

# THEOLOGICAL AXIOMS

## PART II

### Assembled by C. F. W. Walther

*Translated from the German  
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#### Preface

As part of our Walther Bicentennial observation we are publishing what we believe to be the first English translation of Walther's *Theological Axioms*. The first installment appeared in the Winter 2011 issue.

These axioms were not written by Walther but were collected by him as part of his preparation for teaching his dogmatics class, which he taught in Latin on the basis of a Latin text. These axioms therefore provide insight into Walther's teaching methodology and into the points which he emphasized in his class.

This collection of axioms reminds the reader of the book of Proverbs. The axioms are best taken in small doses. Readers might want to read and ponder only one section of axioms at a sitting. Each saying is thought-provoking. The student must chew on them and digest them. Each statement presents only one side of a complex question. Statements are often supplemented by their neighbors.

The axioms are intended to lead readers into Scripture. They do not have independent validity. They flow from a study of Scripture. A correct understanding of the axioms depends on a knowledge of Scripture, not vice versa.

The axioms may form a basis for theological reflection and for discussion by pastors' study groups. As Walther concludes, "We leave it up to the readers themselves to weigh their rich and important meanings in their minds." (And, we would add, also their limitations.)

#### XIII. About the Law

1. The moral law was not first presented at Sinai, but was engraved in the hearts of human beings before the fall.
2. If it is a natural right, then it is also a God-given right.
3. In fallen human nature a great part of the moral law has been obscured by sin.

4. By nature people admit that God should be revered, life should be lived honorably, no one should be wounded, and everyone should be given what belongs to him.
5. The Ten Commandments are an epitome of the moral law.
6. In the Ten Commandments you must carefully distinguish between the moral law that applies to all humankind and the trappings of the Mosaic law that applied only to the Israelites in the Old Testament.
7. You must understand the Ten Commandments according to the interpretation of the prophets, Christ, and the apostles.
8. Just as God does not change his essence, he does not change his revealed will.
9. Obedience toward the first table annuls that toward the second table when they are mutually exclusive.
10. The ceremonial law yields to the moral, even in the second table.
11. Love is queen over all commandments.
12. Just as love for God is the chief part and summary of all the above commandments that deal with God, so love for neighbor is the summary and chief part of those dealing with humankind.
13. The rule and measure of what the commandments command is "Love God with all your heart." The rule and measure of what they forbid is, "You shall not covet."
14. The moral law demands thoroughly perfect obedience, impressing upon you that perfection to a degree, in part, or sometimes, is not enough.
15. You must understand the promises appended to the law as conditioned on your perfect obedience.
16. The prohibitions imply that the opposite is commanded and the commandments that the opposite is prohibited.
17. In the law God not only commands the hand or other outward members, but the heart and the entire human being.
18. Not only the outward, but also the inward sins of the heart as well as the innermost corruption of the nature, are indicted by the law.
19. When the Ten Commandments mention a more grievous offence, the less grievous are also prohibited, so that we truly perceive the magnitude and gravity they have in God's court of law.
20. In the genus (of a virtue or a sin) the individual species are always included; in the main species the related species and therefore also the whole genus are included.
21. The idea is that when the act is forbidden, so is the motive.

22. Anything closely connected to the person to whom the law has been given will always be the concern of that same law.
23. When investigating the true sense of each commandment it is exceedingly advisable to consider its end and aim, for it will be easy for you to judge the means from the end.
24. To fully explain the law it is required that you not only relate the virtues and vices each commandment presents, but you must also make express mention of the promises and threats that God has appended either to the whole law in general or specifically to the individual commandments.
25. Under each sin that it specifies by name the moral law refers to all sins of the same genus, everything that gives motives, occasions, or incitements to these sins, and the opposite virtues.
26. One and the same deed is commanded in one commandment and forbidden in another, because it is considered in different respects and purposes.
27. The law not only indicts evil deeds, but also the evil that clings to the good deeds of the regenerate.
28. The First Commandment is contained in all the others.
29. A pious man should always speak as if he were under oath.
30. An oath does not bind you to do wrong.
31. If you have promised to do something evil, you must break your word.
32. What it was a sin to swear to do, it would be a greater sin to do.
33. Love him who begat you, but prefer him who created you.
34. He whom you have not fed, you have murdered.
35. God accepts no soul unless it took leave of its body by his will.
36. Everything you promise you are obliged to do, even if the promise was spontaneous.
37. The last commandment about desires applies to all the commandments before it.
38. The law binds you either to obey it or be punished.
39. The law is a looking-glass whose reflection shows what is above us, the holiness of God and the angels; it shows us what is behind us, the virtues of the first human beings; it shows us what is beneath us, the depths of Satan; it shows us what is outside us, the wickedness of human dealings, and what is inside us, the inner source of wickedness.

