



**Issues, Etc.**<sup>TM</sup>

*Christ-Centered Cross-Focused Talk Radio*

## TRANSCRIPT

*Rev. Todd Wilken, Host*

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### "Reformation Confessors: Johann Gerhard"

**Guest:**

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**WILKEN:** We often think about "the Golden Age," whether it's religious or political. Christians from the Reformation, particularly Lutherans, are often tempted to think about a Golden Age as a time when the Lutheran Confessions were newly minted and Lutheranism was flowing forth in its purest form, so to speak.

Well, that may have been true with regard to the teaching and practice of Lutheran congregations by and large, and Lutheran pastors by and large, but I'm pretty sure the

men who lived during that "Age of Orthodoxy," as it's often called in Lutheran history, didn't consider it a Golden Age. It's a very difficult time, and no one exemplifies this more than one Johann Gerhard. He's born into that age, but his life is far from easy. It's far from a walk in the park for this theologian and pastor of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* We're live this Wednesday afternoon, October the 23<sup>rd</sup>. I'm Todd Wilken. Thanks for tuning us in. We're going to spend this hour – *Issues, Etc.*

Reformation Week is upon us, and we're focusing on the Reformation Confessors. Today, Johann Gerhard. We'll spend it with Dr. Ben Mayes, remembering Johann Gerhard.

Dr. Ben Mayes is a regular guest. He's Editor of Professional and Academic Books for Concordia Publishing House based in St. Louis; General Editor of Johann Gerhard's *Theological Commonplaces*. Ben, welcome back.

**MAYES:** Thanks, Todd. *Issues, Etc.* is the best!

**WILKEN:** Thank you, by the way! Would you describe for us the kind of age into which this man is born, which is sometimes thought of as the Age of Orthodoxy, or the Theological Golden Age, but a very difficult time to be a Lutheran pastor for Johann Gerhard. Describe it.

**MAYES:** He was born in 1582, so that's about a hundred years after Martin Luther was born, and it's two years after the publication of the last of the Lutheran Confessions, the Formula of Concord. So it was at the end of this period of consolidation in the Lutheran Church, when the Lutherans were getting their act together and confessing clearly what the truth of God's Word is, on the basis of that Word of God. So it was a time for, in many places within the Lutheran Church, where there was relative internal peace. However, that was not absolute. Right there after a number of these struggles, especially in Saxony, had gotten straightened out with the Formula of Concord, a new prince takes over, another elector, and Calvinism is brought right back into electoral Saxony. So while Gerhard is growing up, you have these infiltrations of Calvinist teaching within the Lutheran Church in Saxony once again. That all culminates and is dealt with, with the Saxon Visitation Articles in the 1590s. Now, besides that, the Calvinists were

definitely on the advance. They were taking over territories and churches within Germany that had formerly been Lutheran, and they were generally doing it by having the princes or the rulers convert to the Reformed confession of faith. Then the rulers would try to do their best to impose their version of Christianity upon the churches beneath them. Besides the Calvinist threat, Lutherans were also especially dealing with the Jesuits and Roman Catholic apologists and writers who came about specially as part of the Counter-Reformation. So that was also another external threat. One that we often don't think about, but was a very live problem, was Unitarianism. Especially in a town called Racovia in Poland, the Unitarians had set up a publishing house and several schools and just continued pumping out publication after publication attacking the doctrine of the Trinity and of the two natures of Christ, and of Christ's atonement, His satisfaction for our sins on the cross. And that's another part of this whole era that the Lutherans are struggling with and trying to grapple with and show from the Scriptures that that's not the right view.

As I said, it was a time of relative internal peace as Gerhard was growing up, but then, of course, in 1618, the Thirty Years' War breaks out, and that goes for another thirty years, as the name says, until about 1648. And Gerhard dies right towards the end of the Thirty Years' War. There's a lot going on in that time period, and a lot that people don't understand or know about, but Gerhard certainly had quite a few struggles that he had to deal with.

**WILKEN:** So let's talk about how he came to be one of the giants – really, truly one of the giants of this Orthodox period. Tell us his biographical story briefly, if you would.

