> Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VIII.24, in Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, 595. (Emphasis mine.)

<sup>46</sup> Both of the foregoing are from Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXI.27, in Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, 232.

<sup>47</sup> Luther, *AE* 51, 128-129.

<sup>48</sup> While the understanding of Mary's sinlessness (or lack thereof) changed throughout the time of the Lutheran reformers, some of the most formidable teaching on the subject comes from Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586). See Kreitzer, *Reforming Mary*, 41, who cites Chemnitz in the following way: "Besides, Mary is a sinner, exactly like us, but the flesh that the Lord took from her was purified by the Holy Spirit, so that it would be pure." The question, of course, is just how much of Mary's flesh did the Holy Spirit need and use? Chemnitz seems to suggest a bit of her flesh, possibly even just her womb. However, that would presume that the rest of her remained tainted with sin, creating a Gnostic-like conundrum which is not easily solved.



that purification (was it at her conception or was it at the Annunciation), but I know we would both agree that she was pure and immaculate at the conception of her Son. And working in conjunction with the Holy Spirit (not passively, but actively),<sup>49</sup> she was enabled to give her sanctified flesh to her son as a gift, in order that he might be enabled to come as the sinless saviour of the world, joining his divinity to creation's humanity, as my confessions say, "in his mother's womb."<sup>50</sup> Consequently, in receiving the sanctification of her flesh, and in delivering that flesh to her son, she is worthy of all honor, praise, and veneration, precisely on account of the physical, concrete, tangible connection to the flesh of Jesus Christ, which all began when she heard the angel's word.<sup>51</sup>

Admittedly, there are a number of implications which can be drawn from those specific words of the Annunciation. Mary is, rather clearly I think, the new and greater Daughter of Zion, the Ark, and the embodiment of creation itself. She is also the New Eve, the Spouse of God, the Mother of the Faithful, and a host of other notable and fitting titles. Indeed, as the Church Fathers have said, so I say: "About Mary, one can never say enough!"<sup>52</sup> But what does all of that show us about the sacramentality of Scripture?

Let us recall precisely what transpired within the Annunciation event. And, to get there, we must first remember who Jesus is. He is the Word, the *logos*, the one who uttered creation into existence through his eight-sided "Let there be." He was not merely an agent or "mediator of creation,"<sup>53</sup> as Logos

<sup>49</sup> Large Catechism, Second Part: Creed, 17, in Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, 414: "That is to say, he became man, conceived and born without sin, of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin."

<sup>50</sup> Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VIII.26, in Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, 596.

<sup>51</sup> It is important to note, and it is hoped that this will be seen more clearly in what follows, that any talk of Mary is intended to be talk of Christ. Pope Benedict XVI may have said it best when he wrote: "Thus in Mariology Christology was defended. Far from belittling Christology, it signifies the comprehensive triumph of a confession of faith in Christ which has achieved authenticity" (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*, trans. John M. McDermott, S.J. [San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius Press, 1983], 36).

<sup>52</sup> *De Maria Numquam Satis*.

<sup>53</sup> Aloys Grillmeier, S.J., *Christ in Christian Tradition, Vol. One: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. John Bowden (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1975), 229.

Christology affirms, but an active participant in the creative act and, in fact, he is the one upon whom the whole creation stands or falls.<sup>54</sup> He is the author of creation itself, and when he spoke, there was no gap between word and reality. And that same word, as Wingren has noted: “maintains existence, and repeatedly makes contact with us in the meeting of men and events.”<sup>55</sup>

It is, therefore, the Lord’s word, his *viva vox*, his living voice, which created and continues to sustain this creation, so much so that, if for a moment, the Lord ceased to speak, this world would invariably cease to exist, for creation’s life is “from God’s Word . . . from that which cometh out of the mouth of God.”<sup>56</sup> Why? Precisely because He speaks realities; he speaks and it happens.

