

Luther

for

Evangelicals

A REINTRODUCTION

Paul R. Hinlicky

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Baker Academic

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Published by Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Hinlicky, Paul R., author.

Title: Luther for Evangelicals : a reintroduction / Paul R. Hinlicky.

Description: Grand Rapids : Baker Publishing Group, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017055547 | ISBN 9780801098888 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Luther, Martin, 1483–1546. | Reformed Church—Doctrines. | Evangelicalism.

Classification: LCC BR332.5 .H56 2018 | DDC
230/.41092—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017055547>

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18 19 20 21 22 23 24 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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For Július Filo and James Mauney,
the bishops in my life, alike evangelicals.



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Preface

THIS BOOK IS A WORK in theological hermeneutics—not strictly a historical introduction to Luther’s theology,¹ but rather an interested introduction addressed to the specific audience of English-speaking evangelicals. As such it is yet another work in my scholarly project of liberating Luther from Lutheranism to make him available as a resource to the rest of the Christian world (naturally, I would like also to liberate contemporary Lutheranism for Luther, but that is another story). This book brings also a certain satisfaction of a personal debt I owe to evangelicalism.

Beginning with a high school drama teacher, Mr. Franklin Harris, my own journey of faith has been enriched and stimulated by American evangelicals. Mr. Harris played for me and my thespian friends a tape recording of a revival at Asbury College, which had the hoped-for effect on me of a new and adult experience of the faith. My brother Mark and I, who sometimes quarreled terribly growing up, subsequently attended a Billy Graham Crusade at Yankee Stadium in New York City and walked, arm in arm, down to the crowd that went forward at the end of the sermon. To this day, I think that the message—if not the sacramental delivery—of Luther’s “joyful exchange” has not been better expressed or more widely disseminated in American culture than by Graham’s choir singing Charlotte Eliot’s hymn “Just As I Am.” In time, however, I was made by personal

ambition and academic aspiration to feel somewhat ashamed of these youthful excesses in revivalism, even though in truth I had flirted also for a time with the charismatic movement.

But I did not much cotton to the intellectual obscurantism or petty moralism that I encountered among some evangelicals and charismatics. My adult discovery of Luther's way came when a seminary professor, John Groh, guided me to reading Luther's polemical writings against Karlstadt, Müntzer, and Zwingli. To be sure, these polemical writings hardly serve well in a book such as this one, which is rather more interested in building bridges; they are necessary reading, but for those already matriculated in Luther studies. All the same, I would be lying if I denied that reorganization of affects that evangelicals call the "new birth," which came home to me, a believer since my baptism as an infant, in those tumultuous times of emergence from adolescence to adulthood in the 1960s. This book is a personal acknowledgment of that debt to evangelicalism and a small effort to satisfy it. For that formative experience informs my reading of Luther's doctrine of faith, as that exposition is unfolded in the following pages. Be it noted that my reading is in some tension with the standard doctrine of Lutheranism from the 1580 Book of Concord, which separated justifying faith and regeneration into two different things.

I am also grateful to my Roanoke College colleague of seventeen years, Gerald R. McDermott, who through countless conversations taught me much about the history and dynamics of evangelicalism. He offered valuable commentary on the opening portion of this book. Likewise I am grateful to Robert Benne, whose personal engagement with evangelicals is far greater than my own, and to my newer colleague James Peterson, who cautioned against the insensitive usage of habitual in-house Lutheran lingo that would be offensive to my target audience. Offenses that remain are entirely the responsibility of this author! I would also like to thank Gordon Isaac of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary for his sympathetic reading of the manuscript and his encouragement, especially with regard to the pertinence of the intervention I make in this book. Finally, thanks

are due to Ms. Cara Anderson, my research assistant at Roanoke College, who helped with proofing and indexing.

I try in what follows to win over evangelicals to a fresh reading of Luther, well grounded in the current changes in direction taking place in the field.² I aim to convince them to undertake the theological task of reading Luther for themselves, freed from some influential but misleading interpretive clichés. My strategy is to discuss lesser-known writings and in the process to clear up at least some of the perceived obstacles to evangelical reappropriation today of the theology of the sixteenth-century reformer, taken as a teaching theologian, not a hero or prophet (or for that matter, a villain). The scholarly arguments for my more controversial statements about Luther's theology in debate with other scholars, accordingly, do not appear much in this volume. Those interested should consult my other books, as they are referenced in the endnotes. I have likewise tried to keep the scholarly apparatus to a bare minimum. The purpose is to provoke readers to look at Luther and see for themselves. Of course, along the way I try to provide reasons why this resourcing in Luther is needed today and beneficial—namely, the account of the “crisis” in evangelical theology that is laid out in the introduction and further elaborated at the beginning of part 2.

