

The Pastor as Dogmatician

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Michael J. Seifert

Jesus did dogmatics

As a dogmatician, the pastor stands in good company. Jesus did dogmatics! Matthew 19 offers a case study.¹ As Jesus made his final journey to Jerusalem, the Pharisees tracked him down with a question: ***Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?*** Their latest attempt to trap Jesus provides insight into the way they did dogmatics. There seems to have been agreement among rabbinical dogmaticians that Deuteronomy 24 was the relevant passage regarding lawful divorces.² But differences surfaced when it came to defining what exactly constituted a **עֲרוֹת דָּבָר** (NIV: *something indecent*). Followers of Rabbi Hillel held the liberal position, probably couched in the phrase, ***for any and every reason***. Rabbi Shammai promoted the more conservative view, that a lawful divorce required something more than general dissatisfaction.³

The purpose of their question was to force Jesus onto a side. But instead of falling into their dogmaticism, Jesus did dogmatics! ***"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."***

Certainly they had read Genesis 2. But in their reliance on rabbinical tradition and, consequently, their presumption that there was such a thing as a God-pleasing divorce, they had failed to see its relevance. They had passed over God's definition of marriage and jumped straight to his regulations about divorce. Their dogmatics produced manifold problems.

1. A faulty exegesis of their proof passage: Nowhere does Deuteronomy 24 justify divorce. It simply prohibited a man from remarrying his ex-wife if, in the meantime, she had married and divorced again.
2. A fruitless argument about vocabulary (**עֲרוֹת דָּבָר**) plucked out of its context: It makes no difference *why* a man divorces his wife if he shouldn't divorce her in the first place.
3. The resultant damage to Jewish homes and souls where husbands divorced their wives on account of "something indecent"—however they defined it—boasting God's approval all the way to the

¹ Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Mt 19:3-6).

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² If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance (Dt 24:1-4).

³ Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Concordia Commentary: Matthew 11:2-20:34* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010) 950.

courthouse: *I'm following Moses' orders. After all, he commanded that I give my wife a certificate of divorce and send her away.* Thus he abandons his God-given wife and robs his children of a father.

Contrast that with the way Jesus did dogmatics: The question is divorce, so he begins with the institution of marriage and he reads the passage as it stands. *It is God who brings a man and a woman together as husband and wife. They aren't two anymore. God has made them one. So don't separate what God has joined.*

Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason? Jesus' answer: *Read Genesis 2. Don't divorce at all.*

Jesus doesn't need to stand behind any human authority to state and apply God's truth. He stands on Scripture. No doubt the Evangelists had this in mind when they reported the people's amazement at Jesus' teaching, ***because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law*** (Mk 1:22; cf. also Mt 7:29).

What is dogmatics?

The New Oxford American Dictionary defines *dogmatics* as "a system of principles laid down by an authority, especially the Roman Catholic Church, as undeniably true."⁴ If we took out the part about the Roman Catholic Church and designated Scripture as the sole authority, this would be a suitable definition of dogmatics in the Evangelical Lutheran Church. In the *Prolegomena* of his never-completed dogmatics textbook, Professor J. P. Meyer offers a definition of dogmatics "in a looser sense...[as] the doctrines of theology couched in as concise statements as possible, expanded in explanatory discussions, arranged in some convenient order."⁵

In Luke 2, *δόγμα* denotes Caesar Augustus' decree. In Ephesians 2:15, it refers to the forms in which the Sinaitic covenant was conveyed to Israel. Closest to our usage is Acts 16:4, where it refers to the decisions reached by the Jerusalem Council. In our terminology we might place the council's decisions more specifically in the realm of ethics—the application of scriptural principles to a particular situation.

⁴ *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, Third Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), s.v. "dogmatics."

⁵ John P. Meyer, "The Way of Salvation: A Handbook of Lutheran (Biblical) Doctrine: *Prolegomena*," *Quartalschrift* 45:1 (January 1948), 10.

