Luther on the God Behind the First Commandment

by Charles P. Arand

Johann Michael Reu, perhaps the foremost authority on Luther's catechisms in American Lutheranism during the twentieth century, insisted that the First Commandment is "*always* governed by the superscription which is always thought of as pure *Gospel* and promise."[1] Consistent with his conviction that the prologue, "I am the Lord your God who led you out of Egypt," provided the backdrop against which the commandments are to be understood, Reu inserted it at the head of the Ten Commandments in his own edition of the Small Catechism.[2] He then introduced his exposition of the Decalog with a discussion of baptism as the New Testament corollary to the prologue. As the prologue made known to the Old Testament people "*who* it is that gives these commandments and by what peculiar *right* He gives them," so also in baptism God "has a peculiar right to give them to us."[3]

The emphasis on the prologue by Reu and subsequent expositors stands in sharp contrast to the relatively little attention given to the epilogue, "I the Lord your God am a jealous God . . ."[4] As Johannes Meyer observed, the former seems to portray God as a helping God, the latter a revenging and rewarding God. The question arises, is it the God of redemption or the God of retribution, the God of Exodus or the God of Sinai, the God of the gospel or the God of the law who gives the commandments?[5] The perceived dichotomy between the prologue and epilogue has led some to interpret Luther's explanation of the First Commandment one way in the Decalog and another way in the epilogue.[6]

The prologue and epilogue need not, however, be interpreted as diametrically opposed to one another. With the western tradition since Augustine, Luther places both of them under the rubric of the First Commandment.[7] Together they form a single unit so that a part can be taken for the whole.[8] Two themes emerge in Luther's exposition: First, it is not God as Redeemer, but God as Creator of heaven and earth who issues the First Commandment.[9] To be sure, the Creator is also the God who redeems and restores creation. But

it is God as Creator who figures prominently—Christ never enters the discussion.[10] Second, as God manifests his wrath and love in earthly punishments and blessings, he discloses his alien and proper works in creation. By means of these works God would drive us away from false gods and draw us to himself as the exclusive giver of all good things in time and eternity. For this reason the threats and promises will render everyone without excuse for ignoring his wrath or doubting his love.

Creator and Creation in the First Commandment

Before we examine the First Commandment, we must keep in mind that Luther believed that the entire Decalog applied to Christians not because it appeared in Exodus or Deuteronomy, but because it expressed the law of creation.[11] "It is inscribed and engraved in the hearts of all men from the foundation of the world" (LC II.67,82).[12] Moses fitted the law of creation "nicely into his laws in a more orderly and excellent manner than could have been done by anyone else" (LW 47:90; WA 50:331).[13] As such, the Decalogue is not a set of rules heteronomously imposed upon human creatures. It delineates the shape of life as God created it. Life begins, is lived, and ends under the force of the law, under the objective moral order. It tells us what God has made us to be. "You are to be this rather than that."[14] And so the Decalogue belongs to the whole world. In this context, Luther reads the Decalogue as a description of life "from the bottom up," as a summary that gets to "the nonnegotiable requirements of the human condition," as an explication of "the ineradicable minimums of creatureliness."[15] The Decalogue's force and authority, accordingly, derive from its ability to accurately describe the way things are.

By setting the Decalogue within the context of the law of creation, Luther interprets the First Commandment in such a way that it calls for the recognition of the distinction between the Creator and his creation and the dependence of the latter upon the former. Human beings are to perceive themselves as creatures who receive life from outside ourselves and are to look to God as the exclusive giver (since he alone is the Creator) of life. "The nexus between the First Commandment and the knowledge of the Creator was so important for Luther that the recognition of the interrelationship

between the Creator and his creature must be defined as the existential fulfillment of the First Commandment which is made possible by faith in Christ."[16] This understanding highlights the First Commandment as the cornerstone of the remaining nine commandments, all of which have to do with creaturely matters of everyday life. When people regard God as the giver of all good things they are free to use his gifts properly, that is, not as idols (LC I.47). As Gustaf Wingren notes, "Only he who is secure in faith has the ability to obey God's commands without ulterior motives. Such a faith . . . is belief not only in the forgiveness of sins, but also in God's providence, protection, and direction in material matters."[17]

Creation and Redemption in the Prologue

The emphasis on the Creator and his creation emerges in Luther's treatment of the prologue to the First Commandment. In particular, it leads him in his sermons to draw a sharp line of demarcation between the clauses, "I am the Lord your God" and "who led you out of Egypt."[18] They reflect for Luther the two major ways that God relates to us. On the one hand, he relates to the world as its Creator and on the other hand he relates to his people as their Redeemer.[19] With respect to the contents of the catechisms, the clause "I am the Lord your God" embraces the Ten Commandments and First Article, while the clause "who led you out of Egypt" encompasses the Second and Third Articles as well as the Lord's Prayer! It is the former, however, that provides the basis upon which God issues the commandments.

The Creator: "I am the Lord Your God"

With the law of creation as a criterion, Luther extended the application of the phrase "I am the Lord your God" to embrace God's claim upon every creature since God created all people, whereas He led only the people of Israel out of bondage from Egypt. "I am the Lord your God . . . Separate these words from the others ("led out of Egypt"—which we must strike out) and pay close attention to them, for they refer to us all, the entire world in general

and each individual in particular, Jews and Pagans, not because Moses had written them, but because God had created all men, preserved and ruled them."[20] The emphasis on God as Creator surfaces in the Large Catechism when Luther refers to God not in the particularity of his revelation in Jesus, but in the more general terms of "the one, eternal good" (LC I.15) and the "eternal fountain which overflows with sheer goodness and pours forth all that is good in name and in fact" (LC I.25).

Consistent with his stress on God as Creator, Luther emphasized that the phrase. "I am your God," provides the source and fountain from which all creaturely blessings flowed. "The word, 'I am your God, I have sworn to do good to you,' gives bread to the hungry" (WA 28:721.3–5). Again, whatever good the world gives, be it goods or life, it is the work of the God of the First Commandment (WA 28:735.3–5).[21] And so the prologue thus extends without exception to all good things in the world.[22] In fact, Luther speaks almost exclusively of temporal needs in the Large Catechism. "It is he who gives us body, life, food, drink, nourishment, health, protection, peace, and all temporal and eternal blessings. It is he who protects us from evil, he who saves and delivers us when any evil befalls. It is God alone, I have often enough repeated, from whom we receive all that is good and by whom we are delivered from all evil" (LC I.24). Luther's emphasis on God's preservation and provision will even point to the other commandments as gifts themselves—they provide protective fences around God's gifts of creation.[23]

The prohibition, "you shall have no other gods," continues the theme. In fact, at times Luther treats the prologue and prohibition as mirror images of one another. The latter speaks positively of God's creation. The former warns against relying on anything in creation. As creatures who possess neither life nor the future in and of themselves, they need to get help from somewhere. Seeing that good things come from creatures, they turn to them and not to God. Consequently, people think they have God and everything in abundance if they have money . . . (LC I.5,6). Yet in their very search for assistance they divulge the identity of their god. When people fail to distinguish between God and his many masks (parents, rulers, neighbors, wives, children, etc.), they fashion idols of them (WA 28:613.19–22,25–27). Although all creation is good, it is perverted if worshiped and substituted for the Creator.

