

The Shack: A Journey from Pain To Truth to Error



T. R. Halvorson

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This book offers a new kind of critique of *The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity*. It views *The Shack* from a confessional Lutheran perspective. Its primary concern is the chief article upon which the church stands or falls, namely, justification and the redemption we have in Jesus.

Looking for healing for his Great Sadness, the author of *The Shack* hit upon a particular strain of thought from the renaissance of Trinitarian theology that happened worldwide in the 1980s and 1990s. This theology has much to be commended. Tragically, however, it departs from the teaching of Scripture about the atoning sacrifice of Jesus for us on the cross. It denies the wrath of God on sin, and denies that Jesus bore that wrath for us. *The Shack* teaches a different theory of the cross that springs from perichoretic speculations about the Trinity.

About the Author

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Sidney, Montana



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Abbreviations

- FC Ep Epitome of the Formula of Concord (in McCain, Paul Timothy, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).
- FC SD Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord (in McCain, Paul Timothy, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).
- LC Large Catechism (in McCain, Paul Timothy, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).
- RTT Christopher Schwöbel, ‘The Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology: Reasons, Problems and Tasks,’ in idem, ed., *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995).
- SA Smalcald Articles (in McCain, Paul Timothy, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).
- SC Small Catechism (in McCain, Paul Timothy, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).
- TS Wm. Paul Young, *The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity* (Newberry Park, CA: Windblown Media, 2007). Kindle edition.
- TSR Kruger, C. Baxter. *The Shack Revisited: There Is More Going On Here than You Ever Dared to Dream* FaithWords. Kindle Edition.
- WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. Weimar: Herman Böhlau, 1883–.

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Preface

The novel, *The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity*, has come out as a movie. It is time again for Christians to have discernment about this material.

Many Christians have written previously about false teachings in *The Shack*. A number of worthy critiques of *The Shack* have been written from Reformed and Arminian perspectives.¹ Those address a catalogue of problems with *The Shack*. They are worth reading.

Those who have defended it have given three main defenses:

- It is just a novel. It is not meant to teach religion.
- Don't be so nitpicky. No book is perfect. Any errors of doctrine in it are small matters.
- It really helped me with my own tragedy, loss, or pain.

The approach of this book is different. It adds something to the existing body of literature. This book views *The Shack* from a confessional Lutheran perspective. While it does deal with the preliminary question about novels and movies teaching religion in Chapter 1, its primary concern is the chief article upon which the church stands or falls, namely, justification and the redemption we have in Jesus.

The theology and the story of *The Shack* arise from two pressures:

- Pain, tragedy, loss, trauma, and suffering.
- The perceived inadequacy of Calvinistic and Wesleyan-Arminian evangelicalism to heal pain.

The author, Wm. Paul Young, had a severely abusive childhood. It is a painful story. Mackenzie Phillips (Mack), the main character in *The Shack*, had a severely abusive upbringing by his hypocritical Christian father. It is a painful story that Young tells very well.

Chapter 2 relates these pains and Young’s claim of the inadequacy of traditional Protestantism to heal them.

Parallel to Young’s experience of “the Great Sadness,” there was a renaissance of Trinitarian theology around the world. One particular strain from that renaissance became the Trinitarian Theology in which Young found his healing. In *The Shack* he crafts a story of Mack learning Trinitarian Theology and finding healing for his Great Sadness. Chapter 3 traces these developments.

There is much good in the renaissance of Trinitarian theology. Tragically, however, the specific vein known by the name Trinitarian Theology adopted by Young and Mack gets carried away and falls into error. Chapter 4 diagnoses where Trinitarian Theology is overshot and speculative. The chapter focuses on how the theology’s excesses lead to error particularly with regard to the atonement and justification.

Chapter 5 offers a Lutheran critique of Trinitarian Theology under the headings:

- Underestimation of Christ’s Suffering
- The Lutheran Approach Neglected by *The Shack*
- The Approach of Jesus to Suffering
- Protestant Myopia and Theory-bound Thinking
- Self-contradiction, Incoherence, and Lack of Solvency
- Mystery Meets Mystery: Word and Sacrament
- The Way Christ Faces Temptation
- A Bridge Too Near

That chapter describes Lutheran resources for ministering consolation to sufferers.

When we have worked through the story, the theology, and the critique, we will see that the trouble with *The Shack* is that:

It fails to deal with the shack!

It leaves us in our sins. It dishes broth where stew or chowder should be. It is what Dennis the Menace called “empty soup.”

Chapter 1. Not Just a Novel

“It is just a novel. It is not meant to teach religion.”

In this chapter, we will consider whether, simply because something is a novel, it does not teach religion; and whether, simply because something is a movie, it does not teach religion.

Yes, it is a novel, but not just a novel. Yes, it is a movie, but not just a movie.

Story commonly used to teach religion

Story or narrative is a very commonly used way of teaching religion. Recall, for example: David and Goliath, Daniel in the lion’s den, and Joseph’s coat of many colors.

Zaccheus was a wee, little man,
And a wee, little man was he.
He climbed up in a sycamore tree,
For the Lord he wanted to see.

Jesus teaches in parables, many of which are simply stories, like the prodigal son and the Good Samaritan. *Pilgrim’s Progress* is a novel, but not just a novel. *Chronicles of Narnia* is a series of fantasy novels, but not just novels, and not just fantasy. The mere fact that it is a novel does not stop *The Shack* from teaching religion any more than being a novel stops *The Screwtape Letters* or *Left Behind* from teaching religion.

The Lord sometimes commands that a story be told and retold, to teach religion. He might even command the construction of a monument, to make sure the story gets told. Through Joshua, He command the Israelites to take twelve stones out of the Jordan River and set them as a monument,

that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ Then you shall answer them that the waters of the

Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. (Joshua 4:6-7)

If stories can't teach religion, then why do we tell our children Bible stories?

Theatre: a place for looking at theory

The same is true for theatre. *The Dictionary of Word Origins* says:

A theatre is etymologically a place for “looking at” something. The word comes down via Old French *theatre* and Latin *thedtrum* from Greek *theatron*. This was derived from the verb *theashai* “watch, look at”, whose base *thea-* also produced English theory. It was first used in English for the open-air amphitheatres of the ancient world; its application to contemporary playhouses dates from the end of the 16th century.²

A theatre is a place for “looking at” a “theory.” That is how the Greeks used it, to teach philosophy and religion.

Theatre: origin in religion

The origins of theatre are in religion. Theatre is believed to have evolved from religious rituals. For example, early people acted out natural events like changes in the seasons to try to understand them. Early dramatizations involved moving rhythmically and painting parts of the body.

A second explanation of the origin of theatre says it evolved from Shamanistic rituals, where instead of representing the supernatural, the actor becomes a medium through which the supernatural speaks. That is, spirits possess the actors, and the acting teaches. While in the first theory, rhythmic movement is used, in this second theory, highly energetic, perhaps even trance-state dance takes a more prominent place.

From about 3500 B.C. in Egypt, drama became more than just religious ritual. The themes, however, still were religious and would

be for a long time to come. Priests acted out stories of, for example, what happened to souls after death.

Passion Plays

Being born in Sidney, Montana and growing up in Williston, North Dakota, from childhood I always have been well aware of the *Passion Play* in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Its 70-year run in an amphitheater in Spearfish came to an end in August of 2008. Several times the troupe traveled to Williston where I was able to see it. Passion plays like this were not invented in South Dakota or the 20th Century.

The “Abydos passion play” was performed annually in Egypt from about 2886 B.C. to 400 A.D. It tells the story of the killing of Osiris by his brother Seth and Osiris’ resurrection. This play is typical of themes of the period which include birth, death, and the cycles of the seasons.

The theology of the theatre in such plays is used by critics of Christianity to say that Jesus is nothing special, and in fact that the story of his resurrection is just made up by imitation of the passion plays.

Greek and Roman theatre

In Greece, the “orchestra” was a large circular or rectangular area at the center part of the theatre, where the play, dance, religious rites, and acting took place. In roughly the 6th Century B.C., theatre became freer of the ritual aspect of religion, and the themes of drama expanded to include history, morals, and politics. But religion still was a major theme. The Greeks used theatre as a pedagogical device to teach the piety of Greek religion. Once Greek society “went liberal,” relative to their traditions, irreligion also became a theme in Greek theatre. Religion and irreligion.

The Romans degraded theatre from the Greek ideal. (Obviously, this is an over simplification, but necessary for purposes of brevity.) They created secular, non-religious performances that were crudely dependent on jest, slapstick, wit, wordplay, and song. Translating a certain set of Roman plays in high school Latin class, I remember

spontaneously exclaiming, “This is just a TV sitcom.” That earned me the only compliment I ever got from my Latin teacher.

During the reign of Emperor Nero, Rome persecuted Christians. Mime was used to ridicule the Christian religion on stage. When Christianity was legalized, all performers of mime were excommunicated. In the 6th Century A.D., all theatre was closed.

Drama revived by the Church

Drama arose again, however, in the Church. The visit of the three Marys to the empty tomb of Jesus was shown through action, impersonation, and dialogue. By the 11th and 12th Centuries, the Easter play was followed by dramatizations of the Nativity and other Bible stories.

In the 15th and early 16th Centuries, the Mystery plays were important. These were about 50 short plays, each enacting a Bible passage, presented over two to three days. Priests originally organized these, but after awhile, they were taken over by various relevant guilds. For example, a play about Noah’s ark would be enacted by shipbuilders.