In compliance with a synodical request that he publish his material on dogmatics in the form of a textbook, Professor Meyer prepared a "sampler" *Prolegomena* which was published in the *Quartalschrift* for synod-wide review. He was forthright about his reservations, expressing his fears that a dogmatics textbook "by its very nature, engages the intellect preeminently in defining concepts and formulating propositions" and cannot include the "essential...intensive study of Bible passages according to text and context." For him, dogmatics was properly practiced when it led directly into the Scripture instead of delivering its truths to the student in digest form (1-3). The project stalled. Following his death, an additional section entitled, "Of God, the Author of Salvation" was discovered in his belongings. It was published posthumously in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (vols. 62-64) and again in *Our Great Heritage*, vol. I, 465-547.

Though related, the usage of *δόγμα* in the New Testament is different from our usage of *doctrine*⁶ and *dogmatics*.

Scripture uses various terms to denote the sum total of Christian teaching. Some examples follow:

- 2 Timothy 1:13 – **What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching** (ὑποτύπωσιν ἔχε ὑγιαίνοντων λόγων), **with faith and love in Christ Jesus.**
- Titus 1:9 – **[The overseer] must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught** (ἀντεχόμενον τοῦ κατὰ τὴν διδαχὴν πιστοῦ λόγου), **so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine** (ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ τῆ ὑγιαίνουσῃ) **and refute those who oppose it.**
- John 8:31-32 – **To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching** (μείνητε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῷ ἐμῷ), **you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”**

These passages also demonstrate the practical nature of dogmatics. It is not a cold corpus of statements to be memorized and scrutinized for its own sake. Professor Meyer echoes Jesus and Paul:

If anyone is interested in Christian dogmatics, whether he teaches it or studies it, merely for the sake of a purely theoretical grasp of the Scripture doctrine, he abuses the term dogmatics. Dogmatics does require also a *habitus theoreticus*, but it is essentially nothing less than a *habitus practicus* which includes not only the readiness to teach and defend, but to apply to life, yes, to suffer for the establishment of the doctrine.⁷

Dogmatics as *corpus doctrinae* is the sword in its scabbard. Dogmatics as *habitus practicus* is the sword in our hands. We must know our weapon so that we know what we must believe, what we must teach, defend, suffer for, and, if God wills, die for.

Dogmatics, Systematic Theology, and the Theological Disciplines

In current usage the terms *dogmatics* and *systematic theology* are virtually synonymous. The Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Catalog divides the academic curriculum among the four traditional theological disciplines: Biblical, Historical, Systematic, and Practical Theology.⁸ Every course offered in Systematic Theology is a dogmatics course. The term works well since dogmatics as *corpus doctrinae* arranges the teachings of Scripture in a logical system.

Systematic theology has also been defined more broadly. Professor J. P. Koehler found it useful to divide theology into two chief disciplines: The historically descriptive (exegesis and history) and the systematically constructing (dogmatics and practical theology).⁹ When the theologian engages in the historical disciplines, he uses his Spirit-guided reason to understand and describe. He ingests and wrestles with the content of his sources in an effort to determine what it means. When the theologian engages in

⁶ *Dogma* derives from Greek; *doctrine* from Latin. We generally use *dogmatics* to refer to the discipline and *doctrine* to refer to statements of teaching, whether collectively or individually.