#### **XIV. About the Gospel and Its Distinction from the Law**

1. Sometimes in Scripture the gospel is called "law," but never is the law called "gospel."

2. The word “gospel” is either used in its proper sense as the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ by grace, or in an improper sense for the doctrine of grace and of the law.
3. When the word “gospel” is used in its broader sense for the whole preaching of Christ and the apostles, this name is certainly used because the chief part of their doctrine is forgiveness by grace.
4. When by the word “gospel” you are to understand the whole doctrine of Christ, then it is right to say and write that the gospel is a preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins.
5. Wherever the gospel is contrasted to the doctrine of the law, you can be sure that there the word “gospel” stands for the doctrine of grace.
6. Wherever Christ and his kindnesses are the subject of the gospel, there the word “gospel” is being used properly in that it is being distinguished from the law.
7. Wherever human beings who have felt their sins and are contrite are said to be the object of the gospel, there you should take the word “gospel” as the doctrine of grace.
8. Wherever eternal salvation is set forth as the effect of the gospel, you can be sure that there you should understand what is called gospel to be the preaching of grace.
9. Wherever faith is represented as standing in correlation to the gospel, you should assume that by the word “gospel” the doctrine of grace is indicated.
10. An “evangelical law” is an oxymoron.<sup>1</sup>
11. If the gospel is not plainly distinguished from the law, then Christian doctrine can not be kept intact.
12. The distinction between law and gospel is to be preserved in the churches with great diligence as an especially bright light.
13. He who understands how to correctly distinguish the gospel from the law should say thank you to God and know that he is a theologian.
14. Law and gospel differ as to their origins, their subject matter, their style, their effect, and the people they are meant for.<sup>2</sup>
15. You should distinguish law and gospel in such a way that you put the gospel in heaven and the law on earth; that you call the

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<sup>1</sup>Literally, “wood made out of iron.”

<sup>2</sup>That is, as J. Gerhard writes, “The law is different from the gospel (1) by virtue of its origin and the way both of them have been revealed. In a way, people know the law by nature, for it was implanted in the human heart in the first creation and not com-

gospel's righteousness a heavenly, divine righteousness and the law's righteousness earthly and human; and that you separate the gospel's righteousness from the law's righteousness as meticulously as God has separated heaven from earth, light from darkness, and day from night. The former would be light and daytime, the latter darkness and night. And oh, that you could make the distinction between them even sharper!

16. Faith acquires what the law requires.
17. The law shows sin, the gospel grace.
18. The law indicates the sickness, the gospel the remedy.
19. The law demands payment of the total amount owed; the gospel gives notice that the debt has been remitted.
20. The law teaches what you owe and what you lack; Christ grants you what you are supposed to do and have.
21. By virtue of the law of works, the Lord says, "Do what I command"; by virtue of the law of faith, we say, "Lord, grant what you command and then command whatever you want."
22. The law is the doctrine of what man does; the gospel is the doctrine of what man should believe.
23. The law requires you to have your own righteousness; the gospel offers you someone else's.
24. The office of the law is to condemn and to reveal sicknesses; that of the gospel is to absolve and to heal.
25. The law terrifies; the gospel uplifts the terrified.
26. It is not the gospel that condemns unbelief, but it is the law illuminated by the light of the gospel.
27. Although law and gospel are in themselves thoroughly separate from one another, they nevertheless are also most intimately connected in the heart, yes, in one and the same heart. They are so intimately connected that one is inextricably intertwined with the

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pletely eradicated by the fall. Ro. 2:15. But the gospel is a secret completely hidden from human reason. Jn. 1:18. Ro. 16:25. Col. 1:26. Eph. 3:9. (2) by virtue of its substance or contents. The law is the doctrine of works, but the gospel the doctrine of faith. (3) by virtue of its form. The law's promises are conditional, for they require perfect obedience, imposing the condition of perfect fulfillment as the reason God will keep the promise. But the gospel's promises are promises of grace and, so to speak, given away. (4) by virtue of its effect. The law rebukes sin and terrifies human beings, but the gospel proclaims forgiveness of sins and uplifts through life-giving comfort. (5) by virtue of its intended recipient. The law is to be proclaimed to the godless, to secure and stiff-necked sinners, for it concerns the old self; but the gospel is to be proclaimed to contrite hearts and to consciences that have been terrified by the sensation of their own sin." *Loc. th. de ev.* §. 54.

other. Hence there can be no mathematical relationship that would be quite like it.