This book is dedicated to two bishops who in the course of my life and ministry have “overseen” me in ways personal, pastoral, and evangelical. Július Filo was my mentor for my family's sojourn in Slovakia in the 1990s. A product of Lutheran Pietism, but also an intellectual forged in the fire of Dubček's crushed Prague Spring, Filo always lifted up “faith operative in love” as the holistic mission of the post-Christendom church. I matured to an adult knowledge of my ancestral Slovak language while listening to his beautiful intonation of the liturgy and his existentially gripping sermons, suffused always with his own warm piety.

James Mauney has been my bishop for the eighteen years since we left Slovakia in 1999 and came to Roanoke College. I know of no bishop today who is a more passionate proclaimer of the crucified and risen Lord. He welcomed me and sustained pastoral friendship with

me through thick and thin—no easy task in the case of the prickly personality who is your present author! Much of the material in the present book is adapted from studies in Luther that Mauney commissioned me to write for the pastors of our synod in preparation for the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. I am happily in his debt and salute his episcopal “mission accomplished” on the occasion of his retirement.

Paul R. Hinlicky
Easter 2017

Introduction

MARTIN LUTHER needs to be reintroduced to the evangelical theological world. This is true today for a number of reasons. First and foremost, Luther is not the possession of the denominations named after him. Historically speaking, Lutheranism is Luther as mediated by his younger colleague, Philipp Melanchthon, who survived him and put a decisive but ultimately misleading cast on his legacy. The resulting Lutheranism from the beginning dove into “identity politics,” accentuating certain kinds of differences from other Christians while ignoring certain kinds of affinities. Luther, to be sure, battled as much with would-be allies as with declared enemies. This embattled Luther, certain of the impending end of days, was henceforth pressed into service, made over into the prophetic founder of Lutheranism, which thought of itself as the true, visible church of God on earth. Other Christians ever since have taken Luther as filtered by the various Lutheran representations of him (as prophet, as hero of individual conscience, as national liberator, and always as enemy of all things Roman)—even as these others were also caught up in identity politics of their own. In recent times, however, a new Luther picture is emerging that conscientiously seeks to identify and avoid such fallacies.¹

Second, evangelical theology needs a fresh introduction to Luther because Luther is one of its neglected but significant theological sources.

If, historically, we see the sources of evangelicalism in the Puritan doctrine of the new birth descending from Calvinist Anglicanism, the Wesleyan doctrine of the new birth descending from Arminianism, and the Anabaptist doctrine of the new birth as conformation to the cross and resurrection of Christ, we can in different ways trace these genealogies back to Luther's doctrine of justification by faith. By the same token, these various sources of evangelicalism are not entirely compatible with each other; indeed, in some ways they militate against each other and can coexist only to the extent that an inarticulate experience of the new birth is elevated over the understanding of it. But that elevation of experience over understanding has had its day. Evangelical theology today is in a state of internal crisis precisely across this axis.

We can by way of introduction orient our project with the help of two recent works: the *Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, edited by my friend and former colleague Gerald McDermott; and *New York Times* opinion writer and University of North Carolina historian Molly Worthen's history of evangelicalism, *Apostles of Reason*.² The *Oxford Handbook* champions the thesis that evangelical theology (as opposed to popular evangelicalism) has come of age, forsaking fundamentalism and ecumenical isolation to grope its way back to the Great Tradition. Worthen's history, on the other hand, argues that evangelicalism in the twentieth century has been the very uneasy alliance of Mennonites, Wesleyans, and Reformed, united in that elevation of the experience of the new birth, to be sure, but intellectually dominated by the rationalistic fundamentalism articulated in the Reformed doctrine of biblical inerrancy.

In different ways, both theses are true. Contemporary evangelical theology cannot any longer sustain the a priori, rationalistic theses that (1) a perfect being must reveal in a perfect scripture, and that (2) this principle of inerrancy comes first and is axiomatic such that (3) those who deny inerrancy can be "othered" as "liberals" not sharing a biblical worldview and so unworthy of theological engagement. But if these lines of intellectual defense fall, as they must today, all that remains to evangelicalism, it seems, is a shared experience of the new birth variously understood.