**MAYES:** Well, he was always an excellent student in school and university. After pursuing medicine for a while, he decided to

study theology and become a pastor. In 1606 – which, by the way, is the year before Captain John Smith established Jamestown, Virginia – Gerhard received his first call, which was a call to be a pastor and superintendent of twenty-six parishes and a lecturer at a high school. He was just about twenty-four years old at the time. So just by considering his first call, it's obvious that his contemporaries thought very highly of the gift that God had given to Gerhard. Of course, among us, a new pastor is never made a District President or a Circuit Counselor right off the bat. That just doesn't happen. But Gerhard was. His first call was to be a supervisor of other pastors. So before he was thirty, he had become a Doctor of Theology and he had published several books. In his mid-thirties, then, he was called to be a Professor of Theology at the German city of Jena which is also where he had studied. And there he spent the next twenty-one years until his death. Now, his family life: his first wife – her name was Barbara, and she died after only three years of marriage when he was 29. Three years later, he married Maria Mattenberger, and lived happily with her for the rest of his life. And the latter couple had ten children; four of whom died in early childhood, as was so common in those times. I should mention also that a number of his devotional works that he wrote, some of those early devotional works, I think here like the *Handbook of Consolations* that Carl Beckwith translated, those were written right at the time when his first wife and his first child died, because they both died of the same disease right about the same time, when he was quite young in his 20s. His life was not just the happy life of a writer and a teacher. As I said, in 1618, war broke out across Germany, a war that would continue off and on for thirty years. And this was especially fought between the Roman Catholic Holy Roman Emperor and the Lutheran Swedes, led by the Swedish king, Gustavus Adolphus. Now, you would think that the Lutheran Swedes would treat the

German Lutherans pretty nicely, but that didn't always happen. Sometimes they didn't treat the Germans any better than the Emperor's army did. Now, because Gerhard had been so successful in defending Lutheran teaching against the Roman Catholic Church, the Emperor's soldiers plotted to kidnap Gerhard in 1631 and bring him to Rome for trial. However, God preserved Gerhard from their plot. On the other hand, the Swedes, too, were angry with Gerhard because he had been advising that the Lutherans make peace with the Emperor. And so Gerhard had to face the threat of imprisonment from them, too. In 1636, the Swedish army plundered Gerhard's estate and burned his house and his farm buildings. Then in 1637, the city of Jena was raided and plundered. That was the year, by the way, that Gerhard died. That year, he wrote to his friend Solomon Glassius, who became in many ways his theological successor, telling him about the savagery of the soldiers. He said, "But I am enduring all of these things patiently, and I say along with Job, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.' He Himself, nevertheless, will look out for me and my household with the assistance necessary for life, for I see that my finish line is near." Then on August 12, 1637, Gerhard, being 54 years old, became very ill, and he knew that his death was approaching. In the next few days, he spoke to his friends and his family, confessing the same faith that he had written throughout his life, and making arrangements for his family and the university of Jena after his death. Two days before his death, he confessed his sins to his pastor and received private absolution and the Lord's Supper from him. After receiving Christ's body and blood, he sang the common Lutheran communion hymn that I know and love, "Oh Lord, we praise Thee, bless Thee, and adore Thee." And right after this, he arranged for money to be given to the poor people of his city so that they could have a meal. The next two days, he fell speechless,

lost his eyesight, and most of his hearing. And yet shortly before giving up his spirit on August 17, he uttered the words, “Come, come, Lord, come.” That is his biography.

**WILKEN:** With only about a minute here before we take this break, those final words, the way that he disposes of his estate, so to speak, before he dies, that’s pretty emblematic of the kind of man that he proved to be, isn’t it? About a minute before we take a break.

**MAYES:** Absolutely. His writings and his whole life are marked both by piety and learning. And you see this here, at the end of his life, he’s focused on the Lord’s means of grace, the Lord’s means of delivering his forgiveness to us. And that doesn’t stop there. It flows out in mercy towards other people, and here you see that flowing out to provide for the poor, and to give some of his estate towards the poor. That is emblematic.

**WILKEN:** We’re talking about 17<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran theologian Johann Gerhard. It’s *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week. The theme of this week: Reformation Confessors. We’ve talked about Martin Luther and Martin Chemnitz. We’re now in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Johann Gerhard. Dr. Ben Mayes is our guest, Editor of Professional and Academic Books for Concordia Publishing House based in St. Louis; General Editor of Johann Gerhard’s *Theological Commonplaces*.

When we come back, we’re going to delve a little bit into some concerns about Johann Gerhard: his connection to what some historians call Proto-Pietism. We’ll explain what that means on the other side of the break, and then we’ll talk about his many, many theological works that are still being published today. We’ll be right back.