### **XV. About Repentance**

1. True, proper repentance really consists of having contrition and sorrow or terror over sin and what is more, right next to that, believing the gospel and absolution, believing that your sins are forgiven and you have obtained grace through Christ, which is the faith that in turn comforts and gives peace to the heart. (Augsburg Confession)<sup>3</sup>
2. Contrition, the scholastics have imagined, is a feeling that you take on and stir up within yourself, by the powers of your own free will, the feeling of hating sin, whether or not you really want to hate it. However, this contrition is a sorrowing or torment that the conscience must suffer whether it wants to or not, when it is struck soundly and impelled by the law. (Luther)
3. The contrition of the fallen is in itself, before faith is added to it, no good work. (Kromayer)
4. When your conscience is terrified, and especially when you are going through the great and real anguishes of conscience that have been described in the psalms and the prophets, how will you know whether you have feared God as your own God out of love or whether you only hate his wrath and would flee eternal damnation? The way they play with words and make distinctions between different kinds of tears, they cannot have experienced much of these real anguishes of conscience. But when it is in your heart and you are going through it, it is very different. Then poor syllables and words give the conscience no rest, the way the good, gentle, idle Sophists dream they should. (Apology)
5. They say that people earn grace with such pains, contrition, and sorrow, with such anguishes of conscience, so long as they love God or their contrition comes from love for God. Dear Lord God, what kind of preaching is that for consciences that need comfort? Indeed, how then can we love God, when we are stuck in the unspeakable struggle of such deep and great anguishes, when we are feeling God's great, terrifying earnestness and wrath? These things are so intense that even after they are past no human being on earth can describe how they feel. (ibid.)
6. For the illness to be healed, it must first be perceived.

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<sup>3</sup>Walther: From now on we will cite all the sources from which we have taken these theological rules, when we know them. A statement of the sources for what has already been passed on will be finished in a later volume.

7. It is not as easy to believe you are a sinner as it is to be one.
8. Genuine repentance grieves over its sins and rejoices over its grief. (Augustine)
9. We are most well off when it seems to us that we are as bad off as can be. (Kromayer)
10. God pours the oil of his compassion only into a broken vessel. (Bernard)
11. The tears of sinners are the wine that gives angels joy. (Bernard)
12. The way to start doing good works is to confess your evil works. (Augustine)
13. The sin is not forgiven when that which was stolen still has not been repaid. (Augustine)
14. Faith in Bible history comes before contrition, but saving faith comes after contrition. (Gerhard)
15. If you have fallen a thousand times and then have repented a thousand times, then also admittance to the church should be granted to you a thousand times. (Chrysostom)
16. The word “repentance” is either used in a general way for the entire process of a sinful human being turning to God or used specifically for the first part of repentance, that is, contrition. (Balth. Meisner)
17. When repentance is mentioned alongside of faith in Christ, then the word repentance only includes the other part.<sup>4</sup> (Gerhard)
18. When repentance is described as a means of reconciliation with God, then you must take it as speaking synecdochically (that is, when the whole of something is ascribed to only one part of it). (Gerhard)
19. True repentance can never come too late.
20. Late repentance is seldom real.
21. He who has promised that he will always grant grace has not promised that you’ll still be alive tomorrow.
22. Repentance is not the second plank for those shipwrecked to cling to, but is returning to the ship itself, baptism. (Luther)
23. Repentance is putting your baptism to use. (Kromayer)
24. When our Master and Lord, Jesus Christ, says, “Repent,” he wants the entire life of his believers on earth to be steady or unceasing repentance. (Luther)

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<sup>4</sup>That is, contrition.

