Nisi Per Verbum

A Disputation Concerning Postmodernism and the Pastoral Ministry

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A LONG TIME AGO, IN A COSMOS FAR AWAY in space-time, Heraclitus of Ephesus discovered a principle—the ultimate first principle of all created things, in fact. He named this archaic principle *the logos* in his Greek language.

Half a millennium after this discovery, a Jewish man personally beloved by God himself wrote by verbal inspiration, "The Logos became flesh and tabernacled for a while among us, and we have seen his glorious weightiness, the weightiness of the only-begotten" (John 1:14, my translation). This apostle, St. John, is believed to have written down these words in Heraclitus's town of Ephesus.

In our own day, two and one-half millennia after Heraclitus and two millennia after John, there came into the cosmos that we inhabit a French philosopher who wrote many books to convince us that language is meaningless, urging latter-day heirs of Heraclitus and John to deconstruct, that is, in his idiosyncratic terminology, utterly to dismiss the Logos in all of its iterations.

This anti-Logos, antilogic, antilanguage French philosopher is Jacques Derrida (1930–2004). The postmodernism that erupts in his program for eradicating the Logos is what I call "the Shingles Virus of Western culture." I teach philosophy students at my university that Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle founded Western philosophy in large part to provide an antidote to postmodern relativism, the "man is the measure of all things" relativism initially articulated by Protagoras (ca. 490–420 BC), a contemporary of Heraclitus (ca. 540–480 BC) and of Socrates (d. 399 BC). The three founders of Western philosophy realized that relativizing moral truth would result in the atomization of Greek civilization into myriad micronarratives and the death of human society. *Postmodernism* as a word is a recent coinage, but the phenomenon we know as postmodernism is not anything new.

In support of the understanding that postmodernism is a perennial problem or shingles-like virus albeit identified with new verbiage, think of the words of Protagoras: "Man is the measure of all things: of things which are, that they are, and of things which are not, that they are not" (quoted by Plato in *Theaetetus* 152a). Protagoras was a moral and cognitive relativist, the type of philosopher who would be called in our day "postmodernist." In art history, postmodern art is the type of art that comes after distinctly modern art. In literature, postmodern novels are the sort of novels that come after distinctly modern novels. But this is not how it works in philosophy and intellectual life considered more broadly. In philosophy, postmodernism is an intellectual (or more accurately, an anti-intellectual) disposition simultaneously inimical to Heraclitus's logos, the essential feature of the cosmos and of our human being, and to John's Logos, God incarnate.[1]

A half-millennium after the Reformation, the virus of postmodernism has begun to affect the church and her ministry. It is plausible that, just as we become weak and lethargic as the result of viral infections of our own bodies, the body of Christ in the West has become weak and lethargic as the result of the most recent outbreaks of the shingles virus of postmodernism. Many of us realize that preaching toward the end of the twentieth and now into the twenty-first century has become tentative vis-à-vis the word of God and more in sync with the secularized society in which we live. There also is a malaise for the message of Christ in the pews and in the classrooms of Christian schools. It is not unreasonable to ask if this ennui in pulpit and pew may be a symptom of a raging, viral infection of postmodernism.

As another French author put it in the 1970s: "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives."[2] Translation: Those who espouse postmodernism are committed ahead of time, come-what-may, to the denial of capital-T Truth or even the possibility of working toward the truth.[3] This necessarily means the denial of the truthfulness of language and the Truth incarnate. Postmodernists swear allegiance ahead of time to remain steadfast in their disbelief, no matter what. Thus, postmodernism is an aggressive contagion of incredulity.

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1. On this philosophical understanding of postmodernism, the list of postmodern philosophers of the last century or so is short enough to name them all in a book title. See Douglas Litowitz, *Postmodern Philosophy and Law: Rorty, Nietzsche, Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997).

2. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), introduction, http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Lyotard-PostModernCondition1-5.html.

3. See John 14:6, where Jesus identifies himself as *the* truth (Greek *aletheia*). Compare Aristotle's definition of truth: "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is to speak a lie [*pseudos*]; while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is to speak the truth [*aletheia*]" (*Metaphysics*, 1011b25).

There is more going on here than a blatant logical fallacy. It is not just that they are uttering a self-falsifying claim by claiming that there is no metanarrative. ("There is no such thing as truth!" is itself a claim that there is one truth, namely, the claim that there is no truth. The claim that there are no metanarratives is itself a metanarrative. And so on.) It is not simply that they deny the incarnate Logos who identifies himself as "the Truth" in John 14:6 of the greatest metanarrative ever told. The reality is that *postmodernists teach and promote the preemptive surrender of language,* the essential feature of our humanity and the means by which God reveals himself to us. For the Scriptures are language. It is language that we use to preach and to pray, to confess and to absolve. Lyotard's incredulous introductory paragraph concludes with a wholesale dismissal of the meaningfulness and authority of all language. Notice that according to postmodernism, language itself is a vanity, a vapor. Postmodernism is an assertion of Ecclesiastical proportions, a nihilism that is always engaged in denying the words of the one Shepherd (Eccl 12:11). Here again is Lyotard:

This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors [*sic*], its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements — narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. Conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valencies specific to its kind. Each of us lives at the intersection of many of these. However, we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations, and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable.

   Thus the society of the future falls less within the province of a Newtonian anthropology (such as structuralism or systems theory) than a pragmatics of language particles. There are many different language games — a heterogeneity of elements. They only give rise to institutions in patches — local determinism.[4]

Postmodernists atomize. The problem lies in their doomsday weapon of choice. In order to promote their denial of a logical or Logos-centric universe, which is exactly what is meant by their denial of any metanarrative or universal story, postmodernists deny the inherent meaningfulness of all language. Accordingly, their disruptive philosophy serves to support an agenda designed to keep people away from the very means or medium through which the Truth himself meets us and speaks to everyone with ears to hear (see Psalm 1 and every Old Testament passage; Romans 10:14–21 and every New Testament passage). The postmodern program is to deny the meaning of the

word so that we will not pay attention to the word of God when it lies open in our hands or when it is being preached to us by our divinely called pastors (Eph 4:4–16).

   It is Acts 17 all over again, only worse. The Stoics and Epicureans of St. Paul's day had to deny the very possibility of resurrection in order to make their philosophies acceptable to people. Postmodernism has more global aspirations. It seeks to deny us human beings the possibility of truth of any kind, not only the truth of the resurrection of the body.

Postmodernism is erupting within the body of Christ through the books that our pastors and seminary students are reading.

So, what is a pastor to make of books from Christian authors and Christian presses urging us to use postmodernist philosophers such as Derrida to "do church" better? What are we to do with books teaching us to sync our biblical hermeneutics with a method befitting "the postmodern world" in which we are supposed to live?

   The shingles virus of postmodernism is erupting within the body of Christ. While we might assume that it is a cultural infiltration of some sort, taken in through our pores, so to speak, as a matter of record one site of infection is through the books that our pastors and seminary students are reading — books by college and seminary professors urging pastors to incorporate postmodernism into pastoral theology and practice. Consider two examples of such "postmodernism for pastors" books with a weather eye on what they are trying to sell us in order to change in our way of preaching, teaching, and the care of souls in our pastoral office, the word and sacrament ministry that God through his church has called us to be doing, in this place and time.

   The first postmodernism-for-pastors author urges us to welcome postmodernists such as Derrida into the church in order to revivify the Reformation watchword, "Scripture alone!" James K. A. Smith from Calvin College has been publishing books with titles urging the emerging, radical orthodoxy church not to be afraid of postmodernism, but instead to welcome the help that he believes Derrida and other postmodernist philosophers can provide to assist in the emergence of a reformed (or Reformed) twenty-first-century church. Smith believes that the church as such has much to learn about being the church from philosophers such as Derrida, whose announced agenda was to oppose the Messiah of the Bible and to eradicate the divine, biblical mandate of marriage from the world. Professor Smith's argument in a nutshell is that a characteristic assertion from the French postmodernist can inspire a return to the truths of the Reformation.

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4.   Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition,* xxiv.