But the eights at creation ring of an eschatological number, one that will have no end. In other words, the speaking of things into existence (his “let there be” eight times) signifies an activity of the *logos* which will never cease. And so the Annunciation. With a hovering Spirit and a living word, an epiclesis of sorts, Jesus *simultaneously* took up residence in Mary’s flesh. He spoke, and it came to be. With a word and a listen and a *fiat* (a joyful, optative, receptive, “Let it be unto me” of creation’s “Let there be”), Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, was embodied by Mary. And like the burning coals that touched Isaiah’s lips, and the living hand of Jesus that touched the dead boy from Nain, this aural touch of the heavenly messenger delivered the fullness of the one behind the gift. Isaiah received sanctity from the Holy One and the dead boy received life from the one who is Life itself, and in receiving the angel’s touch, Mary received Christ (all of Christ) physically, tangibly, concretely, and sacramentally. To say it in Augustinian terms, the Word came

<sup>54</sup> For Arius, in particular, it is clear that the Son participates in the Father’s *logos*, not by way of communication, but by way of grace—“*per gratiam*” (Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 1:228.). The Son, according to Arius, does not “have identical being with the Father” (ibid., 226, citing the confession of faith made by Arius and his colleagues to Alexander of Alexandria), but in subordination to the Father, participates in the Father’s *logos*, not bearing it in his own being.

<sup>55</sup> Wingren, *The Living Word*, 72.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 74.

to an element and a sacrament was there,<sup>57</sup> because Christ was there. And Christ, who appears as a divine person with divine power to save *in his flesh*,<sup>58</sup> is, very rightly, “the sacrament, the primordial sacrament,”<sup>59</sup> “the sacrament of God,”<sup>60</sup> and “the only way to the actuality of redemption.”<sup>61</sup> And if you do not believe Schillebeeckx and de Lubac, maybe the Proper Preface of the Ambrosian missal will suffice. For the First Sunday in Advent it beautifully declares: “Manifesting to your people the sacrament of your Only-begotten.”<sup>62</sup>

And speaking of missals, allow me here to make one observation. The *Missale Romanum*, the third Latin version since Vatican II, uses the word *sacramentum* 252 times. Interestingly, however, this same word appeared only 131 times in the Missal published in the same year as the start of the Second Council.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, as noted by Van Slyke, “the word’s liturgical import [. . .] has practically doubled in the years following the Second Vatican Council.”<sup>64</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that within your Church, the Roman Church, there has been an evolution in sacramental understanding, beginning with Tertullian’s very basic emphasis on materiality, to Schillebeeckx’ proposal for a broader notion of sacrament, which finds its origin in the person of Christ. But have we transferred this broad-reaching sacramental theology into the realm of sacred Scripture and sacred preaching? Remember: this “encounter,” to steal a phrase from Schillebeeckx,<sup>65</sup> was

<sup>57</sup> Augustine, *In Evangelium Johannis tractatus*, 80:3.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (Lanham, Md.: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 15.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius, 2006), 202: “In this world she [the Church] is the sacrament of Christ, as Christ himself, in his humanity, is for us the sacrament of God.”

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> The Latin reads: “manifestans plebi tuae Unigenitit tui sacramentum.”

<sup>63</sup> Van Slyke, “The Changing Meaning of *sacramentum*: Historical Sketches,” *Antiphon* 11, no. 3 (2007): 245.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Schillebeeckx makes special note of the “encounter with God” aspect of this understanding of Jesus as the primordial sacrament. When one encounters the Christ, he actually encounters God himself.

based upon a word, and that word was a thoroughly sacramental one precisely because of the one it touched and the One it delivered!

The first point of sacramentality, therefore, rests in that word hitting the Virgin's ear. But there is a second bit of sacramental-ness which is of utmost importance too. The word not only came to an element, but in its coming to Mary's ear, Christ was present in, with, and under it: physically, tangibly, concretely, and, so also, sacramentally. Through the mattered means of the angel's word, the divine came rushing down, condescending, if you will, crawling in through the Virgin's ear and down to her heart and her womb. The word not only touched an element, but in its touching Mary's ear, the person of Jesus Christ (in his flesh) as there. It was a tangible word, one that rattled vocal chords and pierced the eardrum and bore the Messiah and delivered the divine. And tangibility, you know, is a key component to any sacramentality. But what does any of that have to do with the Scriptures, with preaching too, and specifically, their inherent sacramentality?