Herein lies the twofold concern of the First Commandment. On the one hand, "we should not disdain the good things that we receive through God's creatures, nor should we arrogantly seek other ways and means than God has commanded, for then we would be receiving them not from God but from ourselves" (LC I.27). On the other hand, we must keep creation in perspective. Creatures are instruments in the hands of the Creator; they are not the Creator. They may be *cooperatores* with God but they are not *concreatores*. Although God's love comes clothed in the gifts and orders of creation, faith must expect all good things from God. "We must acknowledge everything as God's gifts and thank him for them" (LC I.27). So Luther binds the prologue and prohibition together and sees them complementing one another. The prologue stresses that God alone is Creator. The prohibition warns against the deification of creation.

"Who Has Led You Out of Egypt"

While the phrase, "I am your God," sets forth God's universal claim upon all people, the phrase "who has led you out of Egypt" reveals the God of creation more precisely to a particular people at a particular time and in a particular way. Luther notes that with the prologue, Moses "first introduces God himself; he is the universal God of all the nations who gives the universal Ten Commandments, which prior to this had been implanted at creation in the hearts of all men, to this particular people orally as well" (LW 47:90). The qualifying phrase, "who led you out of Egypt," applies directly and immediately only to the people of Israel. It makes clear that the Ten Commandments do not pertain to us for God never led us out of Egypt (LW 35:165–66).[24] For this reason, Luther rejects the relevancy of other features in the Decalogue as well such as the prohibition against images and the observation of the Sabbath.[25]

As it applied to the Israelites, the expression "who has led you out of Egypt" served several functions. First and foremost, it identified the God of creation by giving him a narrative within history (WA 28:599.19–22).

With these words God tells us who he is, what is his nature and essence, namely, that he is the one who does good things for us, rescues us from

danger, and helps us out of need and all sorts of unpleasantness, just as he rescued the Israelites out of Egypt and did even more by giving them the land which he promised to their fathers. He describes himself with these words, works, and deeds, which they saw with their eyes and experienced in their body, that he helped them out of Egypt. Therefore Moses requires the recognition of God in the First Commandment, that God exists, and that he does good and helps temporally and eternally, so that, whoever needs help, runs here, where he will find help. For this God is gracious and compassionate. He gives good things to those who fear him . . . (WA 28:612.16–21)[26]

Second, the phrase "who has led you out of Egypt" distinguished the true God from all competitors. The Israelites "should leave unadorned and should not honor or fear any other god than the one who had led them out of Egypt" (WA 28:599.19–22). Luther observes that in the case of Deuteronomy, God makes his claim and issues this command just prior to the entrance of the Israelites into the holy land where they will gaze in wide-eyed wonder at all the glitz and glitter of the false gods which they will encounter. But whenever tempted to follow another god, they must ask, "did this god lead us out of Egypt?" (WA 28:599.35;600.10).[27]

The confession of the Isralites lasted until a new creed would take its place. Luther found in Jeremiah 23: 7–8 a prophecy that this creed would be superceded. There God declared that the days would come

when people shall no longer say, "As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of Egypt," but "As the Lord lives who brought up and led the descendents of the house Israel (note that not the entire house of Israel but the descendents of it are mentioned here) out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them." Then they shall dwell in their own land. (LW 47:94)

Israel's creed would cease with the incarnation of Christ (WA 16:429. 18). The qualifying phrase would then cease to apply and God would be known by a new name. That time has come.

Now God is known by the name and narrative set forth in the Apostles' Creed and bestowed in the sacraments (WA 16:426.22–35). Where the Israelites once prayed, "O God, who led us out of Egypt," Christians pray, "Lord, you have redeemed us through the blood of your Son . . ." (WA 16:429.10–12;28;604.28–29). Where it was once important to stress "out of Egypt," it is now necessary to say "suffered under Pontius Pilate." Where the Israelites had called

upon the God who has led them out of Egypt, we call upon the God who has gathered us out of all the lands (WA 28:605.20–21). These clauses prevent us from forgetting our captivity and from seeking idols (WA 28:606.24ff.). We can neither praise nor thank God unless we remember the devil, our sin, and our angst (WA 28:606.13–15). Despite these insights in his exegetical writings, before and after 1529, Luther did not incorporate them into his catechisms.[28]

Punishments and Blessings in the Epilogue

In his lectures on Exodus in 1525, Luther declared that the words of the epilogue, like the prologue, applied only to the Israelites. In his catechetical writings up until that time, he had consistently replaced the words of the epilogue with a summary of natural law under the heading, "A Brief Conclusion of the Ten Commandments."

> In Matthew 7 [:12] Christ himself summarizes the Ten Commandments briefly, saying, "Whatever you want others to do to you, do the same to them; this is the whole Law and the Prophets." No one wants to see his kindness repaid by ingratitude or have someone defame his name. No one wants to be treated arrogantly, no one wants to be disobeyed, or treated with anger, or to have an unchaste wife, or to be robbed of his possessions, or endure falsehood against himself, or be betrayed, or be slandered. On the contrary, everyone wants his neighbor to show love and friendship, gratitude and helpfulness, truthfulness and loyalty—all required by these commandments. (LW 43:16–17; WA 7:207.10–16)

In his treatise *Against the Heavenly Prophets* Luther again cited Matthew 7 as a place where Christ teaches natural law (LW 40:97; WA 18:80).[29]

By 1528, Luther included the epilogue in his catechetical writings. In them the opening statement, "I the Lord your God am a jealous God" amplified the prologue, "I am the Lord your God." If the prologue stresses God's claim on all creation, the epilogue brings out the zeal with which God watches over his creation. It makes known the earnestness with which he guards his commandments (LC I.322;319). They are no laughing matter to him (LC I.32;33). With the prologue, Luther expounds the epilogue in

the light of creation. He takes the zeal that the covenant God expressed for his covenant people of Israel and deliberately expands it to embrace the Creator's jealousy for all of creation, particularly for his human creatures.[30] So Luther expands Moses' concern that Israel not pursue idols in Canaan to embrace God's concern that his people not idolize anything in all creation. Moving from Sinai to creation, Luther does not cite God's miracles in Egypt, but refers to God's activity in creation as the arena in which people continuously encounter God's goodness in their lives.

The Threats and Promises of Creation

The Creator's zeal for his dominion in the world manifests itself in threats and promises that are embedded in the very structures of creation. In earlier works, Luther tended to speak of these earthly punishments and blessings as inferior and of lesser quality than so-called "spiritual" threats and promises. He noted that in the Old Testament the former were intended primarily for the Israelites (WA 16:448),[31] whereas in the New Testament the bodily threats and promises receded into the background (WA 16:475;448). By the time he wrote the catechisms, however, Luther's subordination of the temporal to the eternal diminishes to the point of disappearing.[32] In fact, Albrecht Peters observes, in the catechisms the terrible threats and comforting promises look "above all else to our earthly and worldly fate."[33] Already the *Instructions for the Visitors* had admonished to teach "not only the commandments, but also how God will punish those who do not keep them and how often he has inflicted temporal punishment" (LW 40:276;287; WA 26:203;212). In his sermons on Deuteronomy, which Luther preached the Fall following the publication of the catechisms, he continued to concentrate on God's temporal judgment (WA 29:583;591).