Derrida. Deconstruction's claim that there is "nothing outside the text" [*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*] can be considered a radical translation of the Reformation principle *sola scriptura*.[5]

Notwithstanding Smith's efforts to make us envision "Derrida at the foot of the cross" (which is the title of Smith's next subsection in this chapter promoting Derrida's claim that there is "nothing outside the text" as Reformational), Derrida is clearly anti-Logos and anti-Messiah. He is small-*a* antichrist and a liar by apostolic standards (1 John 2:22–23).

In regard to postmodern authors such as Derrida, the contemporary philosopher Roger Scruton counsels us: "A writer who says that there are no truths, or that all truth is 'merely relative', is asking you not to believe him. So don't."[6] We in the church, pastors in particular, are in urgent need of straightforward philosophical introduction to the perils of postmodernism's pernicious, antitruth, anti-Logos, and illogical degradation of language and texts, because this entails the postmodernization of our understanding of the language and text of Holy Scripture. A writer who promotes Derrida is asking us not to believe him, so we should not. Much less should we invite him to provide seminars on how to fulfill the Reformation at mid-millennium.

The second postmodernism-for-pastors author wants us to befriend postmodernism for our regular work of hermeneutics, or biblical exegesis in preparation for preaching the word. James Voelz of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, theorizes in his *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* that meaning emanates "from several levels of signifiers" as part of his linguistic semiotics, which he promotes as a linguistic theory suitable for pastoral exegesis of Scripture.[7] As Professor Voelz writes,

> Observers from within and without may recognize a "post-modern" ring to what is here advanced. And they are right. . . . But it is the contention of this author that postmodernism, for all of its excesses, is not our enemy, but a sort of friend.[8]

5. James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), 34. Please see pages 34–42 as well. Smith continues after this quotation to protest against what he calls an uncharitable "bumper sticker" reading of Derrida and he enlists the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) in support of his case that Derrida is not a linguistic idealist. Then Smith goes on to demonstrate his contention with a brief study of the Disney movie *The Little Mermaid*. This essay is not a book review, so let me simply mention my philosophical understanding (1) that linguistic idealism is not actually the issue in Derrida's argument, and (2) that Heidegger is not a postmodernist. Nor is Heidegger's philosophy of language postmodern. Quite the opposite.
6. Roger Scruton, *Modern Philosophy: An Introduction and Survey* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996).
7. James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World*, 2nd ed., Concordia Scholarship Today (St. Louis, Missouri: CPH, 1997).
8. Ibid., 11.

What does this mean, promoting a syncing of the church's hermeneutics with "the postmodern world?" Voelz's friend-fellowship notwithstanding, in point of fact, postmodernism maintains that there is no world in the first place. It is therefore nonsensical ever to speak of a "postmodern world." For the postmodernist, there is no ordered creation, no Logos binding all things in a fundamental, Christ-centered coherence, contrary to Colossians 1:15–18. Postmodernism teaches flux and chaos. There is no postmodern world to befriend. There is only this viral contagion. So, what are the consequences of befriending postmodernism? Postmodernism is no friend to the pastor's work as biblical exegete. Postmodernism is a Mephistopheles.

With the anniversary year of the beginning of the Reformation fresh in mind, let me call for a Disputation on Postmodernism and the word of God. The summa-style headline question for our disputation could be "Whether Postmodernism is Compatible with the Office of the Ministry." The assumed answer to the questions is "No." I will account for postmodern objections and sketch a reply to their objections. For the *Respondeo* of my argument, I am going to argue for the Declaration of Dependence upon our Lutheran Confessions, something to which I subscribe without qualification and which I know all faithful pastors of any Christian denomination will take to heart. "God cannot be treated with, God cannot be apprehended *nisi per verbum,* except through the Word" (Ap IV, On Justification).

Here are four theses for our disputation and edification.

1. Language (spoken and textual) is inherently intentional. This is not known theoretically, but within the *logos*-activity of reading and writing, speaking and listening.

2. Language (spoken and textual) forms human beings ontologically. This is known in the Hebrew sense of known-by-personal-acquaintance, but is identified in the thinking of Aristotle, Luther, and Martin Heidegger as the *logos*-capability that is uniquely characteristic of the human being.

3. As language (textual first, then preached and taught), the word of God, or Holy Scripture, is (1) inherently intentional and (2) ontologically formative for human beings.

4. In addition, being the word *of God* (a genitive of origin), the Holy Scriptures are unsurpassably authoritative.

EXPOSITION OF THESIS 1

Language (spoken and textual) is inherently intentional. This is not known theoretically, but within the *logos*-activity of reading and writing, speaking and listening. By intentional I don't mean that someone wants something to happen. This is a technical term for the *aboutness* of language. Intentionality is a feature of our cognition and of our emotional being. It is the recognition that we never just cognize; in fact, we always cognize something. It is the recognition that we never just have emotional feelings; in fact we always feel love or hate or joy or *Angst* about something. For example, here is a glossary entry on emotional intentionality.

Intentionality: That a feeling, emotion, or mood is *about* something; its objectivity. A mood such as *Angst* is *about* the world as a whole, the undefined world in which an individual is situated. This situatedness is immediate and not reducible to either cognition or volition. The "location" of intentionality is best understood as a spatio-temporal field of consciousness and intersubjective experience.[9]

The intentionality of language means that language is never "just words on a page or just sounds in the air"; it is always *about* everything or something, someone or Someone.

Postmodernists object to the inherent intentionality of language.

Postmodernists object to the inherent intentionality of language. For example, look again at Smith's advice to bringing Derrida to church to present vital symposia for pastors and church leaders. What exactly does Smith mean by portraying Derrida as a postmodernist that we should "not be afraid to take to church" because he can help the church today to rediscover the Reformation watchword *sola Scriptura,* "God saves us by Scripture alone." Quoting him at greater length, Smith writes,

Derrida. Deconstruction's claim that there is "nothing outside the text" [*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*] can be considered a radical translation of the Reformation principle *sola scriptura.* In particular, Derrida's insight should push us to recover two key emphases of the church: (a) the centrality of Scripture for mediating our understanding of the world as a whole and (b) the role of community in the interpretation of Scripture.[10]

Smith's mention of "the role of community in the interpretation of Scripture" is in itself perfunctory and clichéd. In light of St. Peter's God-breathed words in 2 Peter 1:19–21, it is also a bit odd. But Smith's notion that Derrida's assertion that there is "nothing outside the text" can be utilized to support Reformation sensibilities and biblical theology is incoherent. Incidentally, Smith, a Reformed thinker in the tradition not of Rome or Wittenberg, but of Geneva, is exhibiting what is known as *the fallacy of composition* by assuming that Calvin's theology of Scripture is the Reformation theology of Scripture. If we were to go all in on welcoming postmodernists to church, we could write off Smith's claim as a postmodern such as Lyotard would,

and point out that this is nothing more than Smith's own micronarrative, but this is serious business for us all.[11]

It is unsurprising to read what we will learn in a few pages to call an *expressionist semiotics* view of Holy Scripture from a professor at a college named for John Calvin. After all, historically only from Reformed thinkers has there been a denial of the doctrine of the efficacious external means of grace.[12] In writing about "the narrative character of our faith," Smith claims that the church, after its encounter with postmodernism, will "look different."[13] In passing, he refers to the Holy Communion as community narrative, not as the divinely instituted means of grace that it is. He depicts the Lord's Supper, in Calvinist terms, semiotically. Note his position that the Eucharist is *nothing more than* symbols and signs and semiotics, merely an expression of the church's communitarian narrative.