Most Christians in the West probably have heard of the morality plays. Many have seen these as being, in essence, sermons depicting the struggle between good and evil.

In continental Europe, during the 16th and 17th Centuries the Roman Catholic Church established the Jesuit Schools. These produced school plays on all kinds of biblical themes.

In the late 16th Century and the 17th Century, Protestants used plays to mock Papist religion.

English Puritanism and theatre

In 1590 England, a law was enacted prohibiting playwrights from dramatizing religious issues. This law was not made against something that cannot or does not happen. Theatre teaches religion. It “looks at” “doctrine.” Though I do not endorse such a law, I also don’t endorse the ignorance that theatre cannot or does not teach religion.

The Puritans gained power and in 1642 closed all theatres and forbade all dramatic performances. With the restoration of Charles I, theatre re-emerged, but in a detectibly more secular form. Puritanical influence in the British colonies in America prevented the development of theatre here until the early 18th century. This historical sequence sets up today's Americans for the notion that theatre is secular. We have let the unique effects of Puritanism filter our perception of what theatre is.

Lutherans of all people should not be bamboozled by this. Religion, philosophy, and morals always have been staples of theatre.

Religious promotion of *The Shack*

The movie, *The Shack*, is promoted as spiritually comforting and inspiring. Its producers are marketing it to pastors. With permission, I quote from an email received by one of my pastor friends.

As an influencer in your denomination, we want to give you the first invitation to attend an exclusive free VIP pre-screening of *The Shack*.

With over 22 million copies sold, and 105 weeks spent on the *New York Times* and 49 weeks on the *Globe and Mail's* best-sellers list, *The Shack* arrives in theatres on Friday, March 3rd.

The Shack shares the story of a father's uplifting spiritual journey. After suffering a family tragedy, Mack Phillips [Sam Worthington] spirals into a crisis of faith. After receiving a mysterious letter, Mack journeys to the shack and encounters an enigmatic trio of strangers led by a woman named Papa [Octavia Spencer]. Through this meeting, Mack finds important truths that will transform his understanding of his tragedy and change his life forever.

Although there are some that feel the story presents tensions with scripture, many have appreciated the story's parable and *The Shack* has served as the cornerstone for many readers' journeys of healing and a reconnection with

God.

The Shack provides a compelling platform from which to engage in a discussion and exploration of who God is, and how he cares.

The producers write to my friend as an influencer in his denomination. They offer to give him the VIP treatment. But the significance of that – the reason they selected him – is not religious, right? They are not looking to gain any influence in his denomination through him, are they? The producers themselves say the movie is a platform to engage in discussion and exploration about who God is and how he cares. But that’s not religion, right? They themselves speak of “the story’s parable,” but it’s not a parable, right?

The author says it’s theology

The Shack is a novel, but not just a novel. The movie is a movie, but not just a movie. This movie does what theatre always has. It provides a place to look at a theory. The book contains many extended didactic dialogues, conversations that teach religious doctrine. The author himself says,

Please don’t misunderstand me; *The Shack* is theology. But it is theology wrapped in story, the Word becoming flesh and living inside the blood and bones of common human experience.³

The Shack’s author, Wm. Paul Young, writes the foreword in *The Shack Revisited* by C. Baxter Kruger. He says, “If you want to understand better the perspectives and theology that frame *The Shack*, this book is for you.”⁴

Chapter 2. Pain

The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity is a presentation of Trinitarian Theology and perichoresis⁵ in the form of story, novel, and dialogue. This Trinitarian Theology is both like and not like our Lutheran confession of the Trinity.⁶ The differences are contrary to the chief article on which the church stands or falls: justification and the redemption we have in Jesus.⁷

Failure of traditional Protestantism

The theology and the story arise from two pressures:

- Pain, loss, and suffering.
- The perceived inadequacy of Calvinistic and Wesleyan-Arminian evangelicalism to heal pain.

Calvinism, with its limited atonement, double predestination⁸ and Augustinian doctrine of original sin, law, and wrath, is seen as too mean⁹ and rotten¹⁰ to heal. These doctrines are taken as basically making you doubt that God wants you to be saved.

Wesleyanism, Arminianism, and synergistic Americanized Evangelicalism lay on the sufferer too heavy a series of burdens, such as the burden to accept Jesus as your personal savior¹¹ and lead a sanctified life. Those performance demands lead to defeat and despair that only add to pain.

The Shack's author “cried out to God for healing, rededicating himself and his life a hundred times, until his ‘rededicator’ finally burned out.”¹² It is not funny, but I must admit, I laugh when I read that, and I suspect that many of you Lutherans out there did the same at the words “rededicator” and “burned out,” particularly those of you who have been delivered from performance driven Evangelicalism.

These two pressures – pain and the inadequacy of “traditional Christianity” – drive a person in pain to look for something else, or drive those who try to help persons in pain to find something else.

Mack’s abused upbringing

Mack, the main character in *The Shack*, had a severely abusive upbringing by his hypocritical Christian father. Besides being a child abuser, his father was a drunk and a vicious wife beater. At a youth revival when he was 13, Mack told a church leader about his sense of guilt for failing to step in and help his mother on multiple occasions when his father beat her unconscious. The leader told Mack’s father. When Mack got home, all members of the family except his father were absent.

For almost two days, tied to the big oak at the back of the house, he was beaten with a belt and Bible verses every time his dad woke from a stupor and put down his bottle. Two weeks later, when Mack was finally able to put one foot in front of the other again, he just up and walked away from home. But before he left, he put varmint poison in every bottle of booze he could find on the farm.¹³

Mack became a performance driven people pleaser. He excelled at seminary and in work following school.

Precious Missy kidnapped and murdered

While camping with his children, his lifeguard skills kicked in and he launched into the lake to rescue a kid who fell out of a canoe. While occupied with this, a serial killer who had been casing the campground seized his opportunity to kidnap Missy, Mack’s precious little girl. Leaving his signature ladybug pin, the killer let everyone know Missy had been taken by a criminal none of whose many victims had been found.

The massive search leads to the shack, an abandoned and dilapidated dwelling in a mountain forest where, on the floor by the fireplace, lay Missy’s torn and blood-soaked red dress. Missy is not found.

The Great Sadness

Mack goes into “the Great Sadness.” He tries to embrace a stoic, unfeeling faith, but “it didn’t stop the nightmares where his feet were stuck in the mud and his soundless screams could not save his precious Missy.”¹⁴

Weekend at the shack

About three and a half years later, one day, there is a note in the mailbox from Papa, who we will learn is God the Father. It says, “I’ll be at the shack next weekend if you want to get together.”¹⁵

Mack goes to the shack, the place of his loss and pain, and meets the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the forms of a large African-American woman (Papa or Elousia), a Middle-Eastern man (Jesus, Yeshua, Joshua, or Jesse), and a small, wirey Asian woman (Sarayu), respectively. He also meets Sophia in a cave.

Over the course of the weekend, through activities, events, experiences, and extensive didactic dialogues, Mack is taught Trinitarian Theology. This theology heals his pain.

Trinitarian Theology in a nutshell

This theology in a nutshell (which can only be an unfair oversimplification and an annoyingly long sentence), is this:

The Triune God, whose persons are all about love and relationship, meet you in your shack, where your Great Sadness is, where your Missy’s blood-soaked red dress stained the wooden floor, where your failed independence, pain, loss, and trauma ruin your life, and reveal that they include you, always have included you, and always will include you, your Missy, her murderer, your abusive father, and everyone else in their perichoresis – their interpenetrating dance of loving relationship – which, when you believe this gospel, heals your pain.

Touching people who are in pain

The author, Wm. Paul Young, whose friends call him Paul, is able

to make the pain vivid owing in part to his talent as a writer, but also to his own severely abused childhood.¹⁶ Paul knows pain, and he connects with people who know pain.

Give him credit. Paul cares about people. He is devoting his life to trying to help people with pain, alienation, and guilt. He originally wrote *The Shack* just for his children, to include them in what was going on inside of himself,¹⁷ to show them what healed his pain.¹⁸ Later it turned into a public phenomenon, where Paul wants us to know that we are Mack.¹⁹

Unique position of Lutherans

We Lutherans are in a unique position. On the one hand, we sympathize with important parts of the critique of Reformed and Arminian Protestantism that led to the theology and novel of *The Shack*. We have profound disagreements with them starting right at the doctrine of the Incarnation with their lamination theory²⁰ of the two natures in Christ.²¹ Because “all theology is Christology,”²² from there, many errors flow, and those errors do inhibit the delivery to sinners of their medicine, the forgiveness of sins. The person who feels unforgiven feels the way Trinitarian Theology complains that Calvinism and Arminianism leave you: in pain *without God*.

On the other hand, just as Protestants tend to see the whole universe of options as confined to the Calvinist-Arminian rivalry and are oblivious to the Lutheran way, in reacting to the insufficiencies of Calvinism and Arminianism to heal pain, Trinitarian Theology continues on in oblivion to the Lutheran way, and thereby has tragically missed the balm in Gilead.²³

In the next chapter we will look at something that happened parallel to Paul’s pain of his Great Sadness. Parallel to Paul being in his Great Sadness, in the 1980s and 1990s, there was a “renaissance of Trinitarian theology.”²⁴ A vein of this renaissance becomes the theology of *The Shack*.