The threats and promises of God speak of comprehensive punishments and blessings that encompass all of creation. The *Instructions* exhort, "teach the people that all tribulations, not only of the Spirit, but also of the body, are sent from God, whether it is poverty or illness, danger to children, peril of possessions, or hunger" (LW 40:287). In the realm of nature punishments take the form of plagues, famines, fires, and floods (LC I.60). Within society, God's

wrath entails that state of affairs where there is no government, no obedience, no fidelity, no faith in this world—only perverse, unbridled men . . . (LC I.69). Within the family, they take the form of wayward spouses, children and servants, and troubles of every kind (LC I.60). Within the sphere of an individual's life, they entail unhappiness in life, no peace of mind, and the loss of everything in which they put their trust (LC I.36,134,148).

As with the threats, God's promise of grace and every blessing runs the spectrum of the First Article's *dona creata.* It includes everything without which "this present life can neither be heartily enjoyed or endured" (LC I.134). Within society the promise entails peace, good government (LC I.134), and soundly instructed citizens (LC I.175). Within the family, it embraces virtuous and home-loving wives, joy and happiness in married life, and children (LC I. 175,218). The promises also encompass those things that sustain life such as bread, clothing, livelihood, money, and sustenance (LC I.164). With respect to the individual, it includes good days, happiness, prosperity, health and long life (LC I.134,164). In brief, God will give everything abundantly, according to the heart's desire (LC I.166). After all, "we have a rich Lord who is sufficient for your needs and will let you lack for nothing" (LC I.253).

Not only do punishments and blessings occur within the parameters of this world, but God executes them through the creatures, orders, and institutions of this world (LC I.182). Pre-eminently this falls to parents, but not exclusively. "God has delegated his authority of punishing evil-doers to civil magistrates in place of parents" (LC I.181). In some cases, friends are "under the obligation to reprove evil" (LC I.275). At times, God even utilizes criminals. "Since everyone robs and steals from the other, he punishes one thief by means of another" (LC I.254,154).[34] God comes with his blessings in a similar way. He "approaches us as our gracious Creator and good benefactor under the masks of his creatures as well as his institutions in nature and history."[35] Creatures are "the hands, channels, and means through which God bestows all blessings" (LC I.27).

Creation Opens the Way to the Creator

When enumerating the earthly punishments and blessings in his catechisms, Luther makes occasional references to both eternal dam-

nation and eternal life. It is as if the bodily threats and promises contain "in, with, and under" themselves eternal threats and promises (WA 16:453.21). Even in his lectures on Exodus (1525), Luther stated that God did not want to lead the Jews through the earthly-bodily threats and promises to a reliance upon temporal things, as if they could grasp their Creator and Lord in a fist. Rather, he wanted to release them from clinging to the visible and lead them back to himself as the Lord and giver of temporal and eternal life (WA 16:448.62).[36] This applies to both his wrath and his love.

Whoever rejects or rebels against God's commandments, institutions, and orders of creation, rejects God's offering hand. When they run afoul of creation they run afoul of the Creator. So it is not the anger of the institutions and orders of this world as representatives of God that people ultimately encounter and experiences, but the wrath of God. Such punishments unveil God's wrath and express his displeasure (LC I.330).[37] They trace their origin back to the holy wrath of God with which he remonstrates against unbelief.[38] Thus Luther explains to the congregation, "I am not to fear the judge or love the judge; but my fear and my trust are to be in someone else beyond the judge, namely, in God, who is the real Judge. I ought to respect and honor the civil judge, who is the mask of God, for the sake of God" (LW 26:96).

By tracing their origin to the wrath of God, the bodily punishments prepare the way for the eternal. Earthly punishments ultimately entail not only the loss of earthly goods, but the loss of favor, blessing, and divine grace of him who is eternal (LC I.151, 253, 174). Thus in the "threat of divine wrath Luther allows the earthly to be opened for eternal damnation,"[39] eternal wrath, misery, woe, damnation, and hell.[40] It anticipates Christ's return in glory proleptically, at which time, God "will pass a most terrible sentence upon them" (LC I.191). The complementarity of the earthly punishments and eternal wrath finds expression most drastically in Luther's *Schulpredigt* of 1530 (WA 30^2:532.23; cf. LW 46:223).

Bodily gifts, conversely, bring a sacramental dimension to creation.[41] In, with, and under creation, human creatures encounter the goodness of God. In his *Brief Form* of 1520 Luther asserts, "Even nature teaches us that there is a God who bestows every blessing and sends helps in every trouble" (WA 30^1:30).[42] Again, the temporal promises of the epilogue contain within them eternal, spiritual

promises. In their original context God wanted to accustom and teach the Israelites what they should expect from him—that he would support them and provide for them temporally and eternally (WA 16:453.21).[43] Luther found the crowning piece of evidence for his argument in the practice of pagans who by their setting up idols demonstrate an awareness of a good God who blesses.[44]

Receiving life and all that they need to support it as gifts from God, creatures should settle into his hand. "Luther sees the wordly promises necessarily bound with the other wordly, because everyone who grasps in the acceptance of the earthly the invisible hand of God, settles himself in the Lord of life and death and thereby leaves this earth behind."[45] By grasping the Creator we takes hold of eternity. For Luther, "eternal life" means "to have a king in our favor . . ."[46] And so, along with the mention of temporal blessings Luther occasionally makes reference to "eternal blessing, happiness, and salvation" (LC I.41,24).[47] The God of creation is also the God of redemption. The goodness of God in the First Article complements the grace of God in the Second and Third Articles. The former entails creation, the latter entails salvation.

Retributive Punishments and Gracious Gifts in Creation

By identifying the Creator of heaven and earth as the one who issues the Decalogue, Luther expounds the threats and promises so as to bring out God's alien and proper works within creation.[48] As Creator, God stands apart and before creation. In no way contingent upon us or any other creature, everything that God promises and bestows he does so freely, as an act of sheer generosity. At the same time, because God's law is part of creation, when we attempt to break the nomological structure of life it in turn breaks us.[49]

Threats and Promises in the Prologue

The unconditional nature of the promise comes through loud and clear in the prologue. Taken by itself, it "is the essence of all promises."[50] With the words, "I am the Lord your God," God would teach us not to rely on ourselves but solely on his grace; not because we do the work, but because God wants to be our God.

"Thus shall a man consider, that nothing appears on account of his own righteousness or holiness, but for the sake of the Word, that God the Lord has sworn in his promise to be your Father, and that he has said to you and the entire world, that he will be your God. That is the ground and cause on account of which God does good to you" (WA 28:751.10–752.7). In the Fifth Commandment of the Large Catechism, Luther declares that God "always wants us to think back to the First Commandment, that he is our God; that is, he wishes to help and protect us." In his *Glosses on the Decalogue,* 1530, Luther comments that the clause, "I am the Lord your God," is "the promise of all promises, the fountain and head of all religion and wisdom, embracing the promise of the Gospel of Christ. This is properly the First Commandment because it prescribes nothing when it says, 'I am the Lord your God'" (WA 30:358.1–7).

In keeping with his habit of using the prologue and prohibition interchangeably Luther can at times even refer to the prohibition as promise. With the command, "you shall have no other gods . . ." God "wishes to turn us away from everything else, and to draw us to himself, because he is the one, eternal good. It is as if he said: "What you formerly sought from the saints, or what you hoped to receive from mammon or anything else, turn to me for all this; look upon me as the one who wishes to help you and to lavish all good upon you richly" (LC I.15). In his Second Sermon Series (1528) Luther states, "you shall have no other gods," that is, "I will be your God and help you." Again, with the words, "you shall have no other gods" God has bound himself to us. "God wants to be ours that I should wholeheartedly trust him" (WA 30:30.6–7).