While the postmodern church is a storied community centered on the narrative of Scripture, it is also a Eucharistic community that replays the narrative in deed. Further, the symbols and signs of the Lord's Supper embody the gospel for us. Because the postmodern church values narrative, it values story and as such values the aesthetic experience engendered by material signs and symbols. Put another way, because of the renewed role of story as a kind of literature activating the imagination, the postmodern church values the arts in general as an incarnational medium that embodies the story of God's faithfulness.[14]

In other words, according to Smith, word and sacrament are not the place where God himself talks to us and gives us his body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine (1 Cor 11). Rather, for Smith's postmodern church, our aesthetic imagination is the location of a community narrative that the church refers to as "the gospel." I tell you, brethren, that many will say in the church in these latter days, "Incarnation this, incarnation that," but let him who has ears get this point:

What a theologian says about the sacraments is doubly important because it parallels what he says about Christ in the flesh. If there is no external efficacy in the one, there is none in the other. This has terribly important consequences for piety and pastoral care: it means the attention of those who long for life in Christ must be directed to

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11. "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives." [Translation: Those who espouse postmodernism are committed ahead of time, come-what-may, to the denial of capital-T Truth or even the possibility of working toward the truth. Postmodernists swear allegiance ahead of time to remain steadfast in their disbelief that there is in reality no logos or logic, no matter what. GPS] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, introduction.
12. Cary also sees this same spiritualizing or metamorphizing of Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist in Augustine. See Phillip Cary, *Outward Signs: the Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine's Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 8; see also the chapter "New Testament Sacraments and the Flesh of Christ," especially 249–52.
13. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?* 76–77.
14. Ibid.

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9. See my *Wednesday's Child: From Heidegger to Affective Neuroscience, A Field Theory of Angst* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 128.
10. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?* 34.

some more inward dimension, to something more spiritual than Christ incarnate. This is the great reason to be critical of any inward turn in Christianity and to be grateful for medieval accounts of sacraments as efficacious external means of grace.[15]

As should be clear to readers of Derrida's *On Grammatology,* and so on, although the hallmark of all postmodern writing is obfuscation (they are always trying to convince us that all texts are meaningless), Derrida's philosophy of language (in speech and in texts) can be expressed in a syllogism, a three-sentence miniargument. This is what Derrida actually maintains.

1. All language is meaningless inasmuch as it does not refer to a reality, to a metanarrative beyond its own words, or to universal truths, for example, God, ethical norms, etc.
2. Words are nothing more than semiotic traces, arbitrary ciphers or linguistic symbols available for infinite, free play interpretations according to the interests of any and every variety of community. Man is the measure of everything.
3. Thus, there is nothing that any text refers to outside itself. A text is merely of parochial interest and subject to infinite interpretations.

Derrida does not maintain that there is "nothing outside the text" because he is a postmodernist Reformer nailing *sola Scriptura* to the emerging church's door. Derrida maintains that there is "nothing outside the text" because he is a chronic, committed disbeliever, a philosophical and theological hardcore skeptic who practices methodological incredulity toward any and every coherent account of ordered reality, toward any putative *logos.*

Derrida is utterly opposed to the inherent meaningfulness of language. As a consequence, his strategy as an author is to be incessantly ironic, ceaselessly indecisive, and tiresomely "witty." Postmodernist writers are notoriously obscure in their own writings.

That postmodernism is indefinable is a truism. However, it can be described as a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning.[16]

So, let our rebuttal of what Derrida and postmodernism bring into the church be clear and unambiguous. Derrida denies language's inherent intentionality. His statement is not Reformational any more than it is coherent. It is a nihilistic theory of language that, by a relentless chatter of incessant, pseudointellectual bullying, means to demolish the church door, the church herself, and the Lord of the church.

What is it that makes contemporary Christian authors—and perhaps many churches today—vulnerable to postmodernism? In part it is a penchant for theorizing as a substitute for reading and listening. The inherent intentionality or aboutness of language is pretheoretical. Before we define or classify language we need to listen to language.[17] Actually, I am going to argue that we cannot sit outside language in order to define it, and therefore that theorizing about language is the problem. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) advised his philosophical colleagues at Cambridge, "Don't think; look!" He meant that they should cease all their efforts to outdo one another by their theories of language and meaning and just look at the texts.

> *It is a nihilistic theory of language that, by a relentless chatter of incessant, pseudointellectual bullying, means to demolish the church.*

This penchant for theorizing is illustrated in Voelz's book on hermeneutics, which is subtitled *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World.* Here again is how he begins the introduction to a "semiotic linguistic theory," which he presents as a confessional Lutheran hermeneutic:

Observers from within and without may recognize a "post-modern" ring to what is here advanced. And they are right. . . . But it is the contention of this author that postmodernism, for all of its excesses, is not our enemy, but a sort of friend.[18]

The textbook itself does not actually present a coherent understanding of language or the biblical text so much as a series of preparatory lecture notes, headed with bibliographical lists unconnected with the author's various comments. Aristotle's *Categories* and Plato's *Republic* and *Timaeus* are listed under Addendum 4-B as important resources regarding "the source of conceptual signifieds and the role of language."

As a philosopher who reads and teaches Aristotle and Plato, I can report that neither one of them articulated a semiotic, "sig-

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15. Cary, *Outward Signs,* 222.
16. "Postmodernism," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/.

17. "To reflect on language . . . demands that we enter into the speaking of language in order to take up our stay with language, i.e., within *its* speaking, not within our own. Only in that way do we arrive at the region within it may happen—or also fail to happen—that language will call us from there and grant us its nature. We leave speaking to language. We do not wish to ground language in something else that is not language itself, nor do we wish to explain other things [than language as it is] by means of language." Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought,* trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 190–91.
18. Voelz, *What Does This Mean?* 11.

nified and signifiers," theory of language. Just the opposite. They held in practice a nontheoretical confidence in the inherent reliability of language. The Greeks originated the vocabulary that Voelz employs for his semiotic theory of hermeneutics, but they had no such theory as he advocates.[19] This is a serious problem.

It is a serious problem because if Voelz had read, really read and engaged with these Greek sources that he gestures toward, he could have saved his readers and perhaps his seminary students a lot of hermeneutical grief. As a brief excursus, pastor to pastor, let me say that this is why we pastors—especially if we are to pastor as Lutheran pastors and to teach the next generations what it means to be confessional Lutherans—need a reasonable diet of good philosophical education in what I refer to as Philosophy *Kata Christon,* in engagement with the apostolic word in Colossians 2.[20]

> ### *The Greeks originated the vocabulary that Voelz employs, but they had no such theory as he advocates.*

What shall we say in response to this postmodern-friendly way of doing biblical exegesis, namely, hermeneutics via semiotic linguistic theory as our hermeneutic? Fraternizing with postmodernists amounts to Chamberlain-like appeasement. Postmodernism in the church is an indication that pastors are failing in their duty as called servants of the word. We need to relocate hermeneutics. It is a secondary discourse, contingent upon our engagement in Scripture.[21] Neither semiotic linguistic theorizing nor any other linguistic theorizing, for that matter, ought ever be presented or taught as a preamble to our pastoral immersion in the word of God.

To put this another way, we ought to debate—not about theories through which to handle Scripture hermeneutically, but—the proper disposition or stance for a faithful pastor to take toward Scripture in his exegetical labors. In the third volume of his academic trilogy on Augustine, *Outward Signs: The Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine's Thought,* Phillip Cary identifies two competing stances that a pastor could take toward the biblical text. Let us take these as two possible understandings as a Pascal's Wager for Pastors. By this, I do not mean that we need to take a gamble. I mean that we need to pick sides, here and now, and stick by our choice. The two views of language are *expressionist semiotics* and *efficacious external means of grace.*[22]

What is at issue is whether we as pastors come to our reading and study of Holy Scripture, attending to its inherent meaningfulness (that is, *nisi per verbum*) or whether we view the Scriptures as signs to be decoded according to a linguistic theory (that is, *ex hypothesi*). Adopting the means-of-grace disposition toward Scripture leads us in the direction of Gerhard Forde's argument that preaching is a sacrament: "Preaching is doing the text to the hearers. . . . Preaching in a sacramental fashion is *doing* to the hearers what the text authorizes you to do to them."[23] Adopting the expressionist-semiotic disposition toward the Scripture means that before you get into the word of God you will want to acquire expertise (or depend on a plagiarized or "borrowed expertise") in order to figure out what to do with the Bible text exegetically. The expressionist-semiotics commitment leads toward the working assumption that the meaning of the text we preach is not in the text per se but . . . elsewhere.[24] The expressionist-semiotic disposition may also lead to pastoral acedia. It is a disputation, so you cannot demur. Which approach to Holy Scripture do you choose?