Chapter 3. Pain to Truth

We have seen that *The Shack* arises from two pressures:

- Pain, loss, and suffering.
- The perceived inadequacy of Calvinistic and Wesleyan-Arminian evangelicalism to heal pain.

These two pressures – pain and the inadequacy of “traditional Christianity” – drive a person in pain to look for something else, or drive those who try to help persons in pain to find something else.

Wm. Paul Young, the author of *The Shack* experienced the Great Sadness that his main character, Mack, suffers in the novel, as a result of severe abuse in childhood.

Renaissance of Trinitarian theology

Parallel to Paul being in his Great Sadness, in the 1980s and 1990s, there was a “renaissance of Trinitarian theology.”²⁵ This happened around the world, across denominational lines, and across disciplines and fields of study. Many Lutherans are unaware of this, but it is a pretty big deal. A piece of this would come to provide Paul with his healing, the healing he wants his children and you to have, the gospel of Trinitarian Theology.

As it relates to *The Shack*, the British setting of this renaissance is significant. In Britain, the revival of interest in the Trinity was much influenced by the Study Commission of the British Council of Churches on “Trinitarian Doctrine Today.” This commission met between November 1983 and May 1988. The seminal paper John Zizioulas presented to the commission delineated its task and defined its agenda.²⁶ Zizioulas agreed with the view of Karl Barth and Karle Rahner that the doctrine of the Trinity has become marginalized in the church, both East and West, not only in matters of doctrine, but also with regard to the devotional life of Christians.²⁷ With Costa Carras and James B. Torrance as their joint chairs, the study commission published their report titled *The*

Forgotten Trinity,²⁸ a selection of papers with the same title, and a study guide for local churches. The study guide related the Trinity to worship, Scripture, tradition, our relationship with God, human relationships, and society.

Torrance brothers, Zizioulas, et al.

Torrance, his brother Thomas, Zizioulas, and theologians like them become some of the prime influences on Paul and others in the perichoresis movement, such as the author of the *The Shack Revisited*, F. Baxter Kruger.

Paul himself writes the foreword for *The Shack Revisited*, saying, “If you want to understand better the perspectives and theology that frame *The Shack*, this book is for you.”²⁹ He describes Kruger as “A Mississippi theologian who cut his intellectual teeth in Aberdeen, Scotland with the Torrance brothers.”³⁰

This school of thought, this type of Trinitarian Theology, is not easy to summarize briefly. It draws from many sources in church history including the Cappadocian Fathers, Irenaeus, Athanasius, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Robert Farrar Cappon, George MacDonald, James Torrance, Thomas Torrance, Kallistos Ware, Richard Rohr, and John Zizioulas, to name a few.

A theory-of-everything

In this theology, the Trinity becomes a theory-of-everything.³¹ All other doctrines are affected by it, to the extent of being conditioned by it. The Trinity becomes a hermeneutical principle that governs how Scripture is interpreted. What we are to believe about creation, law, fall, sin, wrath, promise, faith, repentance, conversion, justification, atonement, sanctification, adoption, testament, new covenant, reconciliation, eschatology, holiness, and more is subject to what fits with the perichoretic Trinity.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not to be regarded as a specialized subsection of the Christian doctrine of God, but it functions as the framework for doing Christian theology. It is the point from where the whole of Christian teaching finds its integration.³²

In Paul's own words:

Eventually Baxter and I would like to deal, among other things, with history to help us understand how we got so far off-course, with theology that asks the hardest and best questions, and with the implications that must necessarily arise out of such conversations. If what we are trying to unveil and communicate is true, how does this affect our thinking about heaven, hell, evangelism, homosexuality, work, the role of women, politics, religion, science, the sacred-secular divide, commerce, education, the nature of the Church, the process of transformation, healing, and everything else? We would then like to see this reality worked out in the flesh of everyday experience. We hope to gather together people who can communicate with us what this vision looks like in their own spheres of interest and passion: astrophysics, mothering, arts, media, music, plumbing, farming, fathering, business leadership, pastoring, caring for the planet, medicine, day laboring, teaching, dance, you name it.³³

Kruger says, and rightly, “it would take twenty volumes to set out the details and nuances of these ideas.”³⁴

Paul's larger vision is rooted in “the evangelical theology of the ancient Catholic Church,” to borrow a phrase from theologian Thomas F. Torrance. This vision involves you, me, and everyone else on the planet in a breathtaking relationship with Jesus' Father – the Papa we always wanted. It is trinitarian, incarnational, relational, thoroughly biblical, Christ-centered, and cosmic.³⁵

Streamlining this to the issue of the chief article:

First, there is a perichoresis of the persons of God, then a perichoresis of the two natures in Christ, and then a perichoresis of fallen sinners in God through Christ, which is our salvation.³⁶

Truth in the Trinitarian renaissance

I agree that the Trinity was marginalized. I agree that the Trinity should be dusted off from the shelf of academia and technicality and made the lay person's bread, breath, prayer, and song. I am on board with that part of the agenda of Trinitarian renaissance. Nine of my catechetical evangelism articles published in my local newspaper are about the Trinity.³⁷ Those articles seek to show how the Trinity is a vital, personal concern for the lay person, a matter close to heart, and an indispensable part of the evangelical appeal of the Gospel.

Trinitarian Theology's theologians, pastors, teachers, and writers have created beautiful, flourishing, and inspirational expressions of many true things about the Trinity and many true implications of the Trinity for family, church, and society. Up to that point, Trinitarian Theology is a journey from pain to truth.

That is why it is tragic, so tragic, that many in the movement have fallen into error in ways that depart from the chief article on which the church stands or falls, justification and the redemption we have in Jesus. Trinitarian Theology, when it goes beyond what is revealed in Scripture, becomes a springboard for speculation. It becomes yet another Enthusiasm that bases beliefs on *intra nos* (within us) sources aside from the external Word and Sacrament. It becomes a *sola trinitas* that overrules *sola scriptura*, thereby changing the doctrines of law, sin, wrath, atonement, and justification, which loses the Gospel.

The next chapter will explore that tragedy. It will explore how the journey from pain to truth got carried away, how it overshot, and led to error. As a foreshadowing, one way of describing the problem is that a vicarious humanity of Christ subsumes and eclipses the vicarious sacrifice of Christ.

As a typical American, I was an individualist. I had always believed that Jesus was the Son of God and that he became a human being, but I thought of him as an individual who did something *for us*. I had not seen – even though Professor Torrance was telling us so fifty times a day, in his great phrase “the vicarious humanity of

Christ”— that in Jesus something happened not only for us, but *to us* and *with us*.³⁸

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Chapter 4. Truth to Error

We have seen that *The Shack* and its theology arise from two pressures experienced by its author, Wm. Paul Young, and main character, Mackenzie Phillips: pain and the inadequacy of “traditional Christianity” to heal it. American Protestantism could not sooth Paul’s or Mack’s Great Sadness.

We have seen that the origin of the theology of *The Shack* in the “renaissance of trinitarian theology.”³⁹ This renaissance happened parallel to Paul’s experience of his Great Sadness. In one vein of the renaissance, Paul found healing. In *The Shack* he crafts a story of Mack learning Trinitarian Theology and finding his healing.

In the previous chapter, I assessed Paul’s movement from pain to Trinitarian Theology as, up to a point, a movement from pain to truth. The Trinity has been marginalized. A renewal of Trinitarian faith should happen. That is true. Pain brought Paul to this, and this much is good.

Springboarding beyond Scripture

Tragically, however, the specific vein known by the name Trinitarian Theology gets carried away and falls into error.

Trinitarian Theology, when it goes beyond what is revealed in Scripture, becomes a springboard for speculation. It becomes yet another Enthusiasm⁴⁰ that bases beliefs on *intra nos* sources, which are notions and experiences from inside us. Those beliefs overrule the *extra nos* means of grace, which are the external Word⁴¹ and Sacraments.

Giving authority to its speculations and Enthusiasm, it becomes a *sola trinitas* that overrules *sola scriptura*. This changes the doctrines of law, fall, sin, wrath, atonement, adoption, repentance, faith, and justification. Having changed those doctrines, it loses the Gospel.

Atonement: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

The Shack expressly and purposely contradicts any understanding you ever had as a Lutheran of this compact confession of the Gospel:

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:14)

This verse shows the actions of each person of the Trinity. Christ offers himself as a blood sacrifice. He offers himself through the Spirit. God receives and accepts Christ's sacrifice.

By these actions, the Triune God worked for us "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood." (Romans 3:24-25) In his Incarnation and state of humiliation, Christ was "made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." (Hebrews 2:17) "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." (1 John 2:2) "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10)

Aborting the atonement mission

Trinitarian Theology portrayed in *The Shack* aborts the mission of propitiation. It abandons the work of exhausting the wrath of God upon Christ as our sin-bearing substitute. It does this by declaring there never was such wrath. It says the wrath seen at the cross is ours upon God, not God's upon sin. Therefore Christ suffers not God's wrath on sin, but our wrath. By suffering our wrath, Christ shows that all along, God had no wrath.