The threats of punishment are not quite as apparent in the prologue. Luther will refer to the prologue, "I am the Lord your God," and the prohibition "you shall have no others," as threat and promise together. Thus "the First Commandment contains salvation for the pious and damnation of the impious" (WATR 1:369.33). It means judgment for one, grace for the other (WATR 1:432.19ff.).[51] In the Large Catechism, he seems to tie the prohibition to the threat. God commands "under penalty of eternal wrath, namely, that the heart should know no other consolation or confidence than that in him, nor let itself be torn from him, but for him should risk and disregard

everything else on earth" (LC I.16). Similarly, in his Deuteronomy sermons, Luther explains the phrase, "you will have no other gods," as a warning to the people of Israel.

The Radical Contrast Between the Threats and Promises in the Epilogue

In his Table Talk, Luther makes the comment that the word "zealous" comprehends wrath and love, *vindicta et defensio* (WATR 2:395). God's zeal is either an all-consuming fire or an all-embracing love.[52] And so, he approaches us either as an angry judge or a gracious father (LC I.327). On the one hand, God threatens to punish to the fourth generation those who transgress his commandments, that is, those who hate him and who do not rely upon him. On the other hand he promises every blessing to the thousandth generation of those who keep the commandments, that is, who love him, rely upon him and turn to him for their every need. God's zeal, as manifested in his threats and promises, shows his determination to remain God in the face of all attacks upon God as God.[53] In the former God warns against deifying creation. He will "tolerate no presumption and no trust in any other object" (LC I.47). Thus they drive us away from other gods (LC I.15) and lead to repentance. In the latter God attracts and allures us to himself (LC I.322,323,15) so that his human creatures might cling to him alone.

At first glance, it would appear that in the Small Catechism's explanation, Luther sets forth God's threats and promises in two parallel, balanced statements:

"God threatens to punish those who transgress the commandments";
"God promises grace and every blessing to all who keep the commandments."

In fact, however, God's promises far outweigh his threats. Luther stresses, "terrible as these threats are, much mightier is the comfort in the promise that assures mercy . . ." (LC I.39). The epilogue places greater emphasis on the positive more than the negative statement.[54] This contrast may be schematized in the following manner:

God threatens [reactive] punishment [merited] to those who transgress [unbelievers] . . .
God promises [proactive] grace and blessing [unmerited] to those who keep [believers] . . .

Luther cannot speak of God's wrath and love so as to conclude that God's anger is part and parcel of God's nature in such a way that the statement "God is wrath" could be affirmed the way one can confess that "God is love." The threats belong to the *opus alienum* of God while the promises belong to the *opus proprium* of God (WA 16:459.34–460.3).

Reactive Threats and Proactive Promises

The threats warn of God's wrath before it descends (LC I.38). As such, they reveal God's punishment as a potentiality, something that is a real possibility but not yet a reality. Thus the *Instructions* insist that pastors should exhort the people with many examples of God's punishment as words of warning of what could happen again. "The preachers are to proclaim and explain the Ten Commandments often and earnestly, yet not only the commandments but also how God will punish those who do not keep them and how he often has inflicted temporal punishment" (LW 40:276; WA 26:203). Examples like Sodom and Gomorrah, the *Instructions* continue, "are written in order to forewarn people" (LW 40:276; WA 26:203). Similarly, Luther observes that Moses issued these warnings before Israel entered into the promised land in order to prevent them from succumbing to the temptations of following foreign gods.

The enacted and implemented punishments require a prior provocation.[55] The reactive nature of the punishments is especially evident in the way that God carries out his threats through his designated representatives and orders. They are not necessarily predisposed to anger, nor are they capricious and arbitrary. They can, however, be provoked to anger. Rebellion against anyone or anything in creation will bring a reaction against the rebel. Disobedience to parents brings down their anger. Laziness at work leads to termination. Using the earth for self-centered purposes will deprive future generations of its provisions.

The promises, unlike the threats, are proactive and antecedent to our actions. In fact, for Luther, the promises are preformative. They bestow what they say prior to our response.

> The promise does not mean that we are thereby pointed to the future . . . The promise is the way in which God's deed comes near to us. That the promise precedes the fulfillment, runs ahead, that is true, but it runs ahead with the fulfillment, for which reason it means for-sending (actually sending out). The promise does not point to the future, rather his word procedes out of the action of God. And only he who has the word, finds his deed.[56]

Unlike the threats, the promises do not speak only of future blessings that are waiting to happen, but of ones already in place. So the epilogue teaches faith and trust in God, for God promises to do good to those who love him, that is, look to him for blessings, as we read in Isaiah 64: "No eye has seen or ear has heard what God prepared for those who love him" (LW 40:277; WA 26:204).

The channels and instruments through which God blesses further illumine the proactive character of the promises. All that we receive, Luther contends, we receive "from God through his command and ordinance" (LC I.26). He continues,

> Our parents and all authorities—in short, all people placed in the position of neighbors—have received the command to do us all kinds of good. So we receive our blessings not from them, but from God through them. Creatures are only the hands, channels, and means through which God bestows all blessings. For example, he gives to the mother breasts and milk for her infant, and he gives grain and all kinds of fruit from the earth for man's nourishment—things which no creature could produce by himself. (LC I.26,27)

God set these orders in place before we arrived on the scene. He gave our parents the command to care for their children. He gave the earth the command to bring forth its fruits before anyone walked the face of the earth. Both are by nature predisposed to bestow their good.

Merited Punishment and Unmerited Grace and Blessing

Not only does Luther view the wrath of God as reactive, but following from that, he regards it as retributive, retaliatory, and

recompensory (LC I.151,152,161). Wrath is vengeance (LC I.34). It must be earned, merited, or deserved.[57] Hence Luther can describe punishment not only as that which God does, but as that which people bring upon themselves.[58] When it falls, they have no one to blame but themselves. They were warned. Having ignored the threats they "justly merit the wrath they receive" (LC I.38). And so in connection with the Fourth Commandment Luther declares, "We get what we deserve: plague, war, famine, fire, flood, wayward wives and children, and servants, and trouble of every kind" (LC I.60).

Again, whereas the threats are merited, the promised blessings are entirely unmerited and undeserved. This comes to the fore in several ways. First, in the Small Catechism Luther takes the phrase "showing steadfast love" from the biblical text and translates it as "doing good." He then expands this in his explanation to include "grace and every blessing." Where "every blessing" would have sufficed to render "benefactor" or to clarify what it means to "do good" of Luther's translation, the addition of "grace," has the advantage of bringing out the graciousness of God. It excludes all claims upon God's well-doing and all thoughts of merit. In relating the two, Meyer suggests that the former is grounded in the latter.[59] The way in which Luther modifies the promises in the Large Catechism with key adjectives further points toward the gracious character of the promises. He describes the promise as one of "sheer goodness and mercy," a "gracious offer," "so cordial an invitation," "so rich a promise," and a "friendly promise." Through the promises God "graciously lavishes us with wonderful blessing" (LC I.39,40,41,252,322).

Finally, Luther sees these promises as rising out of the very nature of God. He observes that God is called good because "he is an eternal fountain which overflows with sheer goodness and pours forth all that is good in name and in fact" (LC I.25). Regardless of the validity of Luther's etymological analysis of the German word for "God," namely that it is derived from the word "good," the basic point that he makes holds true. Elsewhere he notes that the God who promises is a "gracious God" (LC I.148), and that "he is the one, eternal good" (LC I.15). Again, we keep the commandments, "because God shows himself a kind father" (LC I.323).