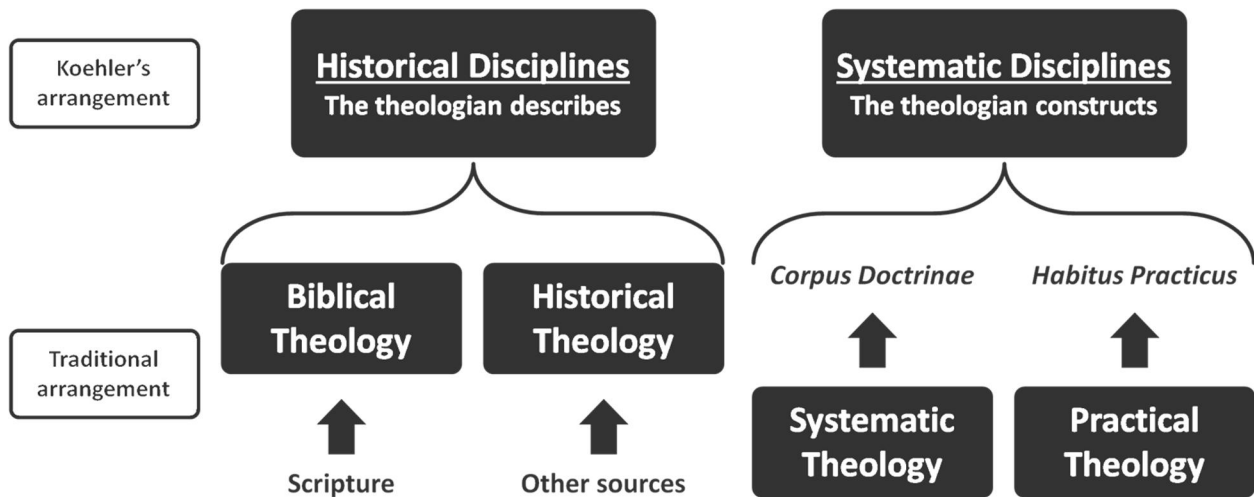
⁷ Meyer, “Prolegomena,” 13.

⁸ *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Catalog: 2013-14*, 13-17.

⁹ John P. Koehler, “The Importance of the Historical Disciplines for the American Lutheran Church of the Present,” *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 428.

the systematic disciplines, he uses his Spirit-guided reason to assemble and apply what he has learned from the historical disciplines. We could use the analogy of building a house: the historical disciplines are concerned with gathering the construction materials; the systematic disciplines are concerned with assembling them in a solid, beneficial way.

Koehler was quick to point out that the systematic disciplines, properly practiced, are also primarily descriptive in nature: “Our older theologians saw also in systematic theology something that in the last analysis was descriptive in nature. They wanted only to present the doctrines which are revealed here and there in Scripture in their close interrelation of thoughts, and that not in any other [way] than that which is supplied by Scripture itself.”^{10,11}



The difference isn't one of theological approach, but of emphasis. Koehler's two-fold division emphasizes the nature of the theologian's *work*: in the historical disciplines he describes; in the systematic disciplines he constructs. The narrower four-fold division emphasizes the nature of the theologian's *sources and product*: in biblical theology he describes Scripture; in historical theology he describes extra-biblical sources; in systematic theology he constructs a logical system of Christian teaching; in practical theology he constructs methods of applying Christian teaching.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., 428.

¹¹ In order to clarify the meaning of constructive in this sense, Professor Brug offers the illustration of a railway system and a river system. True theology is not like the engineering of a railway, where it is up to the theologian to design the system in whatever way seems best to him. True theology is more like a cartographer's work with a river system: After studying the various waterways, he plots them out on paper and labels them in a way that accurately conveys the reality onto a map.

¹² One other difference lies in the definition of Historical Theology. We typically use it to refer to the history of the Christian church from Pentecost to the present. Koehler used it more broadly as the study of all human history as it pertains to the church and as it aids in the proper understanding of the Scriptures in their historical context. The study of history is crucial to the historical-grammatical hermeneutic.

While both arrangements are helpful, they also reveal the inherent difficulties of dividing theology into various disciplines: There is only one theology! No discipline can exist on its own. They are interrelated and interdependent. They are not imposed on Scripture. Each one is a step in the process of understanding God’s revelation and employing it in the care of souls.

In a general way we could demonstrate the relationship between the theological disciplines with the diagram below, where the historical disciplines form the basis of the systematic.



Would it also be proper to insert an arrow pointing down to indicate that the systematic disciplines also inform the historical disciplines? More specifically, should dogmatics influence exegesis?



At the turn of the twentieth century, this question became a topic of debate between theologians of the Synodical Conference on one side and of the Ohio and Iowa synods on the other. In the course of free conference discussions over the doctrine of election, Ohio and Iowa appealed to the hermeneutical principle of “the analogy of faith”¹³ to defend their position that God predestined the elect *in view of faith*. Both sides seemed comfortable with the term, which, together with similar phrases, such as *regula fidei*, had enjoyed long-standing use in the church. The disagreement was over its meaning.