Repentance is the change of mind about wrath that the cross can inspire. By meeting us at our most guilty point, at the cross, where we inflict our wrath on God right while He is showing his imperturbable love for us, and by accepting us there in that crowning guilt, God reveals that there never was a wrath problem

except in our insane minds.⁴² When we believe that God never had wrath, that is repentance.. That is choosing relationship instead of independence.⁴³ In *The Shack*, Papa tells Mack, “Forgiveness does not establish relationship. In Jesus, I have forgiven all humans for their sins against me, but only some choose relationship”⁴⁴

Trinitarian Theology teaches that the fundamental thing about God is perichoretic relationship.⁴⁵ Therefore the fundamental thing about creation is creating humans to share relationship,⁴⁶ the fundamental thing about sin is breaching relationship, and the fundamental thing about atonement is restoring relationship.⁴⁷ Sin is not that Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s Word. Sin is not unbelief in the Word. Sin is that they chose independence.⁴⁸ They chose going it on their own. That is perichoretic transgression.

Sin, as its own punishment, psyched out⁴⁹ Adam and Even into believing they were on their own. They believed God had wrath on sin and that they were alienated from the life of God. They projected that view onto God.⁵⁰ Our sin is to reject relationship, so we projected that sin onto God, believing that He rejects relationship with us. Man created that mythology about God.⁵¹ Contrary to our projected mythology, wrath could not exist because perichoresis precludes out-of-hand that it could, unless we want to give to God’s therapeutic restoration of relationship the name “wrath.”⁵²

Wrath is mere fluff

Somewhere roughly around 600 A.D, the western church absorbed out of society a legal and forensic notion. This legal notion supplanted the perichoretic, relational teaching. Whereas the relational truth had been the church’s theory-of-everything,⁵³ now a legal notion was its theory-of-everything.⁵⁴

Had the church not made this wrong turn, we would have known that Jesus came to the cross to reveal that:

The deadening whisper of our separation from God, of our rejection and abandonment, is here [at the cross] exposed to be mere fluff. For Jesus has included us all forever.”⁵⁵

Mere fluff.

Thus, in *The Shack*, Papa tells Mack, “I don’t need to punish people for sin. Sin is its own punishment, devouring you from the inside. It’s not my purpose to punish it; it’s my joy to cure it.”⁵⁶

Vicarious incarnation vs vicarious sacrifice

How does He cure it? He cures it by a third stage of perichoresis. The story-of-everything in its briefest form has three stages:

- Trinity (perichoresis of the persons of God)
- Incarnation (perichoresis of God and man in Christ)
- Union with Christ (soteriological perichoresis)⁵⁷

We are not saved by vicarious sacrifice so much as by *vicarious incarnation*.

I had always believed that Jesus ... did something *for us*. I had not seen – even though Professor Torrance was telling us so fifty times a day, in his great phrase “the vicarious humanity of Christ” – that in Jesus something happened not only for us, but *to us* and *with us*.⁵⁸

It would take thirty-three years, a horrible crucifixion, and a bodily resurrection and ascension to work out, but in the incarnate Son there is an astonishing coming together of the blessed Trinity and all creation – all fallen creation. The implications of Jesus’ identity are staggering. His existence as the incarnate Son means that you are included in the life of the Trinity. So am I; we all are.⁵⁹

To make this work on an ontological rather than forensic basis, in *The Shack* Papa says:

When we three spoke ourselves into human existence as the Son of God, we became fully human. We also chose to embrace all the limitations this entailed. Even though we have always been present in this created universe, we now became flesh and blood.⁶⁰

Others in Trinitarian Theology have realized the error of that teaching, and perhaps Paul will walk that back, given time. But, the

core error of an atonement that does not atone, so that we do not receive justification and redemption in Jesus, would remain. We only receive a kind of relationship that never considered justice, so that God no longer is “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (Romans 3:26)

In the next chapter, I will provide a Lutheran critique of the atonement theory of *The Shack*. The theory cannot withstand scriptural examination. It is oblivious to the Lutheran teaching of the atonement (see Second Article in the Large Catechism). It collapses under its own weight, because of its self-contradictions and incoherence.

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Chapter 5. A Lutheran Critique

Having traced the journey of Wm. Paul Young, author of *The Shack*, and his main character, Mackenzie Phillips, from the pain of their Great Sadness to the truth of the Trinity to the error of denying God's wrath on sin, I offer a Lutheran critique of the Trinitarian Theology of *The Shack*, under the following headings:

- Underestimation of Christ's Suffering
- The Lutheran Approach Neglected by *The Shack*
- The Approach of Jesus to Suffering
- Protestant Myopia and Theory-bound Thinking
- Self-contradiction, Incoherence, and Lack of Solvency
- Mystery Meets Mystery: Word and Sacrament
- The Way Christ Faces Temptation
- A Bridge Too Near

Underestimation of Christ's Suffering

Recall that the theology and the story arise from two pressures:

- Pain, loss, and suffering.
- The perceived inadequacy of Calvinistic and Wesleyan-Arminian evangelicalism to heal pain.

The problem of suffering finds its answer in the suffering of Christ. Trinitarian Theology reduces the suffering of Christ. It denies that God has wrath on sin. It says that on the cross, Jesus suffered our wrath, as if that were worse than to suffer the wrath of God. One wonders how they think diminishing the suffering of Christ helps us with our suffering.

By making the issue of wrath our wrath rather than God's, the conflict that the cross resolves is a much smaller deal. It is as much smaller as we are smaller than God.

The Lutheran Approach Neglected by *The Shack*

Ronald K. Rittgers provides extensive information about the part ministering to suffering people has in the Lutheran reformation. He shows the Lutheran way of consolation, assurance, and peace amidst tragedy, trauma, pain, loss, and suffering in two of his writings:

- *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012)
- *The Reformation of the Keys: Confession, Conscience, and Authority in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004)

Oxford reviewer Laura Kounine says,

He contends that ‘In the sixteenth century, Protestant theologians and pastors engaged in an effort of unprecedented scope and urgency to change the way their contemporaries understood and coped with suffering’ (p. 5). Indeed, Rittgers argues that suffering formed the battlefield on which early modern Christian confessions fought for the souls of the European population, yet it has been a curiously neglected historical topic.

In a lecture on the book at Concordia Theological Seminary – Fort Wayne arranged by Dr. John T. Pless, Dr. Rittgers said:

Here’s the argument of my book, which will save you about 80 bucks. Martin Luther wanted to reform the way his contemporaries understood and sought to cope with suffering, and this reformation of suffering was an essential though understudied part of his overall reformation agenda. Suffering, the reformation of suffering, was central to the Reformation itself.

Theodore G. Tappert, famous among Lutherans for his edition of the Book of Concord, demonstrates the importance to Luther of pastoral care of sufferers in another work that he translated and edited, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003). In this work, Tappert collects Luther's

letters of spiritual counsel, which he offered to his contemporaries in the midst of sickness, death, persecution, imprisonment, famine, and political instability.

Dennis Ngien unfolds the pastoral work of Luther from his single overarching theme – God's ways with people. As spiritual adviser, Luther sought to relate this focus to the events of his days such as evils, severe afflictions, and the prevalent lay abuse of the Eucharist. He counseled how to meditate aright on Christ's passion, prepare to face the terror of death, advise the sick, rightly approach the sacrament of the altar, why and how to pray aright, what benefits could be gained from the Lord's Prayer, and how to live out a life of discipleship under the cross. *Luther as a Spiritual Adviser: The Interface of Theology and Piety in Luther's Devotional Writings* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

Luther devoted tremendous energy to helping the common person understand and take comfort from God's word. An outstanding aspect of this is his work with the lament Psalms, which Luther brings to bear for the encouragement of everyday Christians. Ngien brings Luther's work in these Psalms forth for us today in *Fruit for the Soul: Luther on the Lament Psalms* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015)

In the succeeding generation, Lutheran theologians and pastors continued this work. An example is Johann Gerhard's *Handbook of Consolations* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009).

Another huge area of Lutheran medicine for sufferers is many of its hymns. Lutherans have hymns Evangelicals never have heard that bring the Balm of Gilead to the soul. These hymns tend to have many verses, and go well into the depths of suffering and consolation.

The Lutheran church continues to produce helpful literature with its chief hallmark: honestly facing stark realities. Rather than giving a sufferer *The Shack*, I would give them *The Problem of Suffering: A Father's Hope* by Gregory P. Schultz (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011). From the foreword:

Warning: After you've read this book you'll never be the same again. You will be challenged by its intellectual

depth, encouraged by its spiritual consolation, and blown away by its honesty. Like a roller-coaster, it will lift you to dizzying heights of insight, plunge you down into the deepest imaginable human pain, then lift you out again into hope.

Pain and suffering come in different sizes and intensities for different people, but they come inevitably to us all. A lot of ink has been spilled over the centuries on the so-called “problem of evil,” but there’s not much help in that. Anyone who has personally experienced the mind-numbing and gut-wrenching impact of suffering, pain, or loss can tell you the last thing anyone needs in the midst of that mess is intellectual reflection and explanation. What you need is the honest truth. And such honesty is rarely pleasant.

The power of the Lutheran approach has not been tried by Trinitarian Theology. So far as can be seen from their explanations of *The Shack*, they appear to be oblivious to this option. Having been raised in Calvinistic and Arminian thought, what Wm. Paul Young and C. Baxter Kruger know as Gospel proclamation is a different breed of cat from what Lutherans know, and they reject the Office of the Keys. Instead of moving from pain to denial of God’s wrath on sin and an atonement that does not atone, they should have started by reading Luther’s Small Catechism, and move from there into the consolations and assurances of the Lutheran confession of the Christian faith.