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I’m Todd Wilken. It’s Wednesday afternoon, October the 23<sup>rd</sup>. It’s also Wednesday of *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week. We’re talking about Reformation confessors, today: the 17<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran Johann Gerhard.

There is some association – and sometimes names get mixed up – but is there early in his life as a theologian some influence from one Johann Arndt, who is sometimes by historians called a Proto-Pietist? You’re going to have to explain to our listeners what Pietism was, and what it eventually came to be, but is there any reason to suspect his theological upbringing because of that association?

**MAYES:** Pietism is difficult to define. It was a movement within not just Lutheranism in Germany, but also had its parallels in England among Puritans, in the Netherlands among the Reformed there, but the emphasis of this movement was on the Bible as a means of criticizing the current state of the church, and an emphasis on “true” conversion, “true” Christian piety, but as I said, this had many different expressions. Some of the expressions of pietism just really wanted to focus on the Bible and right Christian living, but still remained as part of the church, still considered it important to remain part of the church and receive the Word and the Sacraments. Other kinds of pietism broke from the church, became separatistic, and in some cases became almost like a cult. So, sometimes it’s said that Gottfried – Gottfried Arnold, by the way, is an old history writer from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century who was very friendly toward the Pietists. And this is kind of the way that he told the story. According to him, you had all of these good folks like the various Spiritualists and folks of this sort who had always been oppressed by the church. And then finally, you’ve got the Pietistic

movement, and it finally is able to break free of this dead orthodoxy.

Okay, so that's the way that Gottfried Arnold said it. But it was by no means the way that it happened. So was Gerhard a Proto-Pietist? Well, his pastor when he was a boy was a man by the name of Johann Arndt. And Arndt is often considered the grandfather of Pietism because of his use of medieval mystical writings as part of his devotional writing. And the emphasis on the renewal of the inner man, the emphasis on renewal within us, within our heart, and that emphasis on piety. So he was influential on Gerhard when Gerhard was a boy, and he was the one who influenced Gerhard to go into the ministry. Gerhard himself also read some of these medieval mystics. For Gerhard also, renewal of human behavior, of Christian life and piety were also important. We see this especially in his devotional works, like the *Sacred Meditations*. Does that make him a Proto-Pietist? I don't think so. Because these emphases on piety, on renewal, these are true, good, Lutheran, Biblical emphases as well, and you can find them right in the *Book of Concord* as well. What I think distinguishes him from being a Proto-Pietist is his emphasis on the church, the importance of the church, and on the Word and the Sacraments, as well as on pure doctrine. We can get into this a little bit later, but there was even a controversy that came up with a man by the name of Hermann Rottmann on the issue of "Is the Bible truly the Word of God? Does the Holy Spirit truly work through the means of the Word, or should we look for the Holy Spirit elsewhere?" And that was a controversy where Gerhard clearly showed that he was on the side of orthodoxy and not on the side of the spiritualism which would later develop into certain forms of pietism.

**WILKEN:** In that sense, isn't he, in fact, really the best response at the time to what pietism would become? Because we think

of this Age of Orthodoxy, which often has been criticized by historians that should know better as an age of wooden orthodoxy, a heartless dogmatism. But that is the opposite of what Johann Gerhard expresses as a pastor and theologian.

**MAYES:** That's absolutely right. And he's an especially good example of how that bifurcation of the orthodox on one side and the warm-hearted Pietist on the other just doesn't work. Gerhard is both. Now, that's not to deny that there were some academic folks who really, all they thought about was their ivory tower theology. And that's also not to say that there weren't other pietists who cared nothing about doctrine. But with Gerhard you see that they're both there. And so yeah, I agree, he is the right answer. He gets both sides: the learning and the emphasis on making this personal, making this real in the life of believers and Christians.

**WILKEN:** Let's talk about his works, because that could occupy an entire career, as you well know! If there's a seminal work for Johann Gerhard that says, "If you're going to read anything he ever wrote, read this," what is it?