## XVI. About Justification through Faith

1. The doctrine of justification is the article by which the church stands or falls.
2. Justification is a judicial act, not a physical one. (Kromayer)
3. Justification is not something done inside a human being, but something done to the human being from outside. (Quenstedt)
4. The word “justify” properly and in general means to declare someone righteous, whether the person is righteous or unrighteous. (Gerhard)
5. In this article, the word “justify” means the same as “absolve.” (Book of Concord)
6. On the part of human beings, justification is only passive. (Scherzer)
7. Justification is a moral change. (Dannhauer).<sup>5</sup>
8. The sin within us has the nature of a debt and a disease; justification sets aside the debt, sanctification heals the disease. (Gerhard)
9. In justification, sin is set aside, not so that it isn’t there anymore but so that it doesn’t harm you anymore. (Kromayer)
10. Justification can be neither increased nor decreased. (Dannhauer)<sup>6</sup>
11. Justification happens in an instant. (Kromayer)
12. The apostle adds the phrase “for nothing” (Rom. 3:24, “freely”) when he says we are justified by grace. So we cannot understand that word “grace” as a gift that inheres in us, a proficiency that is poured into us, which we put to work in order to be really righteous before God. Rather “grace” means the gracious good pleasure of God, which moves him to accept us in Christ and for Christ’s sake. (Gerhard)
13. The audible and the visible word work equally well as the instrumental cause of justification. (Gerhard)
14. A promise is only accepted through faith. (Book of Concord)
15. God is our debtor, not because we have earned something from him, but because he has promised something to us. (Kromayer)
16. Give what belongs to you, but not what you already owe, and you must give it with regularity, or else you cannot talk about your own merit.

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<sup>5</sup>This axiom might at first glance appear to be wrong since “moral change” is sometimes used to refer to the Catholic teaching that justification is a change that takes place in our nature. Here, however, “moral” means that it is a change not in our nature but in our standing before God’s judgment and our feeling about our status. We felt like and we actually were damned sinners. Now we are and feel like forgiven saints.

<sup>6</sup>That is, it is an all or nothing proposition. It is not progressive.



17. Word and sacrament are the means by which justification is given, and faith is the means by which it is received. (Quenstedt)
18. Faith justifies, not because or for the reason that it is such a good work and beautiful virtue, but because in the promise of the holy gospel it accepts the merits of Christ. (Book of Concord)
19. In justification, faith is not active as something that brings merit, but as the tool that grasps. (Gerhard)
20. It is one thing to be justified because of faith and something different to be justified through faith; we are not justified on account of our faith, but through faith. (ibid.)
21. Faith justifies, not through its presence or through its nature, but through its object and through its connection. (Quenstedt)
22. The word "faith" is used either in an absolute sense for a believing heart or in a relative sense for confidently taking hold of Christ himself; the first way (i.e., as a quality that inheres in us) it is not credited as righteousness. (Gerhard)
23. Faith is the beggar's hand which accepts the heavenly blessings that are offered in the gospel. (Gerhard)
24. Faith is not only the hand which takes hold of the cup of salvation, but it is also the spiritual mouth with which we drink from the well of salvation. (Gerhard)
25. Faith has two hands. The one reaches up high and takes hold of Christ along with all his kindnesses and in this connection we say that we are justified through faith. The other reaches down low to carry out works of love and the other virtues and in this connection we indeed show our faith is real, but we are not justified by it. (Brenz)
26. When it is said of faith that it is credited as righteousness, you should always understand that as talking about the object of faith or the faith that is believed in, not as the faith that does the believing, not the act of faith itself. (Huelsemann)
27. According to the nature of things, faith precedes justification, but not according to time. (Gerhard)
28. Faith alone justifies, although it is never alone. (Gerhard)
29. When the limiting word "alone" is added, it refers to the predicate. (Gerhard)<sup>7</sup>
30. In the article of justification, we insist on using the phrases that exclude everything else from that which merits justification, from

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<sup>7</sup>In the expression "we are justified by faith alone" the word alone modifies the verb "justified" not the noun "faith." Justification is based on faith alone not works, but the faith which justifies does not exist by itself without works.

the means by which justification is obtained, and from the essence of the righteousness of the justified.