By "efficacious external means of grace," Cary means what confessional Lutherans believe, teach, and confess in Luther's catechisms and in our pledged confessional statements such as Apology XII. It is what the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has reiterated many times, such as in the 1932 *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod,* which says:

> We hold with Scripture that God offers and communicates to men the spiritual blessings purchased by Christ, namely, the forgiveness of sins and the treasures and gifts connected therewith, *only through the external means of grace ordained by Him.* These means of grace are the Word of the Gospel, in every form in which it is brought to man, and the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and of the Lord's Supper.

19. "Semiotics before Augustine meant the discussion of the nature of empirical inference. Its task was to articulate epistemological connections within the sensible world rather than to link two worlds or two dimensions of being. That is why it did not occur to Greek philosophers to classify words as a kind of sign (*sēmeion*). For them signs belonged to a process of inference, not a process of expression. They served not to communicate what lies hidden in the soul [or mind] but to reveal what lies unseen in the world, as for example medical symptoms reveal an underlying condition hidden in the depths of the body or as smoke on the horizon indicates a fire that is somewhere nearby but perhaps not yet seen. . . . There are many . . . authors in the Western tradition, beginning with Augustine [who classify words as a species of sign], but none among the Greeks." Cary, *Outward Signs*, 18–19.

20. See www.lutheranphilosopher.com for the link to "Philosophy *Kata Christon:* A Pastor's Guided Introduction to Philosophy Based on Christ Himself." This six-session online video course is provided free of charge by my university and pastors involved in Doxology: The Lutheran Center for Pastoral Care and Counsel.

21. "Hermeneutics . . . cannot become a master discourse (1) displacing the learning of basic skills of interpretation, or (2) generating a claim that we must engage in it before engaging in interpretation." Brian Brock, *Singing the Ethos of God: On the Place of Christian Ethics in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 265.

22. Phillip Cary, *Outward Signs*, preface, ix.

23. Gerhard O. Forde, *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, ed. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 91.

24. See Voelz, "Semiotics," which the author claims without explanation to be "broader than semantics": "*Semiotics*: the study of meaning as conveyed by all types of signifiers, both verbal and nonverbal (broader than *semantics*)." Voelz, *What Does This Mean?* 367. Note well that, on the expressionist-semiotics way of approaching the Bible, the meaning of the text is not in the text. Meaning lies wherever the semiotic theorist may choose to locate it (in "verbal or nonverbal" places), but *not in the text itself.*

The Word of the gospel promises and applies the grace of God, works faith and thus regenerates man, and gives the Holy Ghost, Acts 20:24; Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:23; Gal. 3:2. . . .

. . . [I]t is only through the external means ordained by Him that God has promised to communicate the grace and salvation purchased by Christ. . . . *Whatever activities do not either directly apply the Word of God or subserve such application we condemn as "new methods," unchurchly activities, which do not build, but harm the Church.*

We reject as a dangerous error the doctrine, which disrupted the Church of the Reformation, that the grace and the Spirit of God are communicated not through the external means ordained by Him, but by an immediate operation of grace.[25]

As we have seen, linguistic theorizing is a problem, a point of pastoral vulnerability to the postmodern infection. In this connection it may be worth considering how it is that, although the medievals, in their commentaries on Aristotle and language almost invariably proceeded to produce a veritable industry of Rube Goldberg theories of language,[26] Luther (a credible candidate for the title of "The Last Medieval Churchman") did not theorize as a prolegomenon to his exegetical preaching. He took. He read. He preached. After all, God cannot be treated with, God cannot be apprehended *nisi per verbum,* except through the word.

To recapitulate this thesis concerning the inherent intentionality of language: there is an antiviral medicine (or therapy, as Wittgenstein described philosophy) for pastors as well as for theory-obsessed philosophers. "Don't think. Don't scramble to find a theory of language to carry with you into your exegetical work for preaching and teaching and caregiving. Instead, *'Tolle, lege:* take up and read!' [27] the scriptural text!" Before anything else, read and listen to the word. After everything else, read and listen to the word. Preach the word. It is from reading and hearing the word of God that we come (by empirical inference, as Aristotle put it)[28] to the efficacious external means-of-grace disposition toward the word of God.

Postmodernism is a *de profundis theory.* As the ambitious, nihilistic theory that it is, no counter theory will provide an adequate reply to such a fundamentally corrosive or viral objection to language with its inherent intentionality as Derrida and the postmodernists have mounted. The problem with theoretical understandings of real-life phenomena is that the theories, being abstract management tools, teach us to be reductive in our understanding and practice . . . leading us to be "distracted by distraction from distraction" from our reading and study of Scripture by nothing-but theories,[29] as if language and Scripture as language are nothing but semiotics.

> *Luther did not theorize as a prolegomenon to his exegetical preaching. He took. He read. He preached.*

To establish the profoundly anti-Western agenda of postmodernism, let us put this in terms of the Logos. In the Western tradition, the way to identify the irreducibility of the meaningfulness or intentionality of language was to recognize *logos* as the first principle of language, reality, and thought.

A *first principle* is not "a good idea" or an arbitrary starting point of some sort. Nor is a first principle something that philosophers invent. First principles are discovered, not made. So, first principles are not social constructs. They are the *archai* (Greek), the artesian wells, so to speak, which account for the central phenomena of existence being the enduring and significant phenomena that they are. John 1:1, with John's deployment of the Greek term *arche,* could be translated, "In first principle terms, the Logos already was."[30]

The first principle that I am most concerned with here is the first principle of pastoral theology, *nisi per verbum* from the Apology. But in order to understand together what it means to call this a first principle, let me share with you a brief tutorial on the first principle of noncontradiction, the first principle of ethics, and the first principle of the logos.

Aristotle lights up the first principle of noncontradiction this way: "The same thing cannot be said both to be and not to be (a) for the same person or thing, (b) at the same time, and (c) in the same respect" (*Metaphysics* IV 3, 1005b19–20, my paraphrase).[31] Introducing this in class, I often invite everyone to imagine that two students at the farthest corners of the class-

25. Accessed June 2017 at https://www.lcms.org/doctrine/doctrinalposition#means-of-grace. My italics.
26. "To speak of medieval semiotics is not to speak of a precisely defined discipline besides, and distinct from, other medieval arts and sciences; it is rather to speak of a complex field of more or less — mostly more — elaborate reflections on the concept of sign, its nature, function, and classification. In order to understand the enormous extent to which such theories grew during the Middle Ages some basic formal features of the scholastic organization of knowledge has to be kept in mind." Stephan Meier-Oeser, "Medieval Semiotics," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2011 edition, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/semiotics-medieval/.
27. "*Tolle, lege* [take and read]." Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 12, para 2.
28. Aristotle, *On Interpretation* (Greek, Περὶ Ἑρμηνείας, Peri Hermeneias; Latin, De Interpretatione).
29. For an example, consider Searle's Chinese Room, a thought experiment about intentionality in regard to human intelligence versus artificial "intelligence." See Bryan Wolfmuller's interview with me regarding this Master Metaphor for Philosophy at http://www.whatdoesthismean.org.
30. "Nothing is more generally unacceptable in recent philosophy than any concept of a first principle. . . . Genuinely first principles, I shall argue, can have a place only within a universe characterized in terms of certain determinate, fixed and unalterable ends, ends which provide a standard by reference to which our individual purposes, desires, interests and decisions can be evaluated as well or badly directed." Alasdair MacIntyre, *First Principles, Final Ends, and Contemporary Philosophical Issues* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1990), 1, 7.
31. There are actually three or four versions or augmentations of this first principle. For the mention of these various texts and for a full philosophical treatment, see https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-noncontradiction/#1.

room are texting back and forth. "So Prof. Schulz isn't here to-day!" texts the first student. "But Prof. Schulz is here!" texts the second student. At first blush it sounds like the students are contradicting each other, but maybe not. It so happens that there are two Prof. Schulzes on our two Concordia campuses. First, then, suppose that they agree that they are both referring to the same person, namely, Prof. Greg Schulz. Second, they could text the same texts back and forth a second time, verbatim. Are they contradicting each other now? Probably not, since they may have different times in mind, say, one thinking that I am here on campus today and the other seeing that I am not in the classroom this minute. But what happens if they also agree that "here" in their texts means "here in this classroom during this class period"? Third, they could retext the exact same texts a third time, but there is one more issue to agree on. What do they each mean by saying that I "am here" today? One could mean that I am not mentally present, that I seem unprepared and befuddled, while the other means that I am physically present.