**MAYES:** If you want to read something short, I'd say read his *Sacred Meditations*. The *Sacred Meditations* are a short work, a devotional work written when he was young. And I think it really shows – he goes through the various parts of Christian doctrine and gives a meditation on it. He brings in tons of Biblical references and allusions, as well as brings in some of the most interesting and beautiful expressions of Christian teaching from the early church fathers as well. So after you've read that, I would say then there's a number of other things that you could go on to. One of which we happen to be publishing at Concordia Publishing House, and that is the *Theological Commonplaces*. Now, this is quite a step up. Once we're done publishing it, it's going

to be the most extensive Lutheran theology work in English. So right now, we're going to do 17 volumes, and that's not even going to exhaust the whole series. That's the next thing that I would say. But he's got a number of other works as well.

**WILKEN:** Before we go on to those, can you explain the logic of the title, *Theological Commonplaces*? It's not original with him, obviously, but it is kind of an approach to theology that was very popular at the time of the Reformation.

**MAYES:** "Commonplaces" was actually the way that people took notes. Nowadays, of course, when we take notes, we either write it down on pieces of paper and organize it, or we take notes on our computer or some other way. But in Gerhard's time, and really, for a thousand years before him, the way that they would take notes was to get a big, blank book, and then to divvy up the pages according to topic. Those topics were called the "common places." Then as you would read other authors, you would take notes by – you would find a great excerpt or a great quote from that book that you're reading, and you would then write it down in the pages that were assigned to that topic. So you're writing it down in the common places. Then you had this portable library that you could bring with you or keep at home. And especially if a student was not wealthy, couldn't afford to buy many books, maybe he could just afford to buy this one blank book, but then he could fill it up with his own work and handwriting with all of these quotes that he would want to use later on. So that's the note-taking method that they used; that was called the common-place method.

So now what Gerhard is doing in this work, the *Theological Commonplaces*, this is the result of his study and labor as well as his disputations that he had held with other students and other pastors. So really what you have here is a plethora of materials for

considering a topic, considering all the various theological topics, arranged according to their common places, their topics. So that's really where the name *Theological Commonplaces* comes from. It comes from that method of note-taking that was used at that time.

**WILKEN:** So it's not exactly a systematic theology; it's not exactly a treatment of theological topics according to Scriptural basis, and then a study of the fathers, and then a study of the orthodox theologians, and then the author adding a few of his own thoughts or insights in there as well. It's a little looser than that.

**MAYES:** Well, the term certainly can be. But actually, I would say that this does a good job of doing all those things. If you look at other books that were titled "Commonplaces," such as Philip Melancthon's *1521 Commonplaces*, which, by the way, was another book that's coming up from Concordia Publishing House soon. And there it's completely different. There it's more like just common topics based on the book of Romans. But here, what we have is much more worked out, much more systematic. You see here with every topic that it's subdivided into various parts. For each section, Gerhard proves his position with many arguments and takes as proof many arguments from the Bible first of all, then as testimonies brings in the church fathers, then as further points of argument brings in testimonies even from his opponents, deals with their objections, considers rational arguments, refutes some of those, says, "Some of these are okay," and then at the very end of each section, gives the practical application of how this can be applied in Christian life and living and piety. So, yeah, what I think you do have to have with this *Theological Commonplaces* is a systematic theology.

However, later on in church history, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, systematic theology came to

be considered in a different way. There you had some central idea, some central principle from which you would derive the whole rest of your theology. That's not what Gerhard is doing here. He's much more gathering materials and arranging them in a systematic fashion. That's the kind of work that this is.

**WILKEN:** Dr. Ben Mayes is our guest, Editor of Professional and Academic Books for Concordia Publishing House based in St. Louis, General Editor of Johann Gerhard's *Theological Commonplaces*.

It's *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week. We're focusing on Reformation Confessors; today, 17<sup>th</sup> century confessor Johann Gerhard.

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. We're talking about Johann Gerhard. It is day three, this Wednesday afternoon, of *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week, focusing on Lutheran confessors. Dr. Ben Mayes is our guest.

Dr. Mayes, let's talk about something that you mentioned earlier, and that is in connection with the accusation of being a Pietist or Proto-pietist. You say he has an emphasis on the church. I'm looking at the volume of his *Commonplaces* that's sitting on my shelf, the volume on the church, and it looks like about a thousand pages. That's quite an emphasis. How is this central, or near the center, of Johann Gerhard's theology?