31. The particle "alone" excludes works, not from being present, but from having any part in bringing about the result. (Gerhard)
32. Faith and love can properly be distinguished, but cannot be divorced. (Gerhard)
33. Faith can be separated from love only conceptually. (Gerhard)
34. Love does not give you the right kind of faith; faith gives the right kind of love. (Luther)
35. Justification and renewal are not so divorced from one another that from time to time a person who is planning to do evil could have and retain genuine faith. Our only purpose here is to show the order in which one precedes and the other follows. For it remains true for sure what Dr. Luther rightly said, "It makes sense and is fitting that faith and good works are together. It is faith alone that takes hold of God's blessings apart from works, but faith is never and at no time alone." (Book of Concord)
36. It is false and wicked for anyone to say that faith cannot justify without works; or that faith justifies or makes righteous because it has love with it, so that it is on account of love that faith is said to justify; or that the presence of good works is necessary in the article of justification or to be justified; also that good works are a cause of salvation, in that without them a human being cannot be justified, so that they cannot be excluded from the article of justification even by the *particulae exclusivae: absque operibus etc.*, i.e., when Paul says, "apart from works." (Book of Concord)
37. Not everything that belongs to conversion also at the same time belongs to the article of justification. The things which belong to and are necessary for justification are only God's grace, the merits of Christ, and faith as that which accepts the promise of the gospel. (Book of Concord)
38. Many testimonies of Scripture do not describe the cause of justification, but only the manner which God is accustomed to follow in the believers' initiation into eternal life. (Conr. Dietrich)
39. That which accompanies something is not necessarily its cause. (ibid.)
40. That which comes after something has not always been caused by it.
41. If a human being is justified, works will follow; they do not precede as a condition of justification. (Augustine)

42. The Holy Spirit talks about faith in many different ways in the Scriptures, in one place about faith bare and in its essence, then in another about faith that is busy producing its fruits. (Luther)
43. Justification is ascribed to faith alone, as creation is to the God-head (in Christ), and for sure just as it is completely true to say Jesus the (incarnate) Son of Mary has created all things, so justification is ascribed to incarnate faith (faith that has become flesh, i.e., that has become love and good works) or to what the believer does. (Luther)
44. Every scripture passage that seems to ascribe something to works presupposes and fundamentally credits faith. (Mich. Neander)
45. Something that is by grace “in some sort of way” is not by grace, unless it is by grace in every way. (Augustine)
46. Faith justifies not from the way it acts or manifests its activity, but from the way it accepts and possesses. (V. Loescher)
47. The faith which justifies consists of knowledge, approval, and confidence, but the way such faith justifies is by the purely passive apprehension of the kindnesses of Christ, which submits to the movements of the Holy Spirit and depends on the merits of Christ. Here you must apply the rule of the Ancients: The reason faith justifies does not lie in the category of quality, insofar as it is a work or virtue, but in the category of relationship, namely, in that which is connected to faith—i.e., the thing you put your faith in is what justifies, the merits of Christ which you accept through faith. In this way, it is not the beggar’s hand that makes him rich, but the treasure that is given to him, the alms that the hand takes hold of. It is not the mouth that satisfies the stomach, but the food that it takes in. (Quenstedt)
48. When a human being is justified through faith (which is worked by the Holy Spirit alone), that is truly a rebirth, since out of a child of wrath is made a child of God, going from death into life. (Book of Concord)
49. The word “rebirth” is not distinguished from the word “justification” by considering how things end up, but in looking at how they begin. For although the person who is in immediate need of justification is someone who is still unrighteous, this godless person nevertheless must perceive his own godlessness; but the person who is in immediate need of rebirth and awakening is, in view of how these proceedings begin, a human being fully dead in his sins. (Huelsemann)
50. To each one who has been given forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake is imputed along with that Christ’s perfect righteousness.

That is, for Christ's sake what he has committed is forgiven him and what he has omitted is imputed to him. (Gerhard)

51. The essential attributes of God are incommunicable to any creature, except those that are found in the person of the (personal) Word.
52. Although through their faith God, who is eternal and essential righteousness, dwells in the elect, who become righteous through Christ, this indwelling of God is for sure not the righteousness of faith on account of which we are said to be righteous before God. (Book of Concord)
53. Neither the divine nor the human nature of Christ in itself is imputed to us as righteousness, but only the obedience of the Person, which is at the same time God and human. (Book of Concord)
54. Not through the essential righteousness of God's Son who dwells in us, but through the meritorious righteousness obtained by what he suffered and did, are we righteous before God. (Kromayer)
55. The forgiveness of sins and the imputation of righteousness are called the parts of justification, not because there are two different actions, but two different ideas, just as when you clothe someone and through one and the same action the nakedness is covered and the clothing is there to see. (Gerhard)
56. The righteousness of faith is a purely passive one. (Luther)
57. You must distinguish righteousness in view of a specific deed done from the righteousness of the person. (Gerhard)
58. Through faith each one takes as much as he stands in need of (in order to be righteous before God). (Gerhard)
59. It is also wrong when it is taught that a human being must be saved in a different way or through something different from that through which he is justified before God. (Book of Concord)
60. Be certain that God has no other way to forgive sins than through the word he has commanded us human beings to speak. If you do not seek forgiveness of sins in the word, then you will gape toward heaven waiting for grace in vain or waiting for, as they say, inner forgiveness. (Luther)<sup>8</sup>
61. No false Christian or<sup>9</sup> sectarian spirit can understand this doctrine. How much less will he preach and confess it correctly, even though he wears out and repeats the right words—he for sure

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<sup>8</sup>[I added the word "waiting" twice.]