¹³ For the origin of the term, see Romans 12:6: We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith (κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως).

For Iowa and Ohio, the analogy of faith was a logical system into which all Christian doctrine must fit. This system is to be constructed first with major doctrines thoroughly established by Scripture. If a passage according to its wording contradicts a fundamental doctrine of Scripture, it must be interpreted in a way that achieves logical harmony with the already-established system. In this case, the exegesis of passages pertaining to predestination was governed by the doctrine of justification by faith. For Iowa and Ohio, the result was an election of which faith was a cause.

The theologians of the Synodical Conference understood the term *analogy of faith* differently, simply as the sum total of Christian teaching. The particular doctrines that constitute the *corpus doctrinae* are to be derived only from passages that address that doctrine. When, according to our human reason, two different doctrines seem to contradict one another, it is not our business to declare one to be dominant and the other submissive, but to submit ourselves to both and sing with Paul, ***Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*** (Ro 11:33)¹⁴

In the first three issues of the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Professor Koehler devoted the article, “The Analogy of Faith,” to the debate over the term and its role in establishing doctrine. With it he publically began to lay the groundwork for what would become known as the Wauwatosa Theology. In an essay recently published in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Pastor Peter Prange neatly summarizes the underlying problem Koehler observed on both sides of the debate:

Koehler’s essay is particularly notable because he asserts that the debate over the term “analogy of faith” – indeed, even the manner in which the debate was carried out – served as a microcosm of what was wrong within Lutheran theological circles. He asserted that many theologians had simply lifted the phrase “analogy of faith” from Romans 12:6 and used it dogmatically as a hard-and-fast hermeneutic principle without first doing the necessary exegetical and historical work to determine what Paul actually meant by the phrase. After doing that necessary legwork, Koehler concluded that Romans 12:6 “furnishes no rule of interpretation,” as so many insisted...

Koehler would later lament that “the traditional interpretation of Romans 12 is for me a characteristic example of the style of mechanical exegesis that has come down to us from most ancient times, which does not correspond to the linguistic resources and consequently not to the claims that one today must place on the hermeneutical art.” Even so, he expressed the hope that his essay would “have a general influence on us, not so much in the interest of our position in this controversy about the analogy as in the interest of stimulating us to an impartial style of exegesis.”¹⁵

For the “impartial style of exegesis” to which he referred we could return to the above diagrams depicting the relationship between the historical and systematic disciplines. Koehler argued for just one arrow. Doctrine and practice are based on exegesis, not the other way around. If the system is allowed to govern its contents, the inevitable result is subjective *Ichtheologie*, where human reason arrogates a magisterial role over Scripture. Koehler lamented that “the *objective* Word of God, the objectivity of the

¹⁴ Koehler summarizes the positions in the introduction to “The Analogy of Faith,” *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol I (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 221-222.

¹⁵ Peter M. Prange, “The Wauwatosa Spring: Part II,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 110:2 (Spring 2013), 94.

Word of God, has become too much of an empty phrase.”¹⁶ From his perspective, *sola scriptura* had become much more of a theory than a practice—and not only in the Iowa and Ohio Synods. Together with his colleagues, he would seek to restore it as a practice through his work at the Wauwatosa seminary.

Dogmatics and the Wauwatosa Theology

Koehler observed a difference between the methods employed in the Lutheran Reformation of the 16th century and in the revival of confessional Lutheranism in the 19th century.¹⁷ It was Luther’s exegesis of Scripture that precipitated and sustained the Reformation. Exegesis necessarily gave birth to doctrinal formulations such as the Augsburg Confession and the Book of Concord.