The principle of noncontradiction is a natural law for communication.

Now what happens if, having clarified (a) which person they have been texting about, (b) which time and place they have in mind, and (c) in what respect they are referring to my "being here today," they both stick with their original texts? Well, if they agree that I both am and am not here in this class room this period physically—if they in effect agree that what is true for one writer is not necessarily true for the other writer and everyone else in class feels the same way—then the gig is up. Accepting such contradictory texts as the norm would be the end of all texts—the end, in fact, of all communicating, all thinking, all writing, all person-to-person relationships. As the T-shirt says, "Gravity: It's not just a Good Idea; it's the Law." The principle of noncontradiction is a natural law for communication. It's the law. It's *Torah.* It's a first principle.

There is a first principle for ethics too. Ethics is a normative discipline, a standard-based inquiry that befits us as human beings within God's creation. The perennial, generation-after-generation question that leads us to do ethics is the question, "How *ought* we act and not act toward one another as the kind of creature or being that we are, namely, human beings?" The first principle for ethics is the principle of Good and Evil: "Do the good, avoid the evil." When C. S. Lewis argues in the three essays that comprise his 1943 book *The Abolition of Man,* that "the Innovator" always ends up depending on moral principles whenever he tries to make his case that there is no such thing as morality, he is depending on this first principle. When Nietzsche (whom I take to be "the Innovator" in *Abolition*) at-

tacked the very concept of morality in the waning years of the nineteenth century, he titled one of his attacks *Beyond Good and Evil,* thereby expressing his intent to demolish the first principle of ethics. The principle of Good and Evil is a natural law of ethics. No Good and Evil, no ethics. It is a first principle (see also Rom 12:2–13 and 7:14–25).[32]

Heraclitus's *logos* is a first principle. I would even refer to it as "the first principle of first principles." The first principle character of the *logos* is what we read in these quotes from his surviving textual *Fragments.*

> This *Logos* holds always but humans always prove unable to understand it, both before hearing it and when they have first heard it. For though all things come to be in accordance with this *Logos,* humans are like the inexperienced when they experience such words and deeds as I set out, distinguishing each in accordance with its nature and saying how it is. But other people fail to notice what they do when awake, just as they forget what they do while asleep. (DK 22B1)
>
> For this reason it is necessary to follow what is common. But although the *Logos* is common, most people live as if they had their own private understanding. (DK 22B2)[33]

Here is another way to look at Heraclitus's discovery of this first principle or *arche.* Plato referred to Heraclitus as the philosopher of radical flux. In one of his dialogs Plato puts it this way: "Heraclitus, I believe, says that all things go and nothing stays, and comparing existents to the flow of a river, he says you could not step twice into the same river" (*Cratylus* 402a). So far, so good. But if everything, absolutely everything, is constantly changing, we could never know that everything was constantly changing. This is because we would be fluxing, so there would be no individuals to know anything. The cosmos would be utter chaos and not a coherent cosmos, so there would be no universe to know. Language would be nothing, no thing, not language at all, so there would be no way to know. If all is in flux, there would be nothing to know, no knowers and no language.

However, given that things continue to exist as the things that they are, there must be a source and explanation for their continuing identity over time. If we know the universe as an orderly and dependably consistent unitary reality, then there must be a source and explanation for our coherent knowing. This is what Heraclitus means by the *Logos. Logos* (λόγος) is both the source and fundamental order of the cosmos. In Heraclitus's hometown one-half millennium after his discovery of the

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32. It is also worth noting that Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in the first line of his unfinished *Ethics*, observes that the first principle of ethics is insufficient, apart from a recognition of our insurgency in the Garden, and our need for Christ to redeem and restore the rupture of our fall. But here in Bonhoeffer too, we are likely to miss the full impact of his Christology if we are not cognizant of the first principle of ethics.

33. "DK" refers to the Diels–Kranz numbering system for the texts of the Pre-Socratic philosophers. See *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* at http://www.iep.utm.edu/diels-kr/. Italics added.

first principle of the *Logos,* St. John revealed this first principle to be a two-natured person, the second person of the Holy Trinity. The centerpiece of Heraclitus's philosophy is *l,* the logos, but postmodern philosophers, incredulous of orderliness from the get-go, glom onto the notion of flux. They are, after all, incredulous folks, so reality as it is remains beside the point. Notwithstanding postmodern incredulity, in a philosophical sense as in the biblical sense, you cannot serve two masters. You cannot have flux and chaos as your guiding principle because such a position isg36

not a position, it is nothing more than a stubborn denial of the orderliness of creation as it is. Despite all of this, postmodern philosophers love the flux dimension of Heraclitus, but they hate his philosophical claims in support of the common, universal, ordering first principle of the logos.[34]

In summary of our first thesis, namely, that language (spoken and textual) is inherently intentional, and that this is not known theoretically, but within the logos-activity of reading and writing, speaking and listening, postmodernism is a nihilistic theory of language that targets the first principle of the Logos. Without reasons, without reason, by sheer willfulness[35] postmodernism denies the intentionality or aboutness of language. The church and her pastors are vulnerable to this postmodern theory of linguistic nihilism in part because of a pervasive biblical aliteracy and in part due to a penchant in hermeneutics and the pastor's exegesis for substituting theory for the reading of the text of Holy Scripture. I recommend setting aside theory in favor of reading the word. As will become clearer in my unpacking of our second thesis, I commend to the pastor that he not distract himself with linguistic theorizing, but that he immerse himself regularly in the Psalms, "the little Bible," as Luther referred to this book, particularly Psalm 119 and its concrete précis, Psalm 19. This is the first aspect of what the *nisi per verbum* principle entails.

EXPOSITION OF THESIS 2

Language (spoken and textual) forms human beings ontologically. This is known in the Hebrew sense of known-by-personal-acquaintance, but is evident in the thinking of Aristotle, Luther, and Martin Heidegger as the *logos*-capability that is uniquely characteristic of the human being. By *ontologically* I mean that our very being as human beings is initially formed and then reformed by language. Let me indicate how Western thinking and culture—which is what postmodernism seeks to destroy utterly—has understood our human kind of being. It is also the story of the Logos.

Initially, recall what Heraclitus had said about the Logos: "This *Logos* holds always but humans always prove unable to understand it, both before hearing it and when they have first heard it" and "It is necessary to follow what is common. But although the *Logos* is common, most people live as if they had their own private understanding."

St. John revealed this first principle to be a two-natured person, the second person of the Holy Trinity.

Deeply cognizant of Heraclitus's first principle of the logos, Aristotle defined our kind of being, the *human* kind of being, as *zoon logon echon* (ζῷον λόγον ἔχων) in his *Politics,* Book 1. We are the type of being that is neither rock nor plant, but animal (see Aristotle's *De Anima*) characterized essentially as *logos*-being.

In terms of the Lutheran and Reformation understanding of the human being, consider how Luther, who had taught and translated Aristotle in his own early years of teaching, utilized Aristotle's essential definition of the human being as the first steps in his 1536 *Disputation Concerning Man* (*LW* 34:133–44). Luther agrees with Aristotle's definition of man as *zoon logon echon,* an animal type of being characterized by *logos.*

1. Philosophy or human wisdom defines man as an animal having reason, sensation, and body.
2. It is not necessary at this time to debate whether man is properly or improperly called an animal.
3. But this must be known, that this definition describes man only as a mortal and in relation to this life.
4. And it is certainly true that reason is the most important and the highest in rank among all things and, in comparison with other things of this life, the best and something divine.
5. It is the inventor and mentor of all the arts, medicines, laws, and of whatever wisdom, power, virtue, and glory men possess in this life.
6. By virtue of this fact it ought to be named the essential difference by which man is distinguished from the animals and other things.
7. Holy Scripture also makes it lord over the earth, birds, fish, and cattle, saying, "Have dominion" [Gen 1:28].