Lutherans, appreciate this: you have treasures for healing pain in Gospel proclamation and the Office of the Keys. More is needed for healing of various traumas and suffering, but that is where healing starts, rather than in the denials and flights of fancy in *The Shack*.

The Approach of Jesus to Suffering

The Lutheran approach flows from the approach of Jesus.

Consider his approach. Four men broke through a roof to let down a paralytic on his bed. Here is the man, paralyzed, on a bed, carried by

others, set down in front of Jesus. Is he a sufferer? Surely, he is. What does Jesus do?

“When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you.’” Jesus called him “Son.” He absolved his sins. (Mark 2:1-12; Matthew 9:1-8; Luke 5:17-26.)

Controversy broke out about authority. Does Jesus have authority to forgive sins? Now that Jesus is ascended into heaven, where can a paralytic find authority to absolve sins?

As Rittgers says, “Not only do the Gospels claim authority over sin for Jesus; they also assert that this divine power was entrusted to his disciples.” (*Reformation of the Keys*, p. 2) Gospel proclamation of the forgiveness of sins and the authority the Church possesses from Christ in the Office of the Keys continue the work of Christ for sufferers like the paralytic.

On the root of the forgiveness of sins, our justification and the redemption we have in Jesus, solace, consolation, assurance, and peace grow for sufferers.

Protestant Myopia and Theory-bound Thinking

The second pressure that drove Wm. Paul Young and Mackenzie Phillips to the Trinitarian Theology of *The Shack* was the perceived inadequacy of Calvinistic and Wesleyan-Arminian evangelicalism to heal pain.

When considering options in what to believe, much of American Protestantism suffers from myopia, a kind of tunnel vision. For example, in the chronic disputes about the role of the will in conversion, American Protestantism tends to view this as a conflict between Calvinism and Arminianism. They have the impression that the universe of ideas about free will is completely embraced in those two isms, oblivious to Lutheran thought. They see their own two solar systems, and think that is the universe.

In a similar way, Wm Paul Young and C. Baxter Kruger weighed what they apparently thought were all the Western Protestant options and found them lacking, after considering the teachings of Calvinism and Wesleyan-Arminianism. Calvinism was lacking

because of its limited atonement, double predestination, and so on. Arminianism was lacking because of the burdens of “accepting Christ as your personal savior” and living a sanctified life. They found the theory of the atonement in these two branches of Christendom not only lacking, but offensive. With one exception where they misuse a statement by Luther,⁶¹ they never give evidence in *The Shack* or *The Shack Revisited* of considering the Lutheran confession.

Owing to this myopia, this oblivion to the Lutheran way, they failed to realize that Luther already had solved the problems they found in their Calvinist vs. Arminian world. Luther already delivered us from double predestination, limited atonement, the unbearable burden of “making a decision for Christ,” and the type of sanctification burdens put upon people by the Holiness Movement, Pentecostalism, and so on. Luther already delivered us from errors that the West perpetuates from Aristotle, Augustine, and others. *The Shack* speaks as if the Lutheran confession didn’t exist.

When it comes to the atonement, Young and Kruger reject the theory of the atonement in Calvinism and Arminianism, and adopt a theory of the atonement in Trinitarian Theology. They present this as if it were a great liberation, but it is still theory-bound. Cue up The Who: “Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.” They fail to realize that theory *per se* on the atonement is the problem, so going from one theory to another does not solve the problem, it only perpetuates it.

As Pastor Rolf D. Preus said in his paper on “Justification” presented at the 2017 Brothers of John the Steadfast Conference:

Beware of such words as theory and metaphor to describe the saving works of God. God doesn’t posit theories. If it is a theory, it cannot be divine doctrine. It must be a human attempt to explain a divine doctrine. Talk of theories of the atonement is talk designed to undercut the vicarious satisfaction of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Luther was as capable as any man in Europe to handle theories. But in catechizing, preaching, and teaching, Luther does not do theories. He does Scripture.

A handy place to see Luther's teaching of the atonement is his explanation of the Second Article of the Creed in his Large Catechism. This Lutheran confession of the work of Christ is not theory-bound. It simply represents what Scripture says. What Scripture says has multiple parts. As Luther says, "this article is very rich and broad."⁶² He pulls the parts together, and simplifies them under the little word, "redeemer."⁶³ (See endnote for quotation of it.)

This rich yet simple and scriptural statement defies classification according to theories. It cannot be house broken. It expands past the narrow limitations that caused Young and Kruger to disdain Calvinism and Arminianism. But, included within this teaching is what Trinitarian Theology denies about wrath⁶⁴ and the vicarious satisfaction⁶⁵ worked by Christ on our behalf. Instead of denying these two truths, Young and Kruger could have looked beyond the Calvinist-Arminian world into the Lutheran solution to the problems they perceived.

Self-contradiction, Incoherence, Lack of Solvency

Trinitarian Theology identifies a problem, and proposes the Trinity as the solution. At key points, however, it actually abandons using the Trinity as the solution, and stops short of the distance it says it goes.

Trinitarian Theology says God never had wrath on sin. The belief that he did was a projection of our sin onto God, a mythology about God that we created. That was our misperception and insane mind. Therefore, on the cross, Jesus does not suffer the wrath of God on our behalf. Instead, he suffers our wrath.

But notice what they did there. Having said the Trinity is the solution, just when we get to the crucial (pun intended) point on the cross, suddenly, they stop using the Trinity. The Trinity is not engaged within itself concerning wrath and forsakenness. Jesus' cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me," is not a real conflict of wrath and forsakenness within the Trinity. It is just Jesus' "losing touch" with the Father's love and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶

Trinitarian Theology does not face the mystery of “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me,” but instead explains it, *as if anyone could!* Luther, because he does face the mystery, denies that anyone can explain it.⁶⁷ Trinitarian Theology psychologizes away the cry of Jesus. This is psychological reductionism of sin, wrath, and atonement.

This reductionism goes along with the ironic reductionism right at the Trinity itself. In their flights of fancy about mutual interpenetration and dancing that they use to expand the dimensions of our speculation about God, ironically, they reduce God to a flat, cardboard cutout of “relationship” that means sin is only social, and therefore God cannot have wrath because wrath is antisocial. That is social-reductionism, an oversimplification of the Trinity. The simultaneity of wrath and love in God is rather more complex and rather more mysterious.

Mystery Meets Mystery: Word and Sacrament

These are mysteries:

- wrath and love
- God forsaking God

While accusing traditional Protestant theology of using law to tame God and maintain control, ironically, Trinitarian Theology uses “relationship” as law to tame God and maintain control. They won’t let God have wrath. *They forbid him!*

This they did because of the pressure to heal pain. They want something for their Great Sadness, the fear that God forsakes them. So they use one of the oldest self-medications ever: denial. Just deny it. Just says there is no wrath. This is how they tame the mystery.

Again, in their Protestant myopia, they never considered that Luther already delivered the solution in his teaching of Word and Sacrament. Yes, we need a way to deal with the mystery of wrath and love. God gave the way to us. The way is the external means of grace. Mystery meets mystery: Word and Sacrament meet us at the cross of wrath and love.

In the face of all wrath, God gives you his word on love. He promises, God for Jesus' sake forgives you all your sins, adopts you as his child, and makes you fully accepted in the Beloved. This we hear in the proclamation of the Gospel, and despite all nightmares and monsters of uncertainty over the mystery of wrath and love, we cling to the Word, and do not look behind it for theories.

God also gives his command and promise to Baptism. He gives his command and promise to the Lord's Supper. He even, by his Word, makes bread and wine become his true body and blood that you may receive by your mouth at the Communion rail. Despite all the accusations of the Law, regardless what apparitions of wrath may frighten you, Luther teaches in the Small Catechism, that the words of Christ that his blood is "given and shed for you for the remission of sins" convey what they say, the remission of sins. By his Word and Sacrament, you have exactly what these words say, "the forgiveness of sins."⁶⁸

The Shack would have you turn to a theory about the Trinity instead of the Word and Sacrament. That is why it is only one more in a long string of Enthusiasms that rely on internal notions rather than the external Word. According to the theory, our knowledge of the truth arises from experiencing within ourselves the perichoretic life of the Trinity. The truths we learn from this immediate – immediate, without medium, without means, without Word or Sacrament – condition what the Bible is allowed to say about law, sin, wrath, atonement, repentance, faith, and justification. Knowledge becomes *intra nos* (within us), and cut loose from assurance promised in the *extra nos* (without us, outside of us) means of grace.

The Way Christ Faces Temptation

This ironically lands a person right back at the shack of what is going on inside of us, with the impossible monster of uncertainty because, unless one can detect this inner perichoresis, one has insufficient witness of adoption. This is contrary to the way Christ himself faces temptation.

On the cross, Jesus did not rely on the inner witness that He is the Son of God. He relied instead on the same witness that gave him the

victories in the wilderness temptation and the Gethsemane temptation. In his baptism, Jesus heard the external Word, “*You are my Son*, in whom I am well pleased.” The Spirit immediately (Mark 1:12) drove him into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. The Devil said, “*If you are the Son*.” This was a direct challenge to the external Word. Jesus overcomes temptation by clinging solely to the external Word, “*You are my son*.” He does not cling to his internal experience, his Enthusiasm, but to the external means of grace.