According to Koehler, the resurgence of confessional Lutheranism prompted by the Prussian Union was founded primarily on dogmatics. The melding of the Lutheran and Reformed churches was to be achieved through diluted confessional statements and ambiguous liturgical rubrics. In response, confessional Lutherans stood on the doctrinal statements of their fathers as the pattern of sound teaching. They generally lacked the confidence to do their own exegetical work. The historical disciplines had been monopolized by the Rationalists and thus had suffered neglect in confessional Lutheran circles.¹⁸



While both movements resulted in confessional Lutheranism, the latter movement largely skipped a step. This methodology would come to bear on the way Lutheran immigrants approached theology in America. Nowhere along the way did these Lutherans or their fathers completely ignore biblical theology. But the tendency in America was to begin with the dogmatical assertion and then to prove it from Scripture. In practice exegesis often took a back seat to dogmatics. Instead of the systematic disciplines drawing their conclusions from Scripture, a grab bag of proof passages was used to defend the conclusions of the systematic disciplines. Exegesis had lost its rank as queen; dogmatics had become king.

Wauwatosa professors Koehler, Pieper, and Schaller were outspoken about the reversed relationship between the historical and systematic disciplines. They all had studied under Dr. C. F. W. Walther at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. They held him in high esteem as theological professor and champion of

¹⁶ John P. Koehler, “The Exegesis of ‘This Is My Body’: An Example of Hermeneutics Characteristic of Lutheran Theology,” *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol I (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 400.

¹⁷ Koehler, “Historical Disciplines,” 430ff.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 430.

confessional Lutheranism. Koehler praised Walther's willingness in doctrinal disputes to separate himself from statements of the Lutheran dogmaticians when necessary and to stand firmly on Scripture.¹⁹

But still they were critical of the methods on which Walther cut his theological teeth and subsequently passed on to his students. Pieper observed, "On the whole, his knowledge of Scripture was more an intimate acquaintance with Luther's Bible and a knowledge of passages than a knowledge of the whole line of thought of a biblical book and of the original text."²⁰ Pieper also recalled how students nicknamed Walther's dogmatics class the "Baier hour"²¹ and their daily three-to-five-hours of homework "the Baier grind," which "spoiled their joy in God's precious Word."²² He lamented that the students' time and energy was devoted more to overcoming the Latin in which the class was conducted than to understanding the Scripture into which it was supposed to lead.

The methods used at the seminary naturally also found a home in the ministerium. Pieper and Koehler described American Lutheran theology with disparaging terms such as *Vätertheologie* and *Zitattheologie*.

Our doctrinal controversies have in large part been fought with the fathers as our authorities. And what now was the result of this method? This, that we, to be sure, vigorously stressed on principle *sola Scriptura* again and again, yet inwardly we were increasingly bound to the authority of the fathers, and were taken captive by them. As the ancients sang, so did we young ones chirp. We were brought up with citations from the fathers; with the same citations our teachers gave us, copied again from their writings, we operated when we had to read papers at conferences, synod, in controversies, self-evidently without ourselves thoroughly knowing the fathers from our own study. We knew the Scriptures well, but could not use them; in fact, for the correctness of our scriptural proof we again cited the fathers. "That is how Luther or Lukas Osiander or Johann Gerhard interpreted this passage," is the way the question was usually settled. Thus our fathers grew more and more into our authorities, taking captive our hearts and heads, while Scripture for us remained largely a closed book and a merely theoretical authority.²³

In the same article he scolded with his typical flair, "If we necessarily use the fathers to acquire the correct understanding of Scripture...then consistency demands that we become Catholic and take the pope as our sole infallible interpreter of Scripture."²⁴

As grateful as they were for the confessional Lutheran heritage they had received from their immigrant fathers, the Wauwatosa faculty was concerned about the direction in which their methodology was taking the Lutheran church in America. Their immediate worry wasn't so much that the church was

¹⁹ Ibid., 443.

²⁰ August Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 261.

²¹ Walther's dogmatics textbook was Baier's Latin *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*.

²² Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 237.

²³ August Pieper, "Foreword to Volume 10 of the *Quartalschrift*," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol I (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 111-112.