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34. Postmodernism notwithstanding, it is logically impossible to say that language is in flux, according to Wittgenstein: "What belongs to the essence of the world cannot be expressed in language. For this reason, it cannot *say* that all is in flux. Language can only say those things we can also imagine otherwise" (*Philosophical Remarks*; see also David Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 160–67.

35. This willfulness is what Friedrich Nietzsche called *will to power* (German, *der Wille zur Macht*). Will to power is the means he recommends for Western civilization to continue after the Death of God, that is, the West's abolition of the God of the Bible by ignoring the Bible. Whereas Lutheran pastors proclaim the gospel by means of God's word (as Nietzsche knew firsthand; his father was a Lutheran minister), Nietzsche's Übermenschen would impart meaning to people's now-meaningless lives by means of will to power, a kind of creative vision generated from within. For the fully developed notion of his will to power see Nietzsche's 1883 *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* part 1, "1001 Goals"; part 2 (which has two titled sections), "Self-Overcoming" and "Redemption." When I say that postmodernism is willful, Nietzsche's *der Wille zur Macht* is what I am referring to.

That is, Aristotle's minimum definition of the human being agrees with Scripture. Luther goes on to argue for a fuller, biblically informed understanding of man. Luther achieves this in this thesis of the disputation:

32. Paul in Romans 3[:28], "We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works," briefly sums up the definition of man, saying, "Man is [the kind of being that is] justified by faith."

It is in language that we live and move and know our being.

Since this thesis is definitional, as Oswald Bayer says, we would do well to translate it as: "The human being is human in that he is justified by faith."

The human being is human *insofar as* he is justified by faith. . . . Justifying faith for Luther is not something *about* a human being, no qualitative element, which comes only secondarily, as that which is accidental to the substance. *Hominem justificari fide* (a human being is justified by faith) is, instead, a *fundamental* anthropological thesis.[36]

In other words, while we have grown up learning to think of the human being as *homo sapiens,* on the basis of the thicker, more authoritative biblical anthropology it would be much more accurate to think of the human being as *homo justificans,* since we are the kind of being that seeks to be justified: Either we acknowledge that we are justified by God's grace alone in Christ or we spend our time of grace seeking to justify ourselves apart from Christ—an inherently undoable and unsatisfying project! Luther's development of this understanding of the human being depends on Aristotle's discovery of logos as the essential aspect of human being.

In the twentieth century, Martin Heidegger, familiar with Luther (he had a copy of the Weimar edition of Luther's works and used it), said in his seminal *Sein und Zeit,* "Man shows himself as the entity who talks. The expressing of Logos is language" (*Being and Time,* section 34). From Heidegger I learned not to think of the human being as basically a physical or animal being with the added factor of logos, but to realize that the human being is first and foremost a logos-being. After all, it is through being logos that we recognize that we are bodily beings. It is in language that we live and move and *know our being,* to paraphrase Paul in Acts 17.

There is more. From Heidegger we can come to realize that language, far from being just a tool, whether a virtual tool (postmodernism), a naturalistic tool (secular humanism) or a handy implement (Heidegger's caution), that we use to share our mental thoughts and endeavor to inform or persuade others with more or less success—rather it is the case that language is the atmosphere, the house and dwelling, of our being as humans. We don't "have language"; truth be told, language has us. In a remarkable passage Heidegger says this about human beings and language: "Language is the house of Being."[37] He elaborates by saying that language is the home we dwell in and that human beings, who think with words and who create with words, are the guardians and caretakers of this home. Language is a given from the giver of every good and perfect gift, not a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury but signifying nothing. Language is part and parcel of being human beings.

In response to postmodernism's objections to the essential logos-character of human beings, I recommend two responses. The first is an inference from the way Derrida addresses marriage. The second response is a philosophical critique of the pervasive assumption that evolutionary biology somehow proves that we human beings are not logos-creatures by nature.

If I were a legislator, I would simply propose the abolition of both the word and the concept of "marriage" in the civil and secular code. "Marriage," religious, sacral, heterosexual value, with its procreative intent, for eternal fidelity, etc., is the State's concession to the Christian church, particularly in its monogamous dimension which is neither Jewish (this was imposed on Jews by Europeans only in the last century and among North African Jews was not an obligation as recently as a few generations ago) nor Muslim, as is well known. In doing away with the concept and the word "marriage," this religious equivocation or hypocrisy, which has no place in a secular constitution, would be replaced by a contractual "civil union," a kind of generalized, improved, flexible pact between partners without limitation to gender or number.[38]

Ignoring Derrida's factual inaccuracies, we see here the cost of reducing our shared recognition of the human being as the kind of being essentially characterized by logos to the postmodern mythology evident in Derrida's depiction of marriage as contract. This invites us to compare this postmodernist innovation with 2 Peter 1:16–2:22.

The postmodern objection to my reply to Derrida's postmodern reduction of the human being would likely be something having to do with evolutionary biology. But the evolutionary narrative (which would be unavailable to a consistent postmodernist since he would have to regard it as another micronarrative) is irrelevant to philosophical or theological anthropology.

36. Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 155–56.

37. See Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 63.

38. Jacques Derrida, "I am at war with myself," in *Le Monde,* interview, 19 August 2004.

The question at issue is not one of how we came to be the kind of being that we are; rather, the question is "What kind of being are we human beings?" [39]

Only when we have in hand a suitable real-life account of what kind of being we humans are, are we in a position to begin to ask which account of our history and origin is more plausible—a folk narrative that our type of being is naturalistic and accidental, or a narrative that claims to be from the Creator of all himself, a Creator who made such logos-beings as we are via his own Logos. But the origin discussion is not our subject here.

In summary of this second thesis, namely, that language (spoken and textual) forms us human beings ontologically and that this is known in the Hebrew sense of known-by-personal-acquaintance, but is identified in the thinking of Aristotle, Luther, and Heidegger as the logos-capability that is uniquely characteristic of the human being, we have moved on from postmodernism as a willful but not reasonable theory of language and the effects of this nihilistic theory of the church and her ministry, to a fine-grained consideration of the irrefragable reality of *logos* as the essential feature of our kind of being, that is, human being. (The critical importance of our understanding of the human being is something that Derrida's postmodernist revision of marriage brings to light in a negative manner. His revision is harmful and adolescent.) This undeletable feature of logos as the distinctive of human beings was introduced by Aristotle and accepted by Luther. Logos in the human being serves as the interface for God in the person of Christ, the incarnate Logos to affect us ontologically, or in terms of our very being.[40]

And so, *nisi per verbum* entails a thick understanding of human being in light of the *logos.* This is an indispensable understanding for the application of justification in pastoral theology and pastoral care. The care of souls is about administering the means of grace through which Christ himself comes to the soul (that is, to the body-and-soul human being), which is what we are considering together in our first, third, and fourth theses. In these theses the unofficial watchword is Luther's insistence that the gospel is *extra nos* or from outside ourselves. But in our second thesis we see the *pro nobis* or for-us work of God

in terms of his point of contact. The point of contact is our (fallen but essential human) *logos.* Hence Luther's title, *Disputation Concerning Man,* or *Concerning the Human Being.* Our principled response to postmodernism is from a major article on justification, the *Hauptartikel* or thesis article of Christian doctrine in our Reformation understanding. *Nisi per verbum* is, of course, *nisi per Logos,* an indispensable aspect of justification addressing both the incarnate One and the human race for whom he was and is incarnate.

Logos in the human being serves as the interface for God in the person of Christ.

Having addressed the insufficiency of postmodernism as a theory of language and logos, and its concomitant harmfulness to human beings as the logos-beings that we are, let us have a more concrete conversation applying our disputation labors so far to pastoral practice in our remaining two theses.