On the cross, Christ was stripped of all experience, sign, support, or evidence of being accepted by his Father. What He had left was only one thing, one solitary thing: the Word. The Word alone, like a lone tree on a burnt off prairie. His human ears had heard an audible voice from heaven in the waters of Jordan: “You are my beloved son.” The Word stands.

That is why, when Jesus says to me, “Follow me,” I *can* follow him, by clinging to the external word of promise and identity, “You are my adopted son” in Baptism. The wilderness temptation for us is when the Devil attacks what we heard in our baptisms. The answer is to cling to the Word that makes Baptism what it is, not to a theory about God never having had wrath in the first place.

A Bridge Too Near

Kruger tries to make his theory of the atonement sound like Christ comes all the way to me. He tries to make it sound like a further journey than what traditional Protestantism teaches. He says Jesus “crossed all worlds to find us in our pain.”⁶⁹ He says Jesus “cross[ed] every chasm between the triune God and humanity [to] establish a real and abiding union with us.”⁷⁰ He repeats and elaborates this theme in various ways.⁷¹ He gives a book-length treatment to it in *Across All Worlds: Jesus Inside our Darkness* (Jackson, MS: Perichoresis Press, 2003)

But in another irony of Trinitarian Theology, its narrative of the cross is opposite to the theme of the movie, *A Bridge Too Far*, and has Jesus battling for me only to a bridge too near. For Luther, Jesus met me in my shack, the shack of actual sin, wrath, and forsakenness, which he bears in the place that was mine, the cross. He came all the way to me where I really was, under the wrath of

God. For Kruger and Young, Christ only came so far as my psychological misperception of God, since that's all there is in his shack. In spite of the flourishing language about God crossing all worlds to include me, in reality, Kruger and Young have Christ stop short of my cross and never make it into my shack.

Conclusion

Many worthwhile Reformed and Arminian critiques have been written. But this is the Lutheran critique:

The Shack *fails to deal with the true shack.*

The mess inside is sin. God has two words about it, Law and Gospel. The Law sincerely threatens wrath, and the Gospel sincerely promises forgiveness, life, and salvation. The Shack denies both of these words. This is a loss of the Gospel and a loss of the Christian faith.

About the Author

T. R. Halvorson was born in Sidney, Montana on July 14, 1953, baptized at Pella Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sidney, Montana on November 8, 1953, and confirmed at First Lutheran Church in Williston, North Dakota in 1968. He and his wife, Marilyn, are members of Trinity Lutheran Church (LCMS) in Sidney, Montana. They have three sons and six grandchildren. T. R. farms at Wildrose, North Dakota, and is Deputy County Attorney in Sidney, Montana. He has been a computer programmer; and an author, conference speaker, instructor, and consultant to industry in online legal information. He is among the authors of the religion column in the *Sidney Herald* at Sidney, Montana. He is the Editor of *LutheranCatechism.com*, a regular contributor at *Brothers of John the Steadfast* (SteadfastLutherans.org), and blogger at *Twin Stone Warden* (TwinStoneWarden.com).

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Endnotes

¹ For example: R. Albert Mohler, Jr., President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Norman Geisler, systematic theologian, philosopher, apologist, and co-founder of Veritas Evangelical Seminary and Southern Evangelical Seminary; Mark Driscoll, author and pastor of Mars Hill Church; James B. DeYoung of Western Seminary; Tim Keller, author and senior pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Manhattan, New York; Chuck Colson, evangelical author; Susan Eby of the Chalcedon Foundation; Michael Youssef of Allsufficientgrace; Michael Foust of the Christian Examiner; Amy Spreeman of Berean Research; Tim Challies, author and book reviewer whose review was published by a ministry of Focus on the Family; and many more.

² John Ayto, *The Dictionary of Word Origins* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1990), p. 526.

³ TSR, p xi.

⁴ TSR, p. ix.

⁵ “The beautiful word perichoresis (peri-co-ray-sis), my favorite theological word ... means mutual indwelling, or interpenetration, without loss of individuality: ‘The doctrine of the perichoresis links together in a brilliant way the threeness and the unity, without reducing the threeness to the unity, or dissolving the unity in the threeness.’” TSR, pp. 112-113, quoting Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981), p. 175.

⁶ People of Reformed, Wesleyan-Arminian, and Enthusiasm backgrounds tend to have little knowledge or appreciation for the role of the Trinity in the Lutheran faith. They are oblivious to the reasons Luther restructured the Creed in the Catechism as part of his making the Catechism evangelical again. They are oblivious to its repeated and continual place in the liturgy, its place in the Sacraments, its place in a Lutheran’s daily prayers, and to the

Lutheran understanding of the Trinity in our atonement, repentance, justification, and assurance.

⁷ Luther called this doctrine the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* ('article of the standing and falling of the church'): '...if this article stands, the Church stands; if it falls, the Church falls.' *In XV Psalmos graduum* 1532-33; WA 40/III.352.3. In the Smalcald Articles, he said:

The first and chief article is this: Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins and was raised again for our justification (Romans 3:24-25). He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29), and God has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6). All have sinned and are justified freely, without their own works and merits, by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood (Romans 3:23-25). This is necessary to believe. This cannot be otherwise acquired or grasped by any work, law or merit. Therefore, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us ... Nothing of this article can be yielded or surrendered, even though heaven and earth and everything else falls [Mark 13:31]. ... Upon this article everything that we teach and practice depends, in opposition to the pope, the devil, and the whole world. Therefore, we must be certain and not doubt this doctrine. Otherwise all is lost, and the pope, the devil, and all adversaries win the victory and the right over us.

SA, The Second Part, Article I, The Chief Article, ¶¶, p. 265.

⁸ Double predestination means not only predestination of the saved to salvation, which the Lutheran church confesses, but also predestination of the lost to damnation, which the Lutheran church rejects.

⁹ TS, pp. 20-21, 124. See also the critique of the sermon by Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the hands of an angry God," and of Calvinism generally, in TSR, pp. 53-56.

¹⁰ TS, p. 167.

¹¹ Dr. Luther explains the Third Article of the Creed, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my

Lord, or come to Him.” SC. Creed. Third Article. On the inability of sinners before regeneration to convert themselves to God or make a decision for Christ, see:

- Halvorson, T. R. “Conversion: To See Decisions Dead People Make, Visit the Cemetery,” *Brothers of John the Steadfast*, December 7, 2016.
- Halvorson, T. R., “The Will in Conversion: Protestant Rationalism versus Lutheran Adherence to Scripture,” *Brothers of John the Steadfast*, December 2, 2016.
- Halvorson, T. R., “A Simple Map of Conversion Terminology ,” *Brothers of John the Steadfast*, November 29, 2016.
- Halvorson, T. R., “Conversion: Trusting God’s Word for Your Regeneration and Resurrection,” *Brothers of John the Steadfast*, December 14, 2016.

¹² TSR, p. 7.

¹³ TS, p. xii.

¹⁴ TS, p. 62.

¹⁵ TS, p. 4.

¹⁶ “By the time Paul was six years old, he had been emotionally abandoned, physically and verbally beaten, and sexually abused – repeatedly. To say the least, he was crippled inside from his early days in life. No child – no person – can withstand such trauma. It creates a lethal roux of shame, fear, insecurity, anxiety, and guilt. These invisibles coalesce into a damning, debilitating, and unshakable whisper: “I am not all right. I am not good, not worthy, not important, not lovable, not human,” which haunts every single moment of life. How does a child, or anyone, cope with an inner world of such anguish? No one can.” TSR, pp. 5-6.

¹⁷ TSR, p. 5.

¹⁸ TSR, pp. 8, 10-11, 14.

¹⁹ TSR, p. 26.

²⁰ FC SD, Article VIII, The Person of Christ, ¶ 13.

²¹ The Reformed theory of the Incarnation is as if two different kinds of wood were glued together. This limits the extent to which the second person of the Trinity is incarnate in the man Christ Jesus. The glue of that lamination is an insulator between the two natures. There is no communication of attributes between them. This distance between God and man in Christ sets up a persisting distance between God and many everywhere. For example, Christ is present in Communion only spiritually, not bodily, on the belief that Christ as man cannot be everywhere present. Trinitarian Theology remedies this with the perichoresis of God and man in Christ. They don't know that the Lutheran confessions of the Book of Concord already had overcome the inadequacy of faulty views of the Incarnation by its confession of the personal union of the two natures in Christ. The personal union makes both the God Christ Jesus and the man Christ Jesus able to be, in his whole person, including bodily, present in Communion. We reject the notion that because Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, He cannot simultaneously be bodily present at many Communion altars. He can, and besides, the right hand of God is not a physical location. The right hand of God is everywhere. FC Ep, Article VII, The Lord's Supper, ¶ 12. FC SD, Article VII, The person of Christ.

²² David P. Scaer, "All Theology is Christology: An Axiom in Search of Acceptance," *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Volume: 80 Number: 1, 2016, p. 49-62. Scaer, David P., (eds. Dean O. Wenhe, William C. Weinrich, Arthur A. Just, Daniel Gard, and Thomas L. Olson), *All Theology is Christology*, (St. Louis: Concordia Theology Seminary Press, 2000).

²³ Jeremiah 8:22; 46:11.

²⁴ RTT, pp. 1–30.