Those upon Whom the Threats Descend and Promises Come

The contrast between the threats and promises is further highlighted when one asks, "upon whom do the threats descend and to whom do the promises come?" In the Small Catechism, Luther expands the biblical texts "those who hate me" and "those who love me" to include those "who transgress my commandments" and "who keep my commandments." The hatred and love of God comes to concrete expression in the particulars of one's behavior with regard to each individual commandment. In this, Luther has not been unfaithful to the biblical text. He has simply drawn out the connection between our relation to God and our stance toward the commandments of God. Human behavior reflects either faith or lack of faith in God.

The Large Catechism is slightly more nuanced. Our regard for God shows itself in our attitude toward the commandments. Those who break the commandments hold them in willful contempt and regard them as a joking matter (LC I.246). They either passively neglect and ignore the commandments (LC I.140) or they actively defy, disdain, and despise the commandments.[60] Regarding the commandments as too ordinary, transgressors prefer more glorious, self-chosen and self-promoting works. This applies also to God's instruments of blessing. "We arrogantly seek other ways and means than God has commanded with the result that we do not receive our blessings from God but seek them from ourselves" (LC I.26, 27). In short they belittle creation and circumvent its orders by using the earth and everything in it for their own purposes.

Transgressors have robbed creation of its Creator by despising the commandments. In every case transgressors do not reject abstract, impersonal principles, but the will and person of God himself. These are, after all, the commandments *of God* (LC I.98)! Unfortunately, Luther laments, no one sees them as the command of the divine majesty (LC I.171).[61] Instead, they despise God's commandments as if they came from some loutish peddler (LC I.152). They do not believe that God is serious about his commandments and that he is concerned with how they are regarded (LC I.34,57). By rejecting the commandments people have forgotten about God and have turned away from him.[62] They do not care whether God frowns or smiles (LC I.36). Nor do they take any thought as to how God

feeds and guards them (LC I.128). Such do not desire God's blessing and spurn God's favor and happiness (LC I.253, 155). Such do not fear God; they ignore his wrath (LC I.244). So they persist in evil, stubborness and pride, and refuse to hear God's Word (LC I.35, 38).

Luther describes those who forsake God as belonging to the famous triad, the devil, the world, and our flesh. Of the three, Luther most often cites the "world" as the recipient of God's terrible wrath (LC I.177). More precisely, he refers to the "way of the world" (LC I.229, 123) or the "common course of the world" (LC I.60), as it is turned away from God. He depicts it as "more wicked than ever" (LC I.69), as wrong-headed, and perverse.[63] At other times, Luther refers to human nature, "which in all its conditions is nothing but a vast, wide stable of thieves" (LC I.228). More specifically, Luther names those whom God punishes as "thieves," "knaves and scoundrels," "backbiters," "liars and blasphemers," "non-Christians," "clerics who live and teach contrary to the Word," "conceited fellows," "proud, powerful, and rich pot-bellies," and "criminals."[64]

The statement, "who keep the commandments," would seem to suggest that our obedience merits God's goodness in the way that transgressions earn wrath. Such is not the case. Those who obey the commandments live within their station and vocation in life where God has promised to bless them and where they in turn become channels of blessing to those around them.[65] As God bestows all good things through his channels of blessing, that is, field, home, family, and work, a person must go to the location where God provides it and till the ground, render a service, or pay the price in order to receive food and clothing. By staying within the "channels of obedience," that is, behavior in harmony with the Decalogue, and accepting God's gifts through the cooperation of his creation, we receive the good from the Creator's hand.[66] Each commandment teaches the proper use of God's *dona creata*. And so "obedience to the command corresponds to the gift given by God."[67] Through obedience to the parents and authorities we receive nourishment and protection. "He desires us to honor government as a servant of his and to show gratitude to it because through it God gives us such great benefits" (LW 40:283; WA 26:208).

Conversely, one could say with Johannes Meyer, "All good things

are grounded in the gracious goodness of God 'who gladly helps and blesses everywhere' where he is not obstructed by disobedience."[68] Through offence one falls away from cooperation with God and leaves his channels of love. When we worry about how much we possess, we put ourselves "athwart creation's generous stream."[69] We then become a hindrance and an obstacle in the path of the Creator's generosity. It is as if all we have to do is keep out of God's way (with our sin) and he will richly and continually bless us. Our only care ought to be what we should do with all the good that God has made so that it might benefit our neighbor. Thus the commandments might be thought of as "roadblock removers" that enable us to remain in God's "channels of blessing."

Ultimately, those who gladly keep the commandments and stand in the stream of God's creation cling to God alone, that is, believe and trust in him (LC I.32).[70] So once again, Luther shows that we are not here dealing with impersonal and abstract principles. Each of the commandments draws us back to the First Commandment.

> Here again we have God's Word by which he wants to encourage and urge us to true, noble, exalted deeds, such as gentleness, patience, and, in short, love and kindness toward our enemies. He always wants to remind us to think back to the First Commandment, that he is our God; that is, he wishes to help and protect us, so that he may subdue our desire for revenge. (LC I.195)

So those who keep the commandments value and prize them above all teachings as the greatest treasure that God has given and gladly act in accordance with them.[71] The words "gladly act" shows that they regard them not as unwanted impostions, but as gifts from God.

It is true that Luther frequently speaks of God's blessings as a reward even as he did the punishments. But the similarity ends with the terminology. Already in the *Instructions* the nature of reward is made clear:

> Nor is it necessary to engage in subtle debate as to whether or not God gives these things on account of our works. It is enough to teach that God demands such works and *rewards them because he has promised to do so without our merit*. . . . For the truth is that God gives blessings *because of his promise* not because of our works, yet the good works which God has commanded must be done. (Italics added; LW 40:280; WA 26:206)

Meyer notes that the term "reward" is harmlessly used in the second

sermon series and avoided in the third, "in order to exclude the concept of merit which lies so closely at hand."[72] The way in which Luther describes rewards in the Large Catechism, namely, that "God will reward you a hundredfold" or "richly reward" or "abundantly reward" also suggests that the meritorious dimension is absent.[73] So although the language of reward is not abandoned, the concept of merit is dropped from it. God "rewards that which he alone works in us."[74]

Conclusion

So what difference do the catechisms' explanation of the epilogue (and with it the prologue) make for teaching the Decalogue in particular and the catechism in general? It provides an important interpretive key for the First Commandment. In the process, the epilogue captures two nuanced tensions in Lutheran theology, namely, the tension between creation and redemption as well as the equally important tension between law and gospel.

With respect to the tension between creation and redemption, it is noteworthy that Luther does not interpret the Ten Commandments primarily in light of the Second and Third Articles (redemption)—as Reu had sought to do. Instead, he explains them within the interpretive horizon of the First Article (creation). Luther's exposition of the Ten Commandments thus reflects his conviction that there is nothing distinctively Christian about the Ten Commandments. The catechisms do not refer to the Ten Commandments as a distinctively Christian code of ethics or as a uniquely Christian guide for life. The commandments belong to creation and apply to all people. The *sollen* of the commandments may take its cue from the imperative of creation. From the perspective of the original state of the human creature, it functions descriptively. In the light of creation the commandments simply describe the non-negotiable, necessary conditions for human existence.[75] They set forth our creaturely responsibilities. From the perspective of the creature who is simultaneously a sinner, and who rebels against the structures of creation, the *sollen* also functions prescriptively. Here it takes on the additional functions of coercion and accusation. The creational responsibilities serve as the basis of

indictment. The universality of God's wrath rests upon the universality of his law.[76] The First Commandment thus drives us to the Creed.