<sup>9</sup>[The text seems to have a typo here? It has "nach" (after, according to), but seems it should have "noch" (nor, or).]

does not follow them or keep them pure. He preaches it constantly but you can tell he doesn't have it right. He spits and sputters<sup>10</sup> over it, but ends up taking Christ's honor for himself. (Luther)<sup>11</sup>

62. Those who base their faith on feelings confess the Christ who died, who hung on the cross and makes us blessed, that is true, but they deny that by which we receive him, that is, the means, the way, the bridge and mountain-track, they break apart. (Luther)
63. The Anabaptists, the new Arians, and those whose spirit says, "put your faith in your feelings," who all blaspheme and cast shame upon the holy sacrament of the body and blood of our dear Lord Jesus Christ . . . teach their own dreams under Christ's name and teach mere laws and ceremonies under the name of the gospel. And so the two paths are still the same, as they have been on and on from the beginning: that is, monks, the work-righteous, teachers of the law and of ceremonies, except that now they give their works new names and think up different or new works too. (Luther)
64. No heretic can bear the grace of God. (Luther)
65. It is not in vain that I put so much work into how I handle this article, for I am concerned that people will drift away from it. And there are—unfortunately!—already many among us who despise it and do not give this article a high degree of attention. Also the pope and bishops are dead set against it. If later on preachers come who are sleepy, lax, and lazy in how they preach and press for this article, it's all over with and one error on top of another will come up. (Luther)
66. I often shudder all over at the way Luther, from what presentiment I don't know, very often in his expositions of Galatians and of Genesis repeats this statement: After my death, this doctrine will again be obscured. (Chemnitz)
67. Nobody can grasp or understand this doctrine of the Christian way to be justified<sup>12</sup> without its proper master and teacher, the Holy Spirit. (Luther)
68. Whichever people let themselves think they know and understand it (the article on justification) very well now, they have certainly never yet begun to learn it properly. (Luther)

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<sup>10</sup>[WFW: smears his spit]

<sup>11</sup>Walther: "We hope we don't need to offer an excuse for listing this and the following excerpts with the theological axioms, since they are at least as worthwhile to read as the preceding axioms." This is an apology of sort for the lengthy quotations of Luther which follow, some of which can hardly be called axioms.

<sup>12</sup>[WFW: this doctrine of Christian justification]

69. You see in all the histories that, wherever this article had fallen, every heresy and error rose up, when the people had become secure, thinking they were so familiar with it. After this they fell away in other things and began to dispute about the person of Christ. (Luther)
70. What do Peter and Paul, what does an angel, what do all creatures count for compared to this article, which teaches whereby and how you become absolved of sin, righteous before God, and blessed? If we understand this doctrine correctly and purely, then we have the right sun in our sky, but if we lose it, then we have nothing but bare hellish darkness. (Luther)
71. This point is the capstone and cornerstone that alone produces, strengthens, builds up, preserves, and protects the church of God and without which the church of God cannot endure for one hour. (Luther)
72. Once we have lost this (the article on justification), then we can withstand no heresy, no false doctrine, even if it be ever so laughable and simple, as it happened before under the papacy, when we believed such things we are ashamed to admit now—they fill us with contrition. Then again, if we stand fast in this article, then we are secure against heresy. (Luther)
73. When you lose the article that teaches how you become sinless and righteous before God, then all of Christian doctrine goes with it, and every human being on the face of the whole earth who doesn't have this doctrine must actually be either a Jew, a Turk, a Papist, or a sectarian and heretic. (Luther)
74. Upon this (the article on justification) everything depends and stands. All the other articles have this one in tow and they all have something to do with it, so that whoever errs in the others certainly doesn't have this one right, and if he has all the others and not this one it is for sure all in vain. On the other hand, this article also has the gracious promise<sup>13</sup> that if you work hard and earnestly to stand fast in it he will not let you fall into heresy, either flying in the face of Christ or his Christianity. For it certainly brings you the Holy Spirit, who uses it to enlighten your heart and keeps it in the correct and certain understanding, so that it can make pure and clear distinctions and make judgments in all other articles of the faith and powerfully uphold and defend them. This is what you see in the ancient fathers: where they stand fast in this article and ground their doctrines on it and draw them from it, they remain nice and pure in every point, but