²⁵ RTT, pp.1-30

²⁶ John Zizioulas, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity Today: Suggestions for an Ecumenical Study,' in Heron, ed., *The Forgotten Trinity*, 19–32.

²⁷ Rahner said that if it were announced that the dogma of the Trinity had been a mistake and was to be erased from official Christianity, nobody would be too bothered, neither the ordinary believing Christians nor the authors of theological textbooks. Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, Trans. Joseph Donceel (NY: Crossroad, 1997) pp. 10-11.

²⁸ *The Forgotten Trinity: 1. The Report of the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today* (London: British Council of Churches [BCC], 1989); *The Forgotten Trinity: 2. A Study Guide on Issues Contained in the Report of the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today* (London: BCC, 1989); Alasdair I. C. Heron, ed., *The Forgotten Trinity: A Selection of Papers Presented to the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today* (London: BCC/CCBI, 1991).

²⁹ TSR, p. ix.

³⁰ TSR, p. ix.

³¹ The Trinity as a theory-of-everything has merits. The Renaissance sought the theory of the unified field, giving to the university its name, and while making headway, never found it. The Reformation, without making that its project, serendipitously happened upon it (by grace!), in the Trinity. The Trinity shows something that deserves to be called much more than a harmony of the one-and-many, unity-and-diversity, and community-and-individuality. This harmony solves problems across fields, and thus can be a unified field theory. For example, we see it in the seven simple machines from which all the manifold machinery of the world is composed. Because of the Trinity, I can say that ‘On my farm, I have only seven machines, because there are only seven machines in the world, from which all the thousands of kinds of machinery are composed.’ We see it in *e pluribus unum* underlying the constitutions of Great Britain, Canada, and the United States. We see it in the field of accountancy with its seven elements. We see it in art, architecture, astronomy, mathematics, economics, and so on. A Reformed treatment of the Trinity and the impact of the One-and-Many worth your time to read is Rousas John Rushdoony, *The One and Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy*

(Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1978). The trouble comes when we speculate beyond what is revealed, and use speculative notions about the Trinity as *intra nos* Enthusiasm that supplants the revelation of Scripture. Because, ‘No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him,’ (John 1:18), theology centers better in the Incarnation, in Christology. In Christ, God is declared, not in speculations about God that go past what Christ has declared.

³² Christopher Schwöbel, ‘Where Do We Stand in Trinitarian Theology?’ in Christophe Chalamet and Marc Vial, eds., *Recent Developments in Trinitarian Theology: An International Symposium* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), p. 16. Downloadable at Project Muse.

³³ TSR, p. xii.

³⁴ TSR, p. 64.

³⁵ TSR, p. 63.

³⁶ “This means that the mutual indwelling of the blessed Trinity now includes us! In Jesus, the human race has been gathered into the Holy Spirit’s world. Adam’s fallen race has been embraced by Jesus’ Father and made his children forever. In Jesus, the love and joy, the fellowship and shared life, the staggering oneness of the blessed Trinity, have found us in our shackles – us: you, me, all of us – forever. In Jesus, ‘Papa has crawled inside of your world to be with you.’” TSR, p. 141.

³⁷ Halvorson, T. R., *Catechetical Evangelism in the Newspaper* (Sidney, MT: Synoptic Text Information Services, Inc., 2007), pp. 75-90.

³⁸ TSR, p. 144.

³⁹ RTT, 1–30.

⁴⁰ See SA, Part III, Article III, Of Confession, ¶¶ 3-13. See TS, p. 216, 221-222, 224.

⁴¹ “Try as he might, Mack could not escape the desperate possibility that the note just might be from God after all, even if the thought of God’s passing notes did not fit well with his theological training. In

seminary he had been taught that God had completely stopped any overt communication with moderns, preferring to have them only listen to and follow sacred Scripture, properly interpreted, of course. God's voice had been reduced to paper, and even that paper had to be moderated and deciphered by the proper authorities and intellects. It seemed that direct communication with God was something exclusively for the ancients and uncivilized, while educated Westerners' access to God was mediated and controlled by the intelligentsia. Nobody wanted God in a box, just in a book. Especially an expensive one bound in leather with gilt edges, or was that gilt edges?" TS, pp. 62-63.

⁴² "Here is amazing grace. In breathtaking love, the Lord's way of relationship involves the shocking acceptance of our cruelty. The Incarnation involves the inconceivable submission of the Trinity to our bizarre darkness and its bitter judgment. What sin could be more heinous than rejecting— and then murdering— the Father's Son, and what grace could be more shocking and personal and real than the Lord willingly submitting himself to suffer our wrath so as to actually meet us in our terrible darkness?" TSR, p. 186.

⁴³ TSR, p. 236. In *The Shack*, Sophia says to Mack, "Return from your independence, Mackenzie. Give up being her [God the Father's] judge and know Papa for who she is. Then you will be able to embrace her love in the midst of your pain, instead of pushing her away with your self-centered perception of how you think the universe should be. Papa has crawled inside of your world to be with you, to be with Missy." Young, William P.. *The Shack* (p. 177). Windblown Media. Kindle Edition.

⁴⁴ TS, p. 247.

⁴⁵ "If today's devotees of trinitarian theology learn only one technical term, perichoresis should be it." Roderick T. Leupp, *Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), pp. 71-72, quoted in James D. Gifford, Jr., *Perichoretic Salvation: The Believer's Union with Christ as a Third Type of Perichoresis*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), p. 15.

The *sharing* between the Father and Son in the Spirit is so deep and genuine, the *intimacy* so real and personal, that our minds

are forced to move even beyond the rich notion of face-to-face fellowship into the world of *mutual indwelling* and *union*. The relationship of the Son and the Father in the Spirit is a living and unobstructed fellowship of love of the deepest order. They know one another fully. They live a fellowship of unqualified personal interchange and communion in the Spirit, which is so flawless, so rich and thorough and true, that there is literal mutual indwelling. The Persons pass into one another and contain one another without losing themselves. When one weeps, the other tastes salt, yet they never get so entangled or enmeshed that they lose themselves and become one another. The beautiful word *perichoresis* (peri-co-ray-sis), my favorite theological word, says both things at once.[6] *Perichoresis* means mutual indwelling, or interpenetration, without loss of individuality: “The doctrine of the perichoresis links together in a brilliant way the threeness and the unity, without reducing the threeness to the unity, or dissolving the unity in the threeness.”[7]

TSR, pp. 112-113, (citing at n. 6, Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 168ff, and quoting at n. 7, Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981), p. 175.).

Perichoresis is to dance or flow around, mutual movement, mutual indwelling. Each of the divine persons centers upon the others. None demands that the others revolve around him. Each voluntarily circles the other two, pouring love, delight, and adoration into them. Each person of the Trinity loves, adores, defers to, and rejoices in the others. That creates a dynamic, pulsating dance of joy and love. See Tim Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2008) p. 215.

⁴⁶ TS, pp. 158, 219.

⁴⁷ TS, p. 226.

⁴⁸ TS, pp 143-`44, 207.

⁴⁹ “Evil has its stronghold in our doubt as to God’s goodness, and thus in our fear of separation from God. In believing the lie, we are

irretrievably trapped in its confusion, pain, and projecting mythology. As Jesus bowed to be condemned by us, he suffered fully from our terrified faith in the lie of separation, and from the traumatic world of darkness that lie had engendered.” TSR, p. 202.

“As we shall see, Jesus did not come to suffer punishment inflicted by his Father, or to twist his Father’s arm to accept us. We belong to the Father, Son, and Spirit; we always have, and always will. Jesus died because we are loved forever, and had gotten ourselves into such a profound and astonishing mess that it was utterly impossible for us to know this love and experience its freedom, joy, and life.” TSR, p. 130.

⁵⁰ Blindness in Trinitarian Theology means that when Adam chose independence, that changed his perception of God. It made God appear to be fickle like himself. He projected his sin onto God. That was his new mythology of God and it terrified him. The notion of wrath on sin is part of the blind mythology. TSR, pp. 164-165; and Kruger, C. Baxter. *Across All Worlds: Jesus Inside Our Darkness* (Jackson, MS: Perichoresis Press, 2007; Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2007), pp. 23ff.

⁵¹ TSR, p. 172.

⁵² “Likewise, the wrath of God is not the opposite of love, as if the two were vying for control in God’s relationship with humanity. The love of the Father, Son, and Spirit does not play second fiddle to divine anger. As Papa said, ‘There is a lot to be mad about in the mess my kids have made and in the mess they’re in. I don’t like a lot of choices they make, but that anger— especially for me— is an expression of love all the same’ (121). Wrath is the love of the triune God in passionate action, saying ‘No!’ It is love’s fiery opposition to our destruction. Likewise, the judgment of God is not the divine ‘dark side’ finally having its say. To judge is to discern, to see into a matter and understand what is wrong in order to make it right and whole. Thus, as Pope Benedict said, ‘The judgment of God is hope, both because it is justice and because it is grace.’ And as Sophia says in *The Shack*, “Mackenzie, judgment is not about destruction, but about setting things right” (171). TSR, p. 128.

“Mackenzie, judgment is not about destruction, but about setting things right.” TS, p. 182.