Yet all is hardly lost. Evangelicalism has preserved precious accents of the gospel as Luther understands it in ways better than other Christians have, even better than many “Lutherans.” A renewed understanding of Luther’s doctrine of faith can give precise definition to the new birth as dying with Christ and rising in Him to newness of life. Because this new birth is believed on the basis of the word of God, it is experienced; it is not believed because it is experienced (which would be believing in one’s own feelings rather than in the word of Christ). Because the word of God is the word concerning Christ, the newborn believer can let the Bible be what it really is: the manger bearing the Child, the chamber pot holding a precious treasure, the Spirit’s matrix of the faith-forming word of peace from God through the risen—that is to say, vindicated—Christ. In the luminance of this gospel Word of God, the Bible can be the imperfect, even erring, all-too-human book of many and diverse witnesses that in spite of all, *mirabile dictu*, presents Christ to speak His joyful exchange, “Give me your sins and take my righteousness! Give me your death and take my life!” And because the living Christ who conquered sin and death is present in faith this way, the newborn believer gets to be a Christian not in name only but also in deed, a “little Christ” to every wounded person who appears in her path. Mercifully, the Christian does not ever *have* to show God that she is worthy of grace; being justified by faith, she *has* peace with God! Rather, the newborn Christian *gets* to show God’s love in Christ to others, even as she has first been loved.

The preceding paragraph sketches Luther’s take on the four characteristic preoccupations of evangelicalism that British scholar David Bebbington lifted up: evangelicalism, he said, can be identified by its emphases on (1) conversion, (2) Scripture, (3) mission, and (4) the cross. And so part 1 of this book is organized into four chapters looking at Luther through the lenses of each of these themes. The purpose of these studies, however, is not to replace reading Luther but rather to invite reading Luther directly. By overcoming characteristic misunderstandings of Luther within conflicted evangelicalism today, this book breaks ground for a renewed encounter with the Luther texts identified.

One of the fateful castings of Luther by Melanchthon, followed by Calvin, was to take Luther more as a prophet than a teacher—a hyperbolic rhetorician or pulpit orator whose way of talking was not to be taken, strictly speaking, as referencing a way of being, as reality. This casting stands behind the cliché that verbose Luther was not a “systematic” thinker. This interpretation of Luther, however, confuses Luther’s embattled contextual engagements and variegated employment of genres with Luther’s consistent theological substance. As mentioned, the cliché, first fixed by Melanchthon at Luther’s funeral oration, was that Luther was like an Old Testament prophet, an unsystematic oracular voice from the Lord whose deliverances were now to be tamed by a “systematic” theology like Melanchthon’s own or later Calvin’s.

This narrative is deeply misleading. There is a theological coherence to Luther, but it must be found in the creedal and catechetical genres in which he chose to work. Thus Luther’s kind of coherence is not that of a closed system of reasoning. Instead, as we shall see, coherence brings Luther to entertain certain kinds of dilemmas, aporias, or conundrums that faith must sustain between the light of grace and the light of glory rather than prematurely resolve, as a closed theological system would press, even require. Part 2 thus provides a re-presentation of Luther’s dogmatic theology by way of an interpretive discussion of his own most doctrinally important work, the Large Catechism. Again, the purpose is not to replace reading Luther for oneself with yet another Lutheran interpretation of Luther, but to catalyze a direct encounter with these basic texts of Luther for contemporary evangelicalism in its state of theological crisis after the collapse of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy.

I have made a point of including along the way some of Luther’s hymn texts in the recommended reading (the full lyrics of the hymns I discuss are found in the appendix). For here Luther and evangelicalism find common ground in wanting to utilize popular forms of music to evangelize—that is, to sing the gospel into the human heart and in this affective way instruct the human mind. What evangelical theologians may make special note of, however, is that Luther’s hymns discuss

human experience only in the context of a proclamation of the story of God's way to humanity—never as an independent phenomenon or autonomous source of the knowledge of God.

The outcome of the hoped-for encounter with Luther texts promoted in what follows cannot, I think, be controlled or predicted. We can leave that up to the Spirit! But my presumption is that Luther can help evangelicalism through the present crisis of the collapse of the fundamentalist doctrine of biblical inerrancy by the retrieval of a better understanding of its core claim that justifying faith brings a new organization of affects, a new subjectivity, as Jesus explained the new birth to Nicodemus as a Spirit-wrought birth from above. This better understanding of the new birth, in turn, not only puts Scripture, mission, and cross in new and better light but also points to evangelical mission by the Christian torah, the “method of catechism,” as part 2 lays out.