With respect to the tension between law and gospel, the epilogue draws attention proleptically to God's alien and proper works. As such, the commandments do not set forth a moralistic system of rewards and punishments to motivate the human creature. This carries a number of ramifications for interpreting the words, "we should fear, love, and trust" God. At the very least, it means that "fear" in the First Commandment cannot be diluted to a form of "awe" or "reverence" for God's majesty and transcendence. Nowhere do the latter provide the referents for fear. Instead, the threats of God's wrath consistently supply the backdrop for fear in the catechisms. In this context, fear entails a "healthy respect" for God's Word. It recognizes that God means what he says. Fear thus corresponds to the healthy respect that a mountain climber has for the mountain, the diver for the ocean. Although it does not deter them from the water and the mountain, it does prompt them to proceed with caution and a certain circumspection. Whoever fears God will avoid the danger of idolizing creation. And yet, in so far as we are sinners, this fear will always carry with it a tinge of dread. For in the very act of recognizing that God means what he says, the sinner will recognize that he or she deserves what God threatens. If the threats provide the referent for fear, God's goodness and blessing in creation provide the referents for love and trust. In receiving God's benefaction, they prompt a person to "gladly do" as God commands. Grounded in creation they in turn prompt a person to go "above and beyond the call of duty" and do more than the mere prohibition requires.

In the end, as the threats and promises of the epilogue capture the highly nuanced tensions of creation-redemption as well as law-gospel, they make known God's desire and determination to be God over and against every competitor within creation. At stake is God's standing as God in the lives of his human creatures. Whatever a person fears and/or loves will reveal the identity of his or her god. The First Commandment, accordingly, calls for the recognition of the distinction between the Creator and his creation. "We should fear, love, and trust God *above all things*."

NOTES

1. "Hints for an Understanding of the First [and Second] Chief Part" in An Assessment of the Educational Philosophy of Johann Michael Reu Using the Hermeneutic Paradigms of J. F. Herbart and of J. C. K. von Hofmann and the Erlangen School, A Thesis Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education Paul Imbrie Johnston. (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois, 1989), 810.

2. J. M. Reu, *Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism, Together with Three Supplements* (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1906), 3.

3. Ibid., 27–29. This understanding, accordingly, would seem to consider the Decalog primarily in terms of the third use of the law.

4. Although the prologue has drawn more attention than the epilogue in the literature, the Small Catechism [hereafter cited as SC] makes no reference to it, either in the *editio princeps* nor in any edition that appeared during Luther's lifetime. This omission has prompted Reu to turn to the Nuremberg *Kinderpredigten* of 1533 in order to find an explicit reference to the prologue. *Quellen zur Geschichte des Katechismus Unterrichts* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1904), vol. 1, *Süddentsche Katechismen*, 465. The Large Catechism (hereafter cited as LC) also makes no reference to the prologue—at least explicitly. The heading simply states, "you shall have no other gods." The catechism sermons of 1528 do refer to the opening words of the prologue, "I am the Lord your God," but only in passing and then as a corollary of the prohibition. In order to find extended treatments of the prologue one must look outside Luther's catechetical writings to his exegetical writings such as his lectures on Exodus (1525), his sermons on Deuteronomy (1529), and his *Glosses on the Decalog* (1530).

In contrast with the attention given to the prologue, Luther chose to concentrate on the epilogue. It figures prominently in his 1528–29 writings such as the two catechisms, the *Instructions for the Visitors,* and the second and third sermon series of 1528. This seems to be a relatively late development as Luther did not refer to it in his catechetical expositions prior to 1528. In his earlier writings from 1516 onwards he replaced the epilogue with a conclusion that consisted of Christ's words taken from the Sermon on the Mount that reiterated the content of the Decalogue. The inclusion of the epilogue in the later writings may be due to the impact of Agricola's antinomianism and the peasants "fine art of abusing the gospel." Cf. Robert C. Schultz, "The Theological Significance of the Order of the Chief Parts in Luther's Catechism," in *Teaching the Faith: Luther's Catechisms in Perspective,* ed. Carl Volz. (River Forest, Ill.: Lutheran Educational Association, 1967), 45–56. This would also account for the large amount of space devoted to the Decalog in the LC. It is also noteworthy that although Luther argued for the all encompassing nature of the First Commandment from 1519 onwards, it is not until his second sermon series on the catechism in 1528 that he integrates it into each individual commandment—not coincidentally the same time he weaves the threats and promises of the epilogue into each individual commandment of the Large Catechism. It is also interesting to note Melanchthon had made use of the epilogue already in his 1521 *Loci Communes.* Cf. *The Loci Communes of Philip Melancthon,* tr. Charles Leander Hill (Boston: Meador Publishing Co., 1944).

5. Johannes Meyer, *Historischer Kommentar zu Luthers Kleinem Katechismus.*(Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1929), 178.

6. See *Luther's Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943), where fear as awe before God's majesty is stressed in commandments 1–10, but fear is then referenced to God's threats of wrath in the epilogue. This harmonizes with the contention of Reu who believes that fear is used one way in the commandments where its reference is the gospel and used another way in the epilogue where it is referenced to God's punishment and wrath. Cf. Georg Hoffmann, who distinguished between filial fear in the former and servile fear in the latter in "Der kleine Katechismus als Abriß der Theologie Martin Luthers," *Luther* 30(1959): 49–63.

7. This is particularly evident in Luther's sermons on Exodus in 1525 where he includes under the heading of the First Commandment everything from the opening words of the prologue, "I am the Lord your God," through the prohibitions against idols and images, to the threats and promises of the epilogue, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar, 1983–), 16: 422. 21–30 (hereafter cited as WA). Cf. Bo Reicke, *Die zehn Worte in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Zählung und Bedeutung der Gebote in den verschiedenen Konfession* (Tübingen J. C. B. Mohr, 1973), 9ff., and James W. Voelz, "Luther's Use of Scripture in the Small Catechism," in *Luther's Catechisms—450 Years: Essays Commemorating the Small and Large Catechisms of Dr. Martin Luther,* ed. David P. Scaer and Robert D. Preus (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1979), 55–64.

8. Luther treats the prologue and prohibition interchangeably throughout his second sermon series (1528), "I am the Lord your God, or you should have no other gods." He alludes to this also in the LC, "See to it that you let me alone be your God, and never seek another" (LC I.4), *The Book of Concord,* tr. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959). In his Deuteronomy sermons, "I am . . . See that you don't" (WA 28:596.12–13). Again, "This word precludes all else: 'I am the Lord your God, I and no other.' " (WA 28:601.16–17). Cf. Luther's hymn, *Here is a Tenfold Sure Command*, "I, I alone, am God, your Lord; All idols are to be abhorred" in *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982): #331. Luther finds support for his view that the two words are interchangeable in Lev. 26:1 (LW 40:87; WA 18:70). Thus Aarne Siirala concludes that in Luther, "I am the Lord your God" is to say "You shall have no other gods," *Gottes Gebot bei Martin Luther: Eine Untersuchung der Theologie Luthers unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des ersten Hauptstückes im Grossen Katechismus* (Helsinki: 1956), 53.