⁵³ “Is there a god behind the back of the blessed Trinity, a divine Ogre in the back room, a cosmic Eeyore, perhaps, or a legalist who at any minute might appear and shame the goodness and love of the Father, Son, and Spirit? Is the relationship of the triune God under restraint, and only allowed expression on, say, Monday and Tuesday? Or is this relationship the abiding constant permeating the universe, the one free and stable, reliable and unchanging reality? If this relationship is not the truth of all truths, then something else ultimately calls the shots, and we can only hold our breath until that something else steps forward. I suspect most of us live in the frayed world between wanting to believe that we are loved for our own sake and the fear that such love is a pipe dream. Here is a critical question: Do you believe that you can change the Trinity? Can you alter the way the Father, Son, and Spirit relate to one another?” TSR, p. 123.

⁵⁴ According to C. Baxter Kruger in *The Shack Revisited*:

In the mix and flow of Western history, a legal understanding of holiness slipped behind the fellowship of the Father, Son, and Spirit and became the fundamental truth about God – at least in our minds. This holiness is not relational, not trinitarian, not the expression of love. And without our knowing it, this legal view of holiness was carried back into God’s inner sanctum, so to speak. How this happened over time is a long story, but you can see something of the point. When legal holiness became foundational for our idea of God, the biblical story was reframed in terms of law, guilt, and punishment. God is holy (legally speaking). We have failed; there must be restitution. The story of Jesus’ coming and death then followed this larger story, and his death was understood as God’s punishment for our sins. God, on this reckoning, is too holy (legally speaking) to look upon sin, and turned his back upon his own Son when our sin was placed upon him on the cross. In our place, Jesus suffered God’s punishment for our sins. You may be familiar with this version of the story. But Young puts nail scars on Papa’s wrists, too (97, 104, 109, 166,

224); and rightly so, for how could the One who dwells in the bosom of the Father suffer and his Father not experience his pain? What agony did Jesus bear that his Abba and the Holy Spirit did not also feel? How could there be a dreadful split between the Father and his Son? And how could there be a fundamental character difference between them, such that Jesus could embrace sinners, and indeed “become sin,” as the apostle Paul says, and the Father be unable to even look upon us.

TSR, pp. 129-130.

The inherent legalism of the Western Church trains our eyes to see Jesus’ suffering as the judgment of God upon our sin, and virtually blinds us to the more obvious point that Jesus suffered from the wickedness of humanity. It was the human race, not the Father, who rejected his beloved Son and killed him. The wrath poured out on Calvary’s hill did not originate in the Father’s heart, but in ours. The humiliation that Jesus bore, the torment that he suffered, was not divine but human. We mocked him; we detested him; we judged him. We ridiculed him, tortured him, and turned our face from him. It was not the Father or the Holy Spirit who abandoned Jesus and banished him to the abyss of shame; it was the human race. We cursed him.

TSR, pp. 184-185.

⁵⁵ TSR, p. 206.

⁵⁶ TS, p. 124.

⁵⁷ “My purpose from the beginning was to live in you and you in me.

“Wait, wait. Wait a minute. How can that happen? If you’re still fully human, how can you be inside me?”

“Astounding, isn’t it? It’s Papa’s miracle. It is the power of Sarayu, my Spirit, the Spirit of God who restores the union that was lost so long ago. Me? I choose to live moment by moment fully human. I am fully God, but I am human to the core. Like I said, it’s Papa’s miracle.”

Mack was lying in the darkness, listening intently. “Aren’t you talking about a real indwelling, not just some positional, theological thing?”

“Of course,” answered Jesus, his voice strong and sure. “It’s what everything is all about. The human, formed out of the physical material of creation, can once more be fully indwelt by spiritual life, my life. It requires that a very real dynamic and active union exists.”

TS, p. 116.

⁵⁸ TSR, p. 144.

⁵⁹ TSR, pp. 140-141.

This means that the mutual indwelling of the blessed Trinity now includes us! In Jesus, the human race has been gathered into the Holy Spirit’s world. Adam’s fallen race has been embraced by Jesus’ Father and made his children forever. In Jesus, the love and joy, the fellowship and shared life, the staggering oneness of the blessed Trinity, have found us in our shacks— us: you, me, all of us— forever. In Jesus, “Papa has crawled inside of your world to be with you” (167).

TSR, p. 141.

⁶⁰ TS, p. 101.

Paul also is profoundly confused about the nature of Christ’s state of humiliation, as is evident from this passage:

“But what about all the miracles? The healings? Raising people from the dead? Don’t those prove that Jesus was God— you know, more than human?”

“No, it proves that Jesus is truly human.”

“What?”

“Mackenzie, I can fly, but humans can’t. Jesus is fully human. Although he is also fully God, he has never drawn upon his nature as God to do anything. He has only lived out of his relationship with me, living in the very same manner that I

desire to be in relationship with every human being. He is just the first to do it to the uttermost—the first to absolutely trust my life within him, the first to believe in my love and my goodness without regard for appearance or consequence.”

“So when he healed the blind?”

“He did so as a dependent, limited human being trusting in my life and power to be at work within him and through him. Jesus, as a human being, had no power within himself to heal anyone.”

TS, pp. 101-102.

⁶¹ “The book was born in the crucible of life, of trauma and abuse; of empty religion, misery and betrayal; of mercy, love, and reconciliation. Luther said somewhere that God makes theologians by sending them to hell. In hell, of course, no one is interested in mere theology. In the emptiness of grief, in the pain, the trauma of suffering, we are not interested in pseudo-promises, intellectual masturbation, or “Skippy, the wonder-Christ,” as my friend Ken Blue puts it. What we learn in hell is that we want out. We learn desperation for life, for healing, for real salvation, for a Savior who saves here and now, who reconciles, who heals our brokenness and delivers us from our shame. We need something that works.” TSR, p. 9.

⁶² LC, Creed, Article II, ¶ 26.

⁶³ “27] If now you are asked, What do you believe in the Second Article of Jesus Christ? answer briefly: I believe that Jesus Christ, true Son of God, has become my Lord. But what is it to become Lord? It is this, that He has redeemed me from sin, from the devil, from death, and all evil. For before I had no Lord nor King, but was captive under the power of the devil, condemned to death, enmeshed in sin and blindness.

“28] For when we had been created by God the Father, and had received from Him all manner of good, the devil came and led us into disobedience, sin, death, and all evil, so that we fell under His wrath and displeasure and were doomed to eternal damnation, as we had merited and deserved. 29] There was no counsel, help, or

comfort until this only and eternal Son of God in His unfathomable goodness had compassion upon our misery and wretchedness, and came from heaven to help us. 30] Those tyrants and jailers, then, are all expelled now, and in their place has come Jesus Christ, Lord of life, righteousness, every blessing, and salvation, and has delivered us poor lost men from the jaws of hell, has won us, made us free, and brought us again into the favor and grace of the Father, and has taken us as His own property under His shelter and protection, that He may govern us by His righteousness, wisdom, power, life, and blessedness.

“31] Let this, then, be the sum of this article that the little word Lord signifies simply as much as Redeemer, i.e., He who has brought us from Satan to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and who preserves us in the same. But all the points which follow in order in this article serve no other end than to explain and express this redemption, how and whereby it was accomplished, that is, how much it cost Him, and what He spent and risked that He might win us and bring us under His dominion, namely, that He became man, conceived and born without [any stain of] sin, of the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary, that He might overcome sin; moreover, that He suffered, died and was buried, that He might make satisfaction for me and pay what I owe, not with silver nor gold, but with His own precious blood. And all this, in order to become my Lord; for He did none of these for Himself, nor had He any need of it. And after that He rose again from the dead, swallowed up and devoured death, and finally ascended into heaven and assumed the government at the Father's right hand, so that the devil and all powers must be subject to Him and lie at His feet, until finally, at the last day, He will completely part and separate us from the wicked world, the devil, death, sin, etc.”

LC, Creed, Article Two, ¶¶ 27-31, quoted from bookofconcord.org.

⁶⁴ LC, Creed, Article Two, ¶ 28.

⁶⁵ LC, Creed, Article Two, ¶ 31.

⁶⁶ TSR, pp. 192-193.

⁶⁷ “I have read that once upon a time Martin Luther sat down in his study to consider this text. Hour after hour, that mighty man of God sat still—and those who waited on him came into the room, again and again, and he was so absorbed in his meditation that they almost thought he was a corpse. He moved neither hand nor foot, and neither ate nor drank, but sat with his eyes wide open, like one in a trance, thinking over these wondrous words, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” And when, after many long hours, in which he seemed to be utterly lost to everything that went on around him, he rose from his chair, someone heard him say, “God forsaking God! No man can understand that!” And so he went his way. Though that is hardly the correct expression to use—I should hesitate to endorse it—yet I do not marvel that our text presented itself to the mind of Luther in that light. It is said that he looked like a man who had been down a deep mine and who had come up again to the light.” Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “The Saddest Cry from the Cross,” Sermon No. 2803, January 7, 1877.

⁶⁸ SC, Sacrament of the Altar, under question 4, “How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?” “It is not the eating and drinking, indeed, that does them, but the words which stand here, namely: Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins. Which words are, beside the bodily eating and drinking, as the chief thing in the Sacrament; and he that believes these words has what they say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins.” (quoted from bookofconcord.org)

⁶⁹ TSR, p. 15. See also pp. 49, 142, 151, 218, 219, and 227.

⁷⁰ TSR, p. 63.

⁷¹ TSR, pp. 49, 142, 151, 218, 219, and 227.