One final accent by way of introduction. Luther, as this book contends, is a witness to Jesus Christ and a teacher of the faith in Him that justifies the sinner; he is not particularly, let alone especially, relevant as a saint, a prophet, or a hero. Indeed, it is to be frankly acknowledged that for some—recalling his treatment of pope, peasant, and Jew—he was (and remains to this day) a villain. There is no need to obfuscate here. Like all of us Christians, Luther was in certain ways a man in contradiction—if indeed he is right that Romans 7, situated between baptism (Rom. 6) and consummation (Rom. 8), describes the *Christian* life. In the case of his larger-than-life personality, his particular self-contradictions (as I will note along the way) are rather dramatically on display in his conflicts with papists and enthusiasts, rabbis and rabble-rousers. Luther the Christian made some bad choices in his life's journey. Like many an academic, he was not particularly well prepared for the rough-and-tumble of politics into which life threw him. In this genuine seesaw struggle of the Spirit against the flesh of the justified sinner, Luther and today's evangelicals (and this author as well!) are on common ground. And that observation about the Christian who never ceases to be in need of a savior from sin leads to our opening overture on Luther's famous hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

Overture: “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

LUTHER'S MOST FAMOUS AND BELOVED HYMN is a meditation on Psalm 46.¹ Luther wrote it in the politically tense time between the Peasants' Revolt in 1525 and the Diet at Augsburg in 1530. During this period the threat of martyrdom loomed over him—an important clue to the hymn's meaning. In it Luther retrieves the early Christian theology of the martyrs and what scholars call the “apocalyptic” perspective of New Testament theology.

Brace yourselves! Luther's theology is radical, disruptive, more and more disturbing the better we understand it. With the opening verse Luther situates us in a war going on above us and around us and even within us—a war between good and evil! Scholars call this battle-theology “apocalyptic.” It is the biblical genre that arose in Second Temple Judaism, which we see in books such as Daniel and apocryphal literature such as the Dead Sea Scrolls of the Qumran community. Apocalypse literally means “revelation,” but in a very specific sense: God unveiling and putting into effect His plan of battle to win back the creation that has fallen prey to the contra-divine powers and principalities of sin, death, and devil.

A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he, amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
doth seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

The twentieth-century Lutheran theologian and New Testament scholar Ernst Käsemann (who himself experienced the apocalyptic struggle of the Confessing Church under Hitler)² forcefully argued that “apocalyptic is the mother of Christian theology.”³ He meant both that Jesus understood His messianic ministry, anointed in the Holy Spirit, as a battle against the unholy reign of Satan, and that the first Christians believed the word of His resurrection as God’s apocalypse of His reign. Resurrection meant that in vindicating Jesus who had been crucified, God had exalted Him to God’s “right hand”—not a spatial location but an omnipresent creative power—“until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Cor. 15:25). Thus Luther retrieves and expresses the leading motif of New Testament apocalyptic theology in the first verse of “A Mighty Fortress”: an overwhelming, devastating, and mysterious power of malice has usurped God’s good earth and subjugated its life to the futility of injustice and death. God’s faithful people groan under a cruel oppressor’s rod. They live by faith, as Habakkuk prophesied, waiting for the promised victory of God.

To enter into the apocalyptic world of Luther and his Bible, modern people have to suspend disbelief about something. We have to allow Luther to figure this uncanny power of evil in the biblical character of Satan. We can bracket the question of the nature of Satan’s reality for present purposes—that is a serious question of contemporary systematic theology. But for the purpose of studying Luther’s claim to Christian truth, we have to deal with the *narrative* figure of the

devil; the *Holy Spirit* makes no sense in the gospel *story* except as the person of God doing battle with the *unholy* spirits. This motif is indispensable to the gospel narrative, as Luther reads it.

In the figure of the "ancient foe," we are indeed confronted with the genuine radicalness of Luther's biblical theology with its challenge to "the easy conscience of modern man" (Reinhold Niebuhr) at home and at peace with massive and depersonalizing structures of malice. There is always a danger of superstition when we talk about "the devil." Luther himself, as we shall see, at times fell victim to it. But if we stay on our guard, we can by means of this figure of Satan enter into Luther's *radical* theology of the apocalyptic battle, which, like John the Baptist's axe, *cuts to the root* of our own cozy peace with malice taking malignant form in structures of injustice.