**MAYES:** It's an interesting volume in the *Commonplaces*, because of the way that he coordinates the church with the means of grace. Specifically with the Word of God, and then after that also with the rightly administered Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. And so throughout this book, he's especially responding to the arguments of the Roman Catholic theologian, Robert Bellarmine, and really,

the controversy deals with "Where do you find the true church?" This is important if you hold, like Luther and Gerhard and, really, all the orthodox churchmen have held that there is no salvation outside of the church. So, if there is no salvation outside of the true church, where is that true church to be found? For Robert Bellarmine, and for the Roman Catholic Church, it was, of course, only found in whatever churches are in fellowship and under the governance of the pope. For Gerhard and for Luther and for the entire Lutheran Reformation, it's not quite so simple as that. One has to look at where the Word of God is being preached correctly, in conformity with Holy Scripture, and where the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are being administered in accordance with the Gospel. So he goes through this book regarding the church and looks at the various things that Bellarmine has set forth as being a mark of the church. And some of these have a lot of appeal to them, and that's why I think this book is so important for us today to keep in mind. For example, is the name "Catholic" important to find the true church? We might say no. But what about antiquity – the oldness of the church? If we can prove that our structural church body has roots going all the way back to the early church, does that make it, by definition, the true church? Some of these have a lot of appeal and really need to be thought through. I really do think that this particular volume is of great benefit to us today, especially because of how he deals with the Word of God as being sufficient to establish where the true church is, yet at the same time, holding on to the importance of hearing the testimony and learning from the early church.

**WILKEN:** So is it safe to say that on that subject, he has taken up a theological treatment that doesn't go beyond theologically, where the previous generation of reformers were, but he's beginning to answer questions that they simply weren't posing there?

**MAYES:** Yeah, I'd say that he's going in far greater depth than anyone before him was doing. Now, obviously, I haven't read everything that came before him, but just comparing it to what we have from Luther on the topic – Luther has many similar things to say in, for example, *On the Councils and the Church*, and in other places scattered here and there. But Luther does not deal with the sheer volume of source material that Gerhard does. Also, Gerhard has very interesting claims. Gerhard claims, for example, that all Lutheran doctrine can be found in the early church fathers. Now, that's not to say that all of the early church fathers agreed with all points of Lutheran doctrine. He's not saying that. But he will say that, in fact, a lot of the Roman Catholic errors are also found in the early church fathers. But that's the sort of statement that Gerhard is not afraid to make, because he knows the early church fathers so well.

**WILKEN:** Why did he want to make that statement? Why was it important for him to assert that?

**MAYES:** I think it has to do in part with the Fourth Commandment, to honor your father and your mother, and that's also applied within the church – to learn from those who have gone before us, and to then see where people have confessed God's Word rightly. There are also other passages in Scripture that say very clearly that we're supposed to learn from those who have gone before us. That and, I think Gerhard would say "Just read them and you will see how beautiful their teaching is, and how much it points us to the correct understanding of Scripture." So for Gerhard, reading the early church fathers is really about learning from them but not setting them on a pedestal as somehow infallible.

**WILKEN:** Could we safely say that in his vast theological works, he is building upon the basic doctrine of the Reformation? Or

he's crafting a Lutheran approach to subjects that may not even have been addressed in the Confessions?

**MAYES:** That's certainly true. He's dealing with other questions that especially have been raised by the latest generations of arguments, both from Socinians and Calvinists and Roman Catholics especially. And those folks brought up some of the same arguments that were brought up during the Reformation era, but they brought up a whole bunch of other arguments as well. So Gerhard has such a good grasp of everything that had been written before him, it seems like, that he's able to bring almost an encyclopedic knowledge to bear on any particular topic.

**WILKEN:** How did he find the time to do this? I think about the life of the average pastor today, which by comparison to what Gerhard was facing in a day-by-day basis, even the most fastidious, hard-working pastor would be considered a little bit lazy, by comparison to Gerhard. How in the world did he find the time to craft all of this sound theology in his writings?

**MAYES:** I think there are a couple of things that come into play here. First of all, he was, of course, very gifted. God gifted him with a great mind, great memory. Second of all, he had an excellent education; far better than any of us ever obtain. He went to Latin school when he was a kid and became fluent in Latin and wrote Latin, and Greek; wrote Greek also, Greek verse and things like this. That's the sort of education that enabled somebody to be totally conversant with all of the literature that had come before, as well as all of the literature that was being produced at the time, because you have to remember that Latin was the international language of learning. So already before he started studying theology, he already had that good basis. He also spent just about every day up until about midday studying, praying, and taking notes.