Near the end of *Dei Verbum*, the synod affirms that "in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven *meets His children with great love and speaks with them.*"<sup>66</sup> Indeed, the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God, the *viva vox Jesu*, is as living and active today as it was in the angel's mouth nearly 2,000 years ago. And more, what went for Mary, goes for us. In the words of de Lubac:

As far as the Christian mind is concerned, Mary is the "ideal figure of the Church," the "sacrament" of her, and the mirror in which the whole Church is reflected. Everywhere the Church finds in her her type and model, her point of origin and perfection: "The form of our Mother the Church is according to the form of his Mother."<sup>67</sup>

So when that Word is read and when that Word is preached, it comes to the element of the human ear, bearing with it (as it

<sup>66</sup> *Dei Verbum*, VI:21. (Emphasis mine.)

<sup>67</sup> de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 320.

did for Mary) the full range of sacramental possibility. And when it touches the ear, I think it is safe to say that the sacrament is there. But it is there precisely because Christ is there. The one who swims in the water of the font, and changes bread and wine into his own body, blood, soul, and divinity, by granting it his holy touch, so he crawls in through the ear of the hearer, and does to them what he does to the other sacramental gifts: he changes them; he changes them by dwelling within them; he changes them by becoming one flesh with them. We, like Mary, in our hearing of Scripture read and homily preached, actually participate in the divine nature, because we participate in Jesus, who bears in his body the fullness of the Godhead, and who brings that body from *heaven to mouth to ear* whenever and wherever his Word is read or proclaimed. His *kenosis* is our *theosis*!

And because there is "an exchange of attributes (a sort of *communicatio idiomatum*)"<sup>68</sup> occurring between Christ and us in the back-and-forth-ness of speaking and hearing, we are, in some sense, a sacrament too: a sacrament to the world, an embodiment of the divine, a mattered means by which the world will come in contact with Jesus. This, of course, has inherently ethical and anthropological dimensions. And all of that can be found, not only in the seven sacraments recognized by your Church and the three recognized by mine, but also (and just as fully) in the reading and preaching of Holy Scripture, because it was first found (just as fully) in the Annunciation to Mary.

Sadly, however, while Mary has been considered any number of other things (and all of them rightly so), no one, to my knowledge, has linked her to the sacramentality of sacred Scripture, sacred preaching, and sacred hearing. Yet, I would propose that maybe this is high time that we should. Especially, given the very fine work of the Second Vatican Council on the person of Christ, the Word of God, and their coming together in the fourfold presence of the liturgy; and, especially, given Luther's deep connection with the Church Fathers and his

<sup>68</sup> Tuomo Mannermaa, "The Doctrine of Justification and Christology," trans. Thomas F. Obersat, *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (2000): 210.

profound desire not to part from the Roman Church; especially, given all of that, maybe we can, together, do as Goethe bids in *Faust*: "What you have as heritage, Now take as task," he says, "For thus you will make it your own."<sup>69</sup> This is our heritage. And I pray that it becomes our task.

To that end, allow me to conclude with a bit from David Brown, professor at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, which sums up rather nicely all that I have attempted in the foregoing: "Whether within the biblical text or beyond, words can and do thus function sacramentally, despite all their apparent clash and dissonance. . . . Chewing the Eucharistic elements and chewing the words should thus not be seen as opposed activities. Words, no less than the Word himself, can be fully sacramental."<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, lines 682-683 (translation by Jaroslav Pelikan).

<sup>70</sup> *Christ: The Sacramental Word: Incarnation, Sacrament and Poetry*, ed. David Brown and Ann Loades (London, UK: SPCK, 1996), 19-20.