Samuel Beckett, in his 1950s existentialist tragicomedy *Waiting for Godot*, taunted his audience with the futility of endless waiting, a waiting that becomes habitual and results in sheer, senseless passivity. Luther, to an extent, shares the insight of the existentialists. We are captivated by overwhelming powers that dominate us and make us their puppets. Free will turns out to be but a pleasant illusion when all the choices we have are bad choices within a corrupt and captive world system from which there is no exit—until someone breaks in and sets us free from the strong man who masters the house (see Mark 3:27). We are not strong enough radically and consistently to stem the tide, but are swept away in its current. The very desires of our hearts are captured by the "bread and circuses"—that is, the living standards and entertainment spectacles of imperious powers. These powers own us. We become their puppets, or rather clowns, as in Beckett's play.

But Luther breaks with the existentialists because Someone has broken in for him and bound up that strong man. Existentialists, interestingly enough, are modern people who have inherited the apocalyptic worldview minus this inbreaking Liberator; they are like the ancient gnostics before them, who became disillusioned with the God of the Hebrew Scriptures after the Jewish revolts were crushed and lost faith in the living God promised them in the apocalyptic

literature. Existentialists bravely draw the nihilistic conclusion of pure despair, that there is nothing to wait for even though the groaning life of a creation subjected to futility is just waiting for the world to change, as Romans 8 teaches. There is nothing to hope for. But Luther breaks with the existentialists because here and now, in this old aeon subjected to futility, a righteous man, a champion, a liberator chosen by God has appeared to win the battle for us all.

As a result, waiting in faith is transformed from futility to anticipation. Here and now, faith has something to see and receive, hence also to watch and to follow: Jesus Christ, who heals the sick, embraces the leper, feeds the hungry, expels the demons—all out of compassion for the people as for sheep without a shepherd! Here is our Victor! In naming the name of Jesus, Luther breaks with the existentialists trapped in the futility of endless waiting. They wait for something somehow better that never comes to a world where the more things change, the more they remain the same—eternally so! Their world, as Nietzsche captured in metaphysical poetry, is “the eternal return of the same.” It is the eternal cosmic cycle anciently symbolized in the hooked cross (the Hakenkreuz or swastika), which the twentieth century’s Nazis, in their nature worship, not accidentally appropriated. In such a world without transcendence, Luther finds in Jesus, who came once for all and still comes in the preaching of the gospel, a new ground of hope in the teeth of despair. As a result, a new kind of waiting becomes possible already now, the active waiting of faith receiving Jesus, operative in love. This hope is not optimism based on human calculation, but hope in God as our one, true, mighty fortress.

In hearing of Jesus Christ, those who believe are given a new personhood that becomes real and tangible, on the model of Paul’s statement “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20 NRSV altered). “Faith” is the name Luther gives to this new subjectivity, our incorporation into the faithfulness of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit rescuing us from unholy spirits.

Luther characteristically described this transformation of the existing self by the gospel word that comes from outside the self as the "joyful exchange." It is an exchange or circulation but not a quid pro quo, a calculating tit for tat. It is instead joyful because it gives precisely what is not deserved. It occurs whenever the gospel is rightly proclaimed such that Christ comes again to one by the Holy Spirit. Once and for all, Christ has entered into Satan's kingdom to make, amazingly enough, His own the sin of people by which Satan holds them captive—indeed, to give His own righteousness, Spirit, and life in place of sin and death.

Therefore believers can already now rise up, shake off their shackles, and follow the author and pioneer of their faith through many trials and tribulations on their freedom march. They are no longer owned by this sick and dying system of things but belong to God's coming reign. Here and now believers arise to new lives of *resistance*. "We tremble not for him; / his rage we can endure." These are words of resistance. Those who resist are the ones who have conquered fear and guilt because the desire of their very hearts has been captured by this champion who fights for them, Jesus Christ.