EXPOSITION OF THESIS 3

As language (textual first, then preached and taught), the word of God, or Holy Scripture, is (1) inherently intentional and (2) ontologically formative for us human beings.

I have argued elsewhere that, since the word of God is a divinely instituted means of grace, it is the means through which God terraforms or *cruciforms* us as the complete, complex persons that we human beings are.

> Through our praying of these chapters [of the Psalms] of God's verbal and verbatim means of grace He *uptakes* us into his love and thus reorders our pre-lament loves, polarizing our love so that we feel and exhibit the everlasting love with which he loved us, with which we love him and with which we love our neighbors as ourselves. As Brock induces from Augustine's sermons on these psalms of lament, "For Augustine, *lament is the Christian form that shapes the affective eruption engendered by suffering."* . . . God shapes us via the psalms of lament.[41]

For this third thesis concerning postmodernism and the word of God, I can (with blessed brevity) in effect simply underline the efficacious external means-of-grace disposition toward

39. For further philosophical and pastorally helpful items, see Wittgenstein's treatment of our *Lebensform* or human form of living together. See "Form of Life (*Lebensform*)," in Hans-Johann Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1996), 124–28. Glock stresses that Wittgenstein follows a naturalistic, nontranscendental understanding here, but this stricture is not borne out by Wittgenstein's writing.

40. That is to say, the longstanding and philosophically thick recognition that the human being is essentially known as the logos-being, recall Luther's matter-of-fact acceptance of the logos. Actually, his understanding that the human being is a logos-being accounts for his oft-mentioned observation about the difference between preaching to a human being and preaching to a donkey. The logos-being of the human being is not only the reason that the human beings in the pew can understand our preaching, it is the basis for our fittedness, if you will, for the gospel. After the insurgency at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Eden, human beings are still human beings. Read Luther's *Disputation Concerning Man.* Think of the impact of the incarnation on man. Read of the incarnation of the Logos and what it means that God became a member of the species of us logos-beings.

41. See my "Pain, Suffering, Lament," *LOGIA* 24, no. 2 (Eastertide 2015): 11. The interior quotation is from Brian Brock, "Augustine's Incitement to Lament, from the *Enarrationes in Psalmos,*" in *Evoking Lament: A Theological Discussion*, ed. Eva Harasta and Brian Brock (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 188.

Scripture as a rebuttal of postmodernism's depredations of Heraclitus's logos and John's Logos alike.

Good poetry and great literature can change our lives. For example, "Rebellion" and "The Grand Inquisitor" in Book Five of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* can make us look at suffering and think about God and our fellow man in an entirely different way. The southern Christian author Flannery O'Connor says that good writing is not simply about abstract meaningfulness but about *experienced* meaningfulness, which is why it won't do to read a summary of a good story. You have to read the story as written in its entirety in order to experience meaning. So, it turns out that reading is a reply to postmodernism's (merely theoretical but powerfully willful) degradation of language. The Bible is not less impactful on our thinking than great literature. This reality can be denied in theory but not in its experienced meaningfulness, that is, in the reading of it. That is to say, postmodernism can persuade us of its plausibility only if we do not "take and read." But in the case of Scripture there is more to it.

The word of God as written rewrites us.

The Scriptures are text, but they are text authored by God himself, personally. Our Lutheran sensibility, not to mention the practice of the entire church of Christ for millennia, is to begin with the psalms for engaging in, and sharing the reality of, communication and communion with the personal God personally. "The Psalms press us to understand ourselves as undergoing a redemption guided by texts, in which direct conversation with God is the only constant—and thus the generative condition."[42]

Rather than trying to answer certain preformed questions with the help of Scripture and tradition, this means that we must attempt to position ourselves within the acoustic realm of Scripture. Within this space, our attempts to listen to the will of God will constantly engender the need to listen to the voices of those who have read before us. Of course, what it is that needs to be heard and which particular insight of which thread of the Christian exegetical tradition (or of other discourses) will appear to fit within the acoustic realm of Scripture cannot be predetermined. . . . Engagement in this interpretation[43] may not leave us time

to give a full account of our hermeneutical presuppositions. . . . I am not claiming that the book of Psalms contains the whole biblical witness without remainder, but it can help advance an interpretive proposal that I believe is especially promising for a contemporary church struggling with having distanced itself from Scripture.[44]

In other words, take up your Bible and read the Psalms! The word of God as written rewrites us. The Psalms redeem, rewrite, re-create, renew us in the reading and the praying of these words, words that come from God and which we speak back to him, thus making his words our words while he is carrying out an ontological makeover of our human being. In the words of the Little Bible and the other sixty-five books of the Bible God works on us ontologically as no one else can.

In summary of our third thesis, namely, that as language (textual first, then preached and taught), the word of God, or Holy Scripture, is (1) inherently intentional and (2) ontologically formative for human beings, I have reiterated the inherent intentionality of all language but in order to emphasize the means-of-grace character of God's word. This is the work that the Scriptures (and indeed Holy Baptism, the Eucharist, and confession and absolution) do to us ontologically. That is to say, the power of God's word is neither theoretical nor figurative.

"God cannot be treated with, God cannot be apprehended *nisi per verbum,* except through the word." This is not a proposition that demands our pastoral assent; it demands our pastoral commitment in word and deed to the efficacious external means-of-grace disposition toward Scripture. This means taking up the Bible and reading it for all it is worth. The Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggeman has a wonderful title testifying to the Bible as *The Word that Redescribes the World.*[45] He means by this that God remakes us by bringing us into the wider world of *God* involved with everything he has made, visible and invisible.[46]

This brings us to our fourth thesis for our disputation concerning postmodernism and pastoral ministry, the thesis that addresses the (inherently meaningful, ontologically efficacious) word of God in terms of its authorship and authority.

EXPOSITION OF THESIS 4

In addition, being the word *of God* (a genitive of origin), the Holy Scriptures are unsurpassably authoritative. This is what we have just been introducing into our contemporary Disputation Concerning Postmodernism and Pastoral Ministry: the question of authority and authorship.

As a reply to the objections of postmodernism to *nisi per verbum* or "only through the person and word of the *Logos,*" consider Johann Gerhard. My prescription for Christ's church

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42. Brock, Singing the Ethos of God, 269.
43. "*Interpretation* is the use of practical tools and approaches in the attempt to come to grips with a text or context." Ibid., 264. Brock does not speak of applying theories hermeneutically, but about using practical tools such as lexicons, commentaries, creeds, and the mutual conversation of the brothers for attending to the text exegetically.

44. Ibid., 263.
45. Walter Brueggemann, The Word That Redescribes the World: The Bible and Discipleship (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).
46. Another title that will be useful in itself for sermons, Bible classes, or as a conference discussion starter is Marilyn Chandler McEntyre's 2009 *Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies.*

and her pastors is Johann Gerhard's 1625 *Exegesis: On the Nature of Theology*. While a commentary on Gerhard's *Commonplace I* is not doable here, I would like to invoke Gerhard and his Aristotelian-Lutheran explanation of the authority of Holy Scripture. Gerhard was trained in Aristotle's Three Acts of the Mind and knew well Aristotle's Four Causes.

Not to be confused with innovations such as Boolean logic or sentential and algebraic logics in more recent times, the classical logic of Aristotle is deeply committed to discerning, applying, and elaborating the first principle of the Logos as a natural language logic. For Aristotle, language, mind, and cosmos are contiguous. Each of these three legs on the stool of Aristotelian philosophy bears witness to the reality of the first principle of the Logos.[47] Recall that Aristotle's bare-bones definition of the human being treats *logos* as the essential feature of our unique kind of being. *Human* beings are essentially or substantially *logos*-creatures. Luther accepted and used Aristotle in his understanding of the human being.

Gerhard knows Aristotle well, as Luther did. As part and parcel of doing his pastoral and theological work, Gerhard takes great care to define his key terms so that everyone can understand what he is talking about. He invests the first six pages of his *Commonplace I: On Holy Scripture* to defining the term *Scripture.* He explains his terms according to the traditional Aristotelian Three Acts of the Mind.