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<sup>13</sup>[WFW: has the grace that]

where they depart from it and dispute apart from it they also go wrong and struggle thoroughly, as even happened at times to the most ancient, Tertullian and Cyprian. And what else are they missing—not only the papists, but all our sectarian spirits, who follow their feelings in contradiction of baptism and other articles—except that they have already fallen away from this article, do not trouble themselves with it, and toss out other ideas to take its place, thereby losing all understanding of it, so that they therefore teach nothing correct and cannot uphold any article with certainty, as you can easily see in their books? Accordingly, they fall further away, from one error into another, until they finally lead themselves and other people into destruction. For where this knowledge of Christ is gone, the sun has lost its shine and all that's left is darkness, so that you no longer understand anything correctly and can ward off no error or false doctrine of the devil. And although you hold onto the right words about faith and Christ (as they have remained in the papacy), there is no basis for even a single article of faith in your heart and what still remains there is just foam and uncertain persuasions or conceit or a faith made of paint and cosmetics. On the other hand, where this sun shines and puts light in your heart, there you have a correct and certain understanding of everything, so that you can stand fast and hold fast to every article of faith, as, for example, that Christ is a true human being, born of the virgin Mary, and also true and almighty God, begotten of the Father in eternity, Lord over angels and all creatures. Again, you will then believe and teach correctly about the Holy Spirit, about baptism, the sacrament, good works, and the resurrection of the dead. You will have a simple faith, not disputing and caviling over God's word, starting neither quarrels nor doubts about it. And when anyone comes who takes one or more exceptions to this article, a Christian can guard himself and drive that person back, because he follows the right expert (the Holy Spirit), who alone reveals this article from heaven and who is given to all who hear and accept this word or preaching about Christ. Therefore such a person will not let himself be led into heresy and error, and if he by any chance should blunder or struggle, for sure, as long as he just does not fall away from this article, he will soon get back on track; for this light consumes and scatters clouds and darkness for you and points it out and stands you back up on it. But if he loses this light, there is no helping him. For when this knowledge leaves, it takes everything with it. Accordingly, you may use and confess every article of faith (just as the papists do), but you don't mean or understand them; rather you grope like you are in the dark or like a blind man who hears about color and talks about what he

has never seen. That is what the best and most pious among them do. (Luther, on John 16:3)

75. This article can allow no error to be mixed into it. The Holy Spirit is in it and those who believe it put up with no error. But if they are led astray that is a sure sign that they have not understood this article. If they had grasped it correctly, they would not have been deceived. (Luther)
76. Of this article you cannot yield or give way in anything, even if thereby heaven and earth and whatever does not endure should pass away. For there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved, as Peter says (Acts 4:12), and by his wounds we are healed, says Isaiah (53:5). And on this article stands everything we teach and live for in opposition to the Pope, the devil, and all the world. Therefore we must be completely certain of it and not doubt; otherwise, all is lost, and Pope and devil and all retain the victory and judgment against us. (Smalcald Articles)

### **XVII. About Good Works**

1. Just as reason knows nothing about the blessed hope of eternal life, so it also does not understand what good works are. (Luther)
2. The term “good works” is for the most part used in a wider sense for the entire obedience of the regenerate and for the new life, but at times in a narrow sense for a specific category of righteous acts. (Gerhard)
3. As sin is unrighteousness or transgression against the law, so a good work is righteousness or conformity to the law. (Gerhard)
4. Good works are to be judged not by the motive for which they are done but by the rule. (Kromayer)
5. Whatever happens in compliance with the will of God, although it may appear to be godless, is for sure completely pleasing and acceptable to God; to the contrary, whatever is done against the will of God or other than what he wills should happen, although it may be deemed God-pleasing, is evil and unrighteous throughout. (Chrysostom)
6. Examples do not prove a matter, but only illustrate it. (Proverb)
7. Examples may not be set against the rules, but must be judged according to them. (Proverb)
8. Don’t look at what the fathers did, but whether they did it in righteousness.
9. You will live wickedly whenever you believe wickedly.