So pretty much half of his day was spent, as I said, with this commonplace method, reading authors, writing down those quotations in the correct place. And then another thing that led to his voluminous output of books was the practice of academic disputations. Now, this was just a common thing that all the universities at that time did. And really, a lot of the books – the theology books, as well as the Scriptural commentaries that we have from that time – came from the practice of disputations. Now, the way that this worked is: the professor, such as Johann Gerhard, would write up a list of theses – we think about these theses, for example, that Luther posted on the door at Wittenberg on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517 – those kinds of theses that were then meant for debate. Well, then there would be a student, like a senior-level student who had done a lot of preparation to be the defender, or the respondent of these theses. And all the other students who were going to attend the disputation had to research actual arguments that were used by opponents against these theses. So then at the disputation, the presider – in this case it would be Johann Gerhard, for example – could read the thesis, and then it would be the job of the students in attendance to stand up and give an attack against that, but an actual attack that was actually found in the works of some of the opponents. Then it was the job of the senior student who was the respondent to present a response and to refute that argument on the basis of Scripture first, but then also bringing in testimonies from the early church fathers, reason, and things of this sort. Then if the respondent got stuck, or got tripped up in some way, the presider, Johann Gerhard, would come in and resolve the whole thing. Luther himself did this too. We've got a bunch of disputations that Luther held, and what's great about that is that we actually have transcriptions of the words that were actually said between Luther and Melancthon and others as they were doing these disputations. With Gerhard, a lot of

times what happened was those disputations then would get worked up and become books. My suspicion is that that's exactly what happened with the theological commonplaces. They have these disputations, Gerhard continued to work on it and put it into final form as the theological commonplaces. So that's, I think, a part of how he got so much done. He was constantly serving the church. The other thing, though, is that he probably overworked himself, and that might be part of why he died in his 50s.

**WILKEN:** Let's take a break. When we come back, more with Dr. Ben Mayes, Editor of Professional and Academic books for Concordia Publishing House based in St. Louis. It's *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week. The theme this week: Reformation Confessors, and among them is the 17<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran theologian and pastor, Johann Gerhard.

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** On this Wednesday afternoon of *Issues, Etc.* Reformation week, we're remembering 17<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran theologian and pastor Johann Gerhard. I'm Todd Wilken; this is *Issues, Etc.* Dr. Ben Mayes is our guest.

Let's see what Jeff has to say. He's listening in Indianapolis. Hi, Jeff.

**JEFF:** Hi, Todd. I have a question. In what we confess of the Third Article of the Creed, I understand that the apostles understood that as a broad doctrine of wisdom. Did Gerhard ever address that in his writings; that they looked at that, the true understanding of Scriptures with all of the contentions and controversies that he was addressing? Did he ever look at it as wisdom, as the source of resolution to the truth of those problems?

**WILKEN:** Thank you very much for listening in Indianapolis, Jeff. What do you make of it, Dr. Mayes?

**MAYES:** Well, if I understand the caller correctly, yes, he certainly did see divine wisdom as being in Holy Scripture, and as Holy Scripture being the source for resolving all of these contentious questions. Absolutely.

In fact, we have a lot of decisions and counsels that Gerhard made, addressing specific “tough questions” and giving his own pastoral wisdom. Many of those questions and those opinions were recorded and transmitted to later generations. They just have not been researched sufficiently yet, and none of them really have been translated.

**WILKEN:** A tweet from @revhardheaded, and he asks a question, I think, pertaining to the volume of the *Commonplaces* we’re giving away this afternoon on creation and predestination. He says, “Does Gerhard discuss *intuitu fidei*, that is, God’s election of the elect in view of faith, in his work, and how does he address it?” What’s the answer there?

**MAYES:** I’ll try to make this short. Predestination has to do with God in eternity looking ahead and deciding who He’s going to save. The Calvinist way of answering this question is to say that God from eternity just decides without consideration of anything else that He wants some people to be saved, and He really desires for the rest to be damned to hell, in order that this just condemnation of them to hell would give glory to Him. Gerhard is totally against that teaching, but he also is not 100% in line with what the Formula of Concord Article 11 says. Article 11 of the Formula of Concord sets forth a position which doesn’t rationally make a whole lot of sense. On the one hand, it says God from eternity decided who was going to be saved. And if I am saved, that has nothing to do with me; it’s not