9. It focuses "above all on God's nature as Creator and Father," Robert Kolb, *Teaching God's Children His Teaching,* (Hutschinson, MN, Crown Publishing, 1992), 2–5. Consequently, the First Commandment expresses "the faith relationship which God established at creation between himself and his human creatures," Robert Kolb, "God, Faith, and the Devil: Popular Lutheran Treatments of the First Commandment in the Era of the Book of Concord," *Fides et Historica,* 15(1982): 73f.

10. I am much indebted for this insight to Albrecht Peters recent work, *Kommentar zu Luthers Katechismen, Band 1: Die Zehn Gebote, Luthers Vorreden* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990). In order to find a reference to Christ and his redemption as the context for the First Commandment, one must go outside Luther's catechetical writings to such as his *Treatise on Good Works* (1520) or his *Glosses on the Decalogue* (1530) or to occasional references in his treatises against the antinomians. In each of these cases, however, Luther is not expounding the Commandments within the context of the Creed and Lord's Prayer. Meyer suggests that a new understanding of the Decalogue on Luther's part emerges in 1530. This is picked up by other recent writings such as the one by Stephen D. Reed, "The Decalogue in Luther's Large Catechism," *Dialog* 22 (1983): 264–69. But it must be added that Luther frequently spoke this way. In addition, he never repudiated or altered his exposition of the Decalogue as set forth in the catechisms. If anything, he considered the catechisms to be one of his best writings.

11. This term may be preferable to "natural law" which in our time "has come to mean a law which 'Mother Nature' imposes, one which is impersonally 'natural' to what we are or have evolved to be at this stage of nature's unfolding." Kolb, *Teaching God's Children,* 3–2.

12. This conviction remained constant throughout Luther's life. In his lectures on Exodus in 1525 he asserted that what Moses had written in the Ten Commandments "we feel naturally in our conscience" (WA 16:431.28–29). "I keep the commandments which Moses has given, not because Moses gave the commandments, but because they have been implanted in me by nature, and Moses agrees exactly with nature" (LW 35:168; WA 16:380 "U"). Toward the end of his life, in his *Second Disputation Against the Antinomians,* he again reiterated

that the Decalog "does not come from Moses; he is not the author but the interpreter and illustrator of the biblical commandments in the minds of all men" (WA 39:454.3,15).

13. "The natural laws were never so orderly and well-written as by Moses," *Against the Heavenly Prophets, 1525* in LW 40:98; WA 18:81. Cf. *Against Sabbatarians—Letter to a Good Friend, 1538*, in LW 47:57–98; WA 50:312–37, and, *How Christians Should Regard Moses, 1525* in LW 35:155–74; WA 16:363–93 "U". Cf. Ronald M. Hals, "Luther and the First Commandment: You Belong to Me," in *Interpreting Luther's Legacy. Essays in honor of Edward C. Fendt*, ed. Fred W. Meuser and Stanley D. Schneider (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969), 3. Cf. Siirala, *Gottes Gebot be Martin Luther*, 42–43. See also the lengthy discussion of natural law in *The Loci Communes of Philip Melancthon*, tr. Charles Leander Hill (Boston: Meador Publishing Co., 1944), 110–17.

14. Robert Jenson, *A Large Catechism*, (New York: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 1991) 6.

15. James Arne Nestingen, "Preaching the Catechism," *Word and World* 10, 1 (Winter 1990): 36.

16. Michael Beintker, "Das Schöpfercredo in Luthers Kleinem Katechismus," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Relgionsphilosophie* 31(1989): 17.

17. Gustaf Wingren, *Creation and Law* (Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd, 1961), 71.

18. Luther quotes the former but does not refer to its explanatory clause. This distinction follows from and is consistent with Luther's exposition of the Decalog in his exegetical writings and in his polemics against the fanatics. In each case Luther uses creation as the criterion for applying the two phrases differently. It should be noted that the Nuremberg *Kinderpredigten*, which Reu cites as justification for his use and interpretation of the prologue, expounds it the very same way as does Luther in the Large Catechism and the catechism sermons of 1528, namely, as the flip side of the prohibition, "you shall have no other gods."

19. Robert Jenson, in *A Large Catechism* (New York: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 1991), 7, draws the distinction between a proper name and the identifying history of that name. "I'm Robert Jenson and I just moved in down the street."

20. Consequently, with these words, "I am the Lord your God," God speaks to all people . . . (WA 16:432.28ff.); "I am . . ." means not the Israelites, but all men in the world, for he provides for them all" (WA 16:436.19ff.); "I may also say, 'You are my God, the God, and also the Creator of us all . . .' " (LW 47:90; WA 50:331); We can say "who has led me out of Egypt" only in a general way (LW 47:90; WA 50:331).

21. Again, "Whatever the world has, sun and rain, it receives from him who says, 'I am your God" (WA 28:724.2–3).

22. Ulrich Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers nach seinen Predigten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1988), 313. The word, "I am your God," brings forth all the grain and wine on earth, not to mention clothes, wool, money, house, home, and everything you have.

23. Luther speaks of the Decalog as a protective fence erected around this present life, as a boundary between good and evil (LC I.183) and a "wall, fortress, refuge" (LC I.185). It shows that God wants every husband and wife guarded and protected (LC I.205,206) as well as our property (LC I.223). Luther can even compare God's activity here to a kind father who intervenes to stop bloodshed (LC I.195). Already in 1515 Luther states that fear serves as a *Schutz* for transgression, and love as a help to do good (M182). It functions as a *Damm* that stems the tide of disobedience (Meyer, I187).

24. So "we Gentiles have no use and can have no use for the phrase with which he modifies this commandment and which applies solely to the Jews . . ." (LW 47:90; WA 50:331); For we were not led out of Egypt (WA 16:429.28–30).

25. For example, the prohibition against images is directed only to the Israelites while to have no other gods is directed at all (WA 16:443.36–37;444.11–12); cf. Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, ed. Eric and Ruth Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969),

126. So far as the outward observance of the Sabbath is concerned, the Third Commandment was given to the Jews alone (LC I.80). The specific stipulation about the sixth day in Third Commandment applies only to the Israelites while the command to hear God's word applies to all (LW 47:91–92; WA 50:332–3). Cf. LW 40:98; WA 18:81: "nature also shows and teaches that one must now and then rest a day so that man and beast may be refreshed." The promise attached to the Fourth Commandment of the promised land of Canaan does not apply to us (LW 47:94–95; WA 50:335). Finally, the Ninth and Tenth Commandments, "taken literally, were given only to the Jews" (LC I.293); they presuppose the Jewish divorce laws (AE 47,95–96). Cf. *Second Disputation Against the Antinomians, 1538* (WA 39:418–485).

26. "With his name, God claimed the people for himself and called upon them to rely on him alone. To the Hebrews he gave the word, 'I am the Lord your God, who led you out of Egypt' " (WA 16:425.9–13). Although it is less stressed, the qualifying clause explains why "God is called a Lord, namely, he has led the Israelites out of Egypt" (WA 28:602.13).

27. With it, God "rejects all idols, all who did not lead the Israelites out of Egypt" (WA 28:602.15–18). Again, with these words God would keep them from all false gods and would say, "pray not to Baal or Asteroth, but receive the one who led you out of Egypt" (WA 28:605.18–20).