In brief, the Three Acts exhibit the *logos*-character of the human mind according to three mental activities regarding three elements of language, each one with its own characteristic outcome. The First Act exhibits the logos-activity of *understanding* by defining each key term of the conversation or text, as a moral obligation. Its outcome is shared understanding. The Second Act exhibits the logos-activity of *judging* statements of fact to be either true or false, so it has to do with propositions or declarative sentences. Its outcome is recognition of the truth, just as Aristotle defined it. The Third Act exhibits the logos-activity of *arguing* or giving reasons in our conversations, so it has to do with the reasons given in a paragraph in support of its thesis statement. Usually this act is taught formally as the enterprise of arguing in syllogisms, but I usually plug in informal or conversational give-and-take—an *inferring and warranting,* as we say in philosophy today—so I teach this act as our logos-activity in a region where we have to "mind the gap" by responding respectfully and truthfully to whatever objections the other party raises. The Three Acts, then, constitute *logos* at work in our conversations and texts. This is why Gerhard uses it in his theology. This is why postmodernists shun Aristotle.

In view of our dispute with postmodernism's and Derrida's depredation of language—and keeping in mind the case for choosing the stance of *external effective means of grace* over

and against the stance of *expressionist semiotics,* let us bring into our twenty-first-century disputation one paragraph from Gerhard's theological work to see how a major Lutheran writer employs the First Act in defining what we mean by *Scripture* with great care and scintillating clarity regarding God's authorship and authority.

Luther accepted and used Aristotle in his understanding of the human being.

With the name "Scripture" we must understand not so much the *external form* [*formulae*] or *signs* (that is, the shapes of the letters—the acts and utterances of *writing* by which the divine revelation is put into writing—as the *material itself* or *what is designated,* and indeed the very thing that the writing denotes and signifies, namely, the very Word of God, which instructs us in the essence and will of God. Some state this in such a way that the Word of God is taken either *essentially,* as the very meaning that God expresses, or *adventitiously,* according to what has happened, which are preaching and writing. For as in every writing brought about by a cause that is understanding or intellectual, so also in this prophetic and apostolic Scripture we must consider two points: first, the very letters, syllables, and phrases that are written—the external symbols that signify and express ideas of the mind—and second, the very meanings that are, as it were, something signified and expressed by those external symbols of letters, syllables, and words. Consequently, we include both—and principally the latter—when we use the word "Scripture" here.[48]

This is the *external effective means of grace* disposition toward language and Scripture. It is the way Scripture presents itself. It is the classical Lutheran view. It is the orthodox view. Please note that, while Gerhard uses the word *signified* in his explanation of homonyms for *Scripture,* he clearly does not espouse a semiotic disposition toward the biblical text. Here is why.

Gerhard's mention of symbols and significations of Scripture is congruent with our Lutheran definition of Holy Baptism. We confess that baptism symbolizes our union with Christ in his death and in his resurrection, but also that it in fact unites us with him in his death and resurrection (Romans 6). What we reject is any claim that baptism *merely* symbolizes God's grace to us. Our confession in the catechisms, for example, is that baptism is a means of grace, not a metaphor. Similarly, as Ger-

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47. That is, to the Logos as the first principle par excellence. There can be no knowing that the Logos is the Second Person of the Trinity who became incarnate for us apart from biblical revelation. But, given the biblical revelation of John's and the Holy Ghost's words in John 1, there is a retroactive christological realization as to what's going on with the Greek concept of *logos* because of the incanation of the *Logos* in the fullness of time.

48. Gerhard, 36–37.

hard says, the word of God has an external form, namely, the letters, syllables, and words that God breathed out through his writers, but the word is not *merely* a collection of (arbitrary) signs and (pointless or multivalent) signifiers. It is a means of grace, not a free-play ground for semiotic linguistic theorists. As Gerhard says with crystal clarity, "the external symbols [both] signify and express" because the word of God, the biblical text, is to be taken "*essentially* [this is the robust vocabulary of the Creed, as in the Son is of one *substance*], as the very meaning that God expresses." The word of God, the written Scriptures, are external and effective according to what happens in the preaching and writing of "those external symbols of letters, syllables, and words."

Gerhard speaks about God himself being the efficient cause of Scripture.

Voelz's work would have benefited greatly from such Aristotelian-Lutheran attentiveness to the Three Acts, as Heidegger explains in his lecture on "The Nature of Language." Our reading of theological books espousing a semiotic view of language and the biblical text necessitates it.

What does "to name" signify? We might answer: to name means to furnish something with a name. And what is a name? A designation that provides something with a vocal and written sign, a cipher. And what is a sign? Is it a signal? Or a token? A Marker? Or a hint? Or all of these and something else besides? We have become very slovenly and mechanical in our understanding and use of signs.

Is the name, is the word a sign? *Everything depends on how we think of what the words "sign" and "name" say.*[49]

As an outgrowth of his commitment to the Three Acts, Gerhard speaks about God himself being the efficient cause of Scripture. By employing this vocabulary he is assuming that his readers are classically and Lutheranly educated in Aristotle's Four Causes.[50] By saying that God himself is the efficient cause of Scripture, Gerhard is certifying that the biblical text is inherently meaningful, normative, and authoritative *because* the words of the text are God's words.

In summary to the point of our fourth thesis, namely, that as the word *of God* (a genitive of origin), the Holy Scriptures are unsurpassably authoritative, we have begun to consider Ger-

hard's exegetical writings. In contrast to postmodernism's dependence on obfuscation, Gerhard writes with what we could call "maximum terminological transparency." This is according to traditional Aristotelian logic practiced according to the Three Acts of the Mind. The Three Acts are in turn an antidote to postmodernism's nihilistic theory of language. Whereas postmodernism's approach to language and Scripture is willful and dismissive of the *logos* inherent in both language and human beings, Gerhard's efficacious means-of-grace confidence in language's inherent meaningfulness and logical universality is grounded in the experienced meaningfulness of reading and studying Holy Scripture for himself as a pastor.

To bring our disputation to a conclusion — at least, to bring my initial contributions to our ongoing disputation concerning postmodernism and the pastoral ministry to a conclusion — let us promise each other to immerse ourselves in the reading of the Psalms. As Eugene Peterson has helped me to realize, the word *meditate* occurs in both Psalm 1 and Psalm 2, the pillars to the temple of the book of Psalms. It is a delightful word that can mean one or the other of two types of growling. It is also an Isaiah word.

[I]magine my delight in coming upon a phrase one day while reading Isaiah in which I found the poet-prophet observing something similar to what I enjoyed so much in my dog, except that his animal was a lion instead of a dog: "As a lion or a young lion growls over his prey . . . " (Isa. 31:4). "Growls" is the word that caught my attention. What my dog did over his precious bone, making those low, throaty rumbles of pleasure as he gnawed, enjoyed and savored his prize, Isaiah's lion did to his prey. The nugget of my delight was noticing the Hebrew word here translated as "growl" (*hagah*), but usually translated as "meditate," as in the Psalm 1 phrase describing the blessed man or woman whose "delight is in the law of the LORD," on which "he meditates day and night" (v. 2).[51]

In Psalm 1:2 the Bible reader is *hagah*ing God's word — growling and murmuring with pleasure *within* God's word. But in Psalm 2:1 the people are *hagah*ing the Messiah, the Christ — growling and murmuring *against* God's Word, the Logos-to-be-incarnate. The Jerusalem Bible translates this murmuring *against* as "this impotent muttering of pagans." Think of the *nisi per verbum* in terms of the activity of meditation or "murmuring" in the face of God's Torah as he expresses it in his words, the word of God. Whereas postmodernism urges everyone to murmur *against* the text, the Bible instructs us to murmur *within* the Scriptures. Here is the truth of it. God cannot be treated with, God cannot be apprehended *nisi per verbum,* except through the word.   LOGIA

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49. Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 61. My italics.

50. For textual and analytical resources on the Four Causes, see Bryan Wolfmueller's 2016 interview with me, posted at http://www.whatdoesthismean.org, part of our Ten Master Metaphors for Understanding Philosophy.

51. Be sure to read Chapter 1, "The Forbidding Discipline of Spiritual Reading," in Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 1–11.