because God saw that I would come to faith. It’s not because God saw that I would be a good person; it’s just His grace, it’s just His decision. And as a result of that, the Word was preached to me, I came to faith, I was baptized, and was saved. However, the Formula of Concord says on the other hand, if somebody dies without faith, dies living without his sins forgiven, it’s not because of God’s election, it’s not because of God’s predestination. It’s only due to that person’s sins. Now, that’s not easy to rationally understand. It doesn’t make sense. To our reason, the only thing that makes sense is either God decides both – the Calvinistic way – who’s going to be saved and who’s going to be damned, and He does it from eternity without considering anything within us, or the other option is what is known as the Arminian way. That is where God looks ahead and sees which people are going to believe and live good lives, etc., and makes his decision based on what He foresees. The way that Gerhard then takes it is he does not say – in fact, he denies that God elects us on the basis of seeing our faith. It’s not on the basis of our faith. However, his position is very similar to that, because he says that God looks ahead and sees Christ’s merit. And then he sees Christ’s merit applied to us, and of course, Christ’s merit can only be applied to us through faith. So it’s not precisely what the Formula of Concord says. I don’t think it’s 100% right. But I’ve explained exactly why he says that in the volume introduction, and I’ve also shown how our Missouri Synod Lutheran forefathers understood this. And really, there’s a lot here that we can learn from it nevertheless. So that’s actually a longer answer than I wanted to give, but there you go.

**WILKEN:** Well, and the fact of the matter is, just to append that answer, we have to give Johann Gerhard the benefit of the doubt in that he didn’t actually live to see the predestination controversy that honed our view of predestination over against

Calvinism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He's a man of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

**MAYES:** Right. And he was also very concerned to avoid any kind of notion that anything that we do would contribute to our being elected. It's all God's grace, according to him.

**WILKEN:** What would you say is the primary relevance of Johann Gerhard – I know this is trying to narrow a lot down – what's his primary relevance to the Church today, with about a minute or so?

**MAYES:** There's really a lot of contributions that he can make to us today. I think one is – he's got this book on how to study theology, which has not been published in translation yet. And it's just amazing, the kinds of things he thinks a future theology student or pastor should learn. I think he's got a big contribution for us to make, in raising the bar for what pastors should know and should learn. So that's one area I think where he's got a lot to teach us. Another area, I think, is his doctrine of Scripture – that Scripture *is* the Word of God, and that Scripture has the power of God within it. To some of us, that might seem like, "Of course, yeah, we know that." But it came up as a controversy in Gerhard's time, and there are still a lot of people who do not hold that Scripture *is* the Word of God. And I think he's got a lot of really interesting insights there to teach us as well. That, too – some of that has been translated. A lot of it still needs to be researched.

**WILKEN:** And then, finally, with only about a minute here, a favorite quote from this 17<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran theologian, Johann Gerhard.

**MAYES:** With regard to the study of theology and the study of God's Word, there's a lot that we can't understand, and so the beginning of *On the Nature of God and on the Trinity*, paragraph five, he says

this. He's talking about Elijah, and he says, "When the Lord passed before him on the mountain, the prophet Elijah covered his face with his cloak. By that act, he confessed that the keenness of our mind is too dull to look upon the majesty of God. Thus the curious investigation of the mind should be covered with the mantle of holy ignorance."

**WILKEN:** Dr. Ben Mayes is Editor of Professional and Academic Books for Concordia Publishing House based in St. Louis. He's General Editor of Johann Gerhard's *Theological Commonplaces*.

Thank you very much, Ben.

**MAYES:** Great to be here.

**WILKEN:** *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week continues tomorrow. We're going to talk with Dr. Larry Rast about "the American Luther." That's what he's called – C.F.W. Walther. We'll also wrap up *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week on Friday, discussing the 20<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran theologian Hermann Zasse. Pastor Matt Harrison, President of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, will be our guest for that conversation.

It does really kind of tire you out to sit down and look at a man who so tirelessly pursued the truth of God's Word, not only in his theological study, but also in his preaching and his teaching and his care for souls. An example to be followed, to be sure. Also to see what it is God's Word can bring forth from a man. It's amazing, that final thought there about God's Word having this power in itself, and it's no better displayed than in men that, in spite of their own sinfulness and fallenness, turned to the purposes of God and leave behind such a legacy that we are still drawing from their deep wells even today, like a man such as Johann Gerhard.

I'm Todd Wilken. I'll talk with you tomorrow. Thanks for listening to *Issues, Etc.*

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