To understand Luther's theology here, we need to reflect on the nature of human desire. Luther has in mind Augustine's famous prayer from the beginning of his *Confessions*: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee, O God!" Human desire is polyvalent. It can go in any direction, be invested in any object. But it must go somewhere! We are natural creatures who seek the good and turn from evil. We must do this, since we do not have life in ourselves but must seek what is good from outside ourselves, as Luther explains the first article of the Apostles' Creed in his Large Catechism. Yet we restlessly chase goods that do not satisfy but rather at length addict us and finally degrade us, caught up as we are in Satan's shell game. Having lost God as the one true object of our heart's desire, at root we fear the pains and death of the body as the ultimate evil. As a result, we are tortured by the guilt of our failed souls that so easily agree to fatally compromised lives, unable to resist but rather finally obeisant to the tyrannical powers selling us false goods.

What changes us from pathetic and guilty minions of Satan into just and brave agents of the Holy Spirit is the coming of Jesus Christ into our midst. He captures the heart's desire not with silver and gold but with His own holy and precious blood, so that we may be His own, living under Him in His kingdom and serving Him in everlasting innocence and blessedness, as Luther explained the second article of the Creed in the Catechism. Jesus Christ, who comes to us and takes our place to bring us to God and one another, is the "one little word" from God that subdues the raging Satan and exorcizes the seductions by which he has gained human hearts. In the name of Jesus Christ, believers receive the power of resistance against the fear, guilt, and corruption all around us.

Some contemporary voices object to the military imagery of the Bible. They would certainly have to purge Luther's hymn from our singing as well! But this objection is based on a profound misunderstanding. It fears taking biblical metaphor literally. So naturally enough it wants to nip dangerous literalism in the bud by repudiating the military language for modeling violence and by looking to replace it with something else. It undertakes this revisionist surgery in place of the basic and essential pastoral work of interpreting biblical metaphor theologically as revealing God—which is what Luther does in the verses of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," the very title itself a mighty biblical *metaphor*.

To understand the difference between metaphor and literal interpretation, consider how metaphors have real reference in the world, even though this reference is to something new, perhaps surprising, and previously untold that must now be deciphered. Take an example: "Pastor Joe is a teddy bear." Literally, of course, this is nonsense. If I insisted that the statement's truth depends on its literal meaning, I would (unfortunately for Pastor Joe) have to dispatch him and send his corporal remains to a taxidermist for stuffing and stitching. So understood, we might then want to censure this dangerous imagery of pastors as teddy bears for inducing religious violence. Obviously, such an absurd procedure has missed the metaphor's very real function as reference altogether.

"Pastor Joe is a teddy bear" means that the consolation and comfort a child finds in such an ever-present companion *is* what people experience in Pastor Joe—a presence of comfort, encouragement, safety, and consolation. And that novel predication marks and reveals something real in the world, denoted by the metaphor when it is rightly interpreted and understood. Metaphors have such real reference by making novel predications through the rhetorical device of paradox. Paradox is not nonsense, unless we take it literally. Paradox employs the rhetoric of apparent contradiction in order to say and force recognition of something novel. In this way, paradox grabs attention to tell of things not yet known nor otherwise expressible.

The Letter to the Ephesians indicates this nonliteral but theologically real reference when it signals the right reading of the Bible's military metaphors: "Our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against . . . the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12)—as in the figure of Satan, the "old evil foe." As conqueror of our fear and guilt, which make us liable to Satan, the Holy Spirit brings as His weapon not swords, tanks, cruise missiles, or predator drones but the new personhood in Christ endowed with the courage of faith, the power to resist in defiance of tyrants—the gifts of that very same Spirit who first led Jesus into battle against the unholy spirits when He arose from the baptismal waters of the river Jordan (Mark 1:12–13).

Let's sum up. In this overture we have been introduced to some of the leading motifs in Luther's theology. There is an overarching conflict between God and the devil, and we human beings are the prize. In this conflict we don't start from a neutral position but are born into a world in which our natural desire for God and one another in a beloved community has been captured by an uncanny destroyer making us his guilty and fear-ridden puppets or clowns. Yet a champion, Jesus Christ, has appeared in the very midst of this captivity and burst its bonds to set us free from both the guilt and the power of sin. He has done so by taking on Himself our sin and death to give us in their place His life and righteousness. Now awash with His own Spirit, we take the stand as courageous witnesses to the reign of

God, our one and true mighty fortress. Thus fortified, we get to live new lives of faithful resistance already now—no longer conformed to this world but transformed (Rom. 12:2)—until that mighty fortress of righteousness, life, and peace comes visibly in all power and glory.

Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also;
the body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever!

The key word: *resistance!*