28. This section would seem to support Reu's arguments for viewing the prologue as gospel and baptism as the NT counterpart of the prologue. But again, when Reu appeals to the Nuremberg *Kinderpredigten*, only the first half of the clause is used. Moreover, Luther refers only to the first clause as well and does not incorporate the second half into his catechisms.

29. Melanchthon and Luther jointly drew up the *Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony* in order to provide a uniform basis for implementing much needed reforms within the parishes, including the instruction of pastors, the provision of financial compensation for pastors and teachers, the introduction of evangelical worship, the catechizing of the young, and the maintenance of church buildings. In response to the conditions of parish life uncovered in an initial round of visitations carried out in July and August of 1527, Melanchthon composed a series of articles that stressed the importance of preaching the law in order to bridle the flesh, terrify the conscience, and rein in the moral laxity produced by an abuse of Christian liberty and a disdain for the law. In September of 1527 Luther reviewed Melanchthon's articles and elaborated on them at various points. Luther then wrote a preface to the *Instructions* in January 1528 which finally appeared the following July.

30. Peters, *Kommentar*, 109.

31. See August Hardeland, *Luthers Katechismusgedanken in ihrer Entwicklung bis zum Jahre 1529* (Gütersloh: Verlag von C. Bertelsmann, 1913). Cf. WA 16:449.23,31.

32. Luther's explanations to the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer provide another good example of his increased apprecation and valuation of temporal blessings. In his earlier catechetical sermons, the *Brief Explanation of the Ten Commandments, Creed, and Lord's Prayer (1520)*, and his *Treatise on Good Works*, Luther expounded "daily bread" in line with the tradition by referring it to either Christ as the bread of life or to the Lord's Supper. By the time he preaches the catechetical sermons of 1528 and writes the catechisms in 1529, he has revised his explanation so that daily bread no longer refers to spiritual goods; instead it refers to all of the First Article blessings that support our bodily life.

33. Peters, *Kommentar*, 125.

34. All these, nature, things, and all creatures are instruments with which the wrath of God terrifies the conscience (Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 116).

35. Peters, *Kommentar*, 120. Cf. WA 17^2:192.28.

36. Peters, *Kommentar*, 126.

37. Luther frequently describes the punishments as unveiling or revealing God's "wrath and displeasure," LC I.147, 233, 148, 327.

38. Meyer, *Historischer Kommentar*, 186.

39. Peters, *Kommentar,* 133.

40. LC I.16, 41, 198.

41. Peters, *Kommentar,* 121.

42. *Luther's Works,* vol. 1, *Luther's Catechetical Writings: God's Call to Repentance, Faith and Prayer,* ed. John N. Lenker (Minneapolis: Luther Press, 1907), 190–217.

43. Peters, *Kommentar,* 126.

44. Cf. Meyer, 127.

45. Peters, *Kommentar,* 126.

46. Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament,* 168. This is particularly evident in his exposition of Ps. 90. "Wherever the commanmdments or the works of the first table are spoken of, there the resurrection of the dead is being spoken of" (LW 13:81; WA 40^3:494,495).

47. And afterwards, abundance and blessings forever (LC I.164). Peters sees here not only blessings of the Creator but gracious hand of the redeemer, *Kommentar,* 122.

48. In Luther's treatment of the threats and promises one cannot help but hear echoes of his distinction between law and gospel. This has not gone unnoticed. Cf. Ulrich Asendorf, "We Should Fear and Love God . . ." *Evangelium/Gospel* 3 (June 1974): 78–91. Robert Kolb has also commented, "Thus in his explanation of the first commandment in the LC Luther summarized the heart of his theology, the relationship between God and his human creature, a relationship of faith. He cast his discussion of that relationship into the framework of his distinction between law and gospel," *Fides et Historica,* 74.

49. George Forell, *Ethics for Decision* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), 85.

50. "All the Psalms, which Luther so dearly loved, are for him just an elaboration of this one basic promise, the prologue to the First Commandment," Hals, ftnt 19. Cf. WATR 1, No. 369, p. 160, 5–6.

51. Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament,* 169.

52. As Peters put it, God is either a *Zornsefier* or a *Heilseifer,* 108.

53. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 169.

54. Cf. Paul Raabe, "The Two 'Faces' of Yahweh: Divine Wrath and Mercy in the Old Testament," in *And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel,* ed. Gerald S. Krispin and Jon D. Vieker (Chelsea, MI: BookCrafters, 1990), 283–310.

55. And so Luther frequently uses the word *erzürnen,* to kindle one's anger or provoke to anger, in describing the resulting punishments. E.g., Thus children "anger" (*erzürnen*) both God and their parents (LC I.122–123) or we "provoke" God to wrath (LC I.134, 140). Elsewhere he simply warns that you should come to your senses "before punishment descends" (LC I.38).

56. "H. J. Iwand, *Luthers Theologie,* published posthumously and edited by Johann Haar (Muenchen: Kaiser Verlag, 1974), quoted in Martin Schild, "Praying the Catechism and Defrocking the Devil—Aspects of Luther's Spirituality," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 10 (August, 1976): 54, ftnt 13.

57. Although translated in a variety of ways, Luther consistently uses the word *verdienen* (LC I.231,308,238,163,38,176,198).

58. LC I.137, 155, 176, 177.

59. Meyer, *Historischer Kommentar,* 186.

60. LC I.69, 95, 112, 114, 119, 149, 151 , 152, 166, 184, 213, 234, 247, 323, 330.

61. God's anger is finally directed at anyone who relies "on anything but himself" (LC I.32). Again, "He is a God who takes vengeance upon men who turn away from him" (LC I.34) and will tolerate no presumption or trust in any other object (LC I.47). They disdain his favor and happiness (LC I.155). God is not to be taken lightly (LC I.149).

62. LC I.32, 34, 47, 128, 149, 155.

63. LC I.53, 129, 159, 160, 304, 308.

64. LC I.36, 55, 90, 99, 137, 224, 232, 267.

65. Peters, *Kommentar,* 121, 123.

66. Peters, *Kommentar,* 117.

67. Friedemann Hebart, "Luther's Large Catechism: The Path of Faith," in *Luther's Large Catechism: Anniversary Translation* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1984), xxviii; cf. LC I. 33.

68. Meyer, *Historischer Kommentar,* 186.

69. Wingren, *Creation and Law,* 8

70. LC I.39, 147, 242. Those who love God look to him for all blessings (LW 40:277; WA 26:204).

71. LC I.115, 164, 187, 248, 276, 322, 333.

72. Meyer, *Historischer Kommentar,* 181.

73. LC I.136, 139, 148, 322, 323, 328, 330. Luther also speaks of our obedience as "pleasing to God," LC I.115, 125, 126, 151, 152, 212, 252, 328, 252, 290.

74. H. J. Iwand, "Die grundlegende Bedeutung der Lehre vom unfreien Willen für den Glauben," in, *Um den rechten Glauben* (Muenchen: Kaiser, 1965), 29, quoted in Reed, 265, ftnt 31.

75. James Arne Nestingen, "The Catechisms' *Simul,*" *Word and World* 3(1983): 365.

76. "One could not convince him of this so quickly if it had not been written in his heart beforehand" (WA 16:447.27ff.). Wrath is nothing else than "the feeling of the law's sermon in the conscience," Bornkamm, 128.