10. In order for a work to be service to God, there must be not only the aim of serving God by doing it, but also an action that really serves God. (Gerhard)
11. Good works have no name. (Luther)<sup>14</sup>
12. Good works are not to be judged according to the words used to name them, but according to the words used to define them. (Balth. Meisner)
13. Only those works are good which are done in a good way. (B. Meisner)
14. If someone does something in which he does not seem to sin, he is for sure found guilty of sin if he does not do it for the reason he is supposed to do it for. (Augustine)
15. Suffering makes no martyrs; rather, suffering for the right cause makes martyrs. (Luther quoting Augustine)
16. Whoever does something good unwillingly isn't doing anything good at all.
17. On the way of the Lord, standing in one place and not moving forward is retreating. (Bernard)
18. When you stop wanting to become better, then you stop being good.
19. Whoever wishes his virtues to become public does not care about virtue but about boasting.
20. Whoever does nothing does what is wicked.
21. Good and pious works never make a good and pious man; rather, a good and pious man makes good and pious works. Evil works never make an evil man; rather, an evil man makes evil works. Just as the tree must be there first and then the fruits, and the fruits don't make the tree good or bad but the tree makes the fruit, so also the man must be pious or evil in his person before he does good or evil works. (Luther)
22. First the man must be changed in order to change his works. (Augustine)
23. When the person is pleasing, then the work is pleasing too. (Kromayer)
24. They teach from their Aristotle that no work should be called or considered good unless it is not done out of compulsion but from a good and free will. All the more, then, it must be true in theology that, before the work is done, the reason and will must be upright, which cannot happen except through faith. (Luther)

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<sup>14</sup>This means that good works are not done to gain rewards but to serve God.

25. The essence of virtue, when considered in relationship to the law, is to be in agreement with the law; it is this agreement which makes your action a proper work. The essence of virtue, when considered in relationship to the gospel, is to believe; it is this faith which makes your work pleasing to God. (Meisner)
26. Therefore it is faith which does everything when it comes to works and which gives them their value. (Luther)
27. A good work requires a good intention, but the good intention depends on faith. (Augustine)
28. It is a good intention only when you want to obey God according to his commandments. (Gerhard)
29. Not birth but rebirth makes you into a Christian. (Gerhard)
30. Christians are not born but made. (Kromayer)
31. Although when taken in its proper and specific sense renewal is distinguished from regeneration, it is nevertheless inseparable from it and constantly linked to it. (Gerhard)
32. Regeneration is a work that requires no less of God's power than creation did. (Menzer)
33. In every good work one finds something that follows the law and something that is against the law. (Balth. Meisner)
34. The best good work is, according to divine justice, a mortal sin. (Luther)
35. Good works please God when faith is there to persuade him to be pleased. (Evagrius)
36. Faith gives good works their essence, not as though the Christian's righteousness and amends-making is to be credited to works so that we would be justified in the judgment of God through these works; "for since the works themselves need to be justified, far less are they able to justify us." The works of the regenerate please God, but they do not appease God. (Gerhard)
37. The moral works of the unregenerate, "good works" as far as their outward appearance, are only a shadow and mask pretending to be virtue, yes, they are only sins. (Gerhard)
38. Nothing is good without the highest good. (Augustine)
39. The good we do from our natural morals is evil to God because it does not come from God and is not done for God's sake; and yet the person gives himself credit and flatters himself that the good was his own doing, when it wasn't. (Luther)<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Even the external good in the act is due to God's natural law not to the man's inherent goodness.

40. Works belong to your neighbor, faith belongs to God. (Luther)
41. As much as we ascribe to the merit of our own works, that much we are taking away from God's grace and the merits of Christ. (Kromayer)
42. Good works must be left out of the process of justification. (Gerhard)
43. So long as you are not dealing with justification, good works commanded by God are so glorious that no one can praise them enough. (Luther)
44. The reward will not be given *because* of the works but *according* to the works. (Gerhard)
45. Christ does not say your great reward will be heaven, but will be in heaven. (Gerhard)
46. Our works are just as much gifts from God as his rewards are, and he who has made himself into a debtor through the former has also made us deserving through the latter. (Bernard)
47. God repays us for what he himself did and rewards us for what he himself accomplished. (Cyprian)
48. Out of grace God crowns in us not our merits but his own gifts. (Gerhard)
49. The righteousness of unregenerate people, although God may for all that reward it with the best gifts of this life, is for sure just a godless hypocrite's mask before God. And it is a problem to be wondered at why God should reward righteousness that he himself deems to be unrighteousness. (Luther)
50. It is just as necessary that teachers who have God's blessing work hard at pressing home and giving prominence to the doctrine of good works as it is that they do so with the doctrine of faith. (Luther)

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To Be Continued

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