²⁴ Ibid., 117.

straying from pure statements of doctrine as that it was straying from the proper use of Scripture. By relying on the dogmatic and exegetical work of its fathers, the church was stifling the proper practice of exegesis and dogmatics, much worse, stifling the gospel. As a result, without changing a single word, the Lutheran *corpus doctrinae* was devolving into a *corpus juris*. Legalism was setting in.

Exegesis is stifled when passages are approached with any hermeneutic which is not set by God's Word itself. True exegesis is carried out with a heart of faith that says, ***Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.*** When a theologian rubber-stamps someone else's interpretation of Scripture without doing the exegetical legwork himself, he isn't listening directly to Scripture. (Consider as an example the pope's role as the authoritative interpreter of Scripture.) Or when he ignores the clear meaning of a passage in its context because he can finagle it in a way that fits his theology better, exegesis becomes eisegesis. (Consider as an example Carlstadt's insistence that Jesus pointed to himself when he said, "This is my body.")

When exegetical work is stifled, doctrine will eventually suffer. The doctrinal battles of the 19th century were not the doctrinal battles of the 16th century. So also the doctrinal statements of the 16th century were not formulated to combat the heresies of the 19th century. In addition, language evolves over time and phrases might convey something today that they were not intended to convey hundreds of years ago. (Consider as examples Gerhard's use of *intuitu fidei* in the 17th century and Walther's use of *Pfarramt* and *Predigtamt* in the 19th century.) Pieper compared the doctrinal heritage of our fathers to minted gold coin. It is valuable, but sometimes the image is imprecise, and it slowly erodes as the coin passes hands. "Then misunderstood, it is passed on and acquires a different stress. Practice redefines this stress, and unnoticed, error [whether original or acquired] is established as fact."²⁵

Even if the fathers' exegesis is faultless and their doctrinal statements sufficient for the battle of the day, the stifling of the proper use of exegesis and dogmatics will invariably stifle the gospel. The Wauwatosa faculty's biggest concern was that when the theologian stops breathing in the Scriptures, his spirit grows weak and his ego grows proud. Continuing with his illustration of the minted coin, Pieper wrote

Dogmatic training perhaps makes one orthodox, but it also easily makes one orthodoxist, intolerant, quarrelsome, hateful, and easily causes division in the church. Scripture too is minted gold, but coined by God through a variety of men in a variety of ways. Paul's minting carries one impression, that of Peter another, that of John a third. But none of these makes the other a heretic. Scripture is at once narrow and broad. The study of it makes the heart narrow to actual false doctrine and heresies, but broad toward various human expressions and presentations. It does not accuse of false doctrine unnecessarily; it teaches us to bear and suffer in love with the mistakes of the weak. It keeps the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Therefore we want to entirely do away with this dogmatic authority-theology, and to sink ourselves ever deeper into Scripture and to promote it above all else. We know that in so doing we will best serve the church. The

²⁵ Pieper, "Foreword to Volume 10," 117.

church has already begun to grow old. By renewed immersion in Scripture we can infuse into her new vitality, new life, new youth.²⁶

I believe it goes without saying, but it is worthy of stress that the Wauwatosa Theology was not anti-dogmatic. It was opposed to a dogmatics, and a theology in general, that was content to rest on the work of others. To stand on the shoulders of the fathers is beneficial to our theology. To rest on them, to rely on them, will inevitably make it grow stale. The goal of theology is not only the product of the labor. It is the labor itself, the hard work of impartially reading the Scriptures in their linguistic and historical context, of being put to death by the law and enlivened by the gospel, of testing old and formulating new statements of doctrine to maintain a pattern of sound teaching, of applying God's Word to circumstances not entirely different from but also not exactly the same as circumstances the church has encountered in the past.²⁷ When the theologian lives and breathes in the Scriptures themselves, he is well-equipped to live and work with the Savior they proclaim. This was the theology the faculty sought to promote through the Wisconsin Synod's Wauwatosa seminary.

In Pieper's estimation, some steps toward a more-Scripture-based seminary curriculum were taken in the Wisconsin Synod under Adolf Hoenecke. While dogmatics remained the principal subject during his tenure as president, he at least "put a stop to the pedantry of using Latin in teaching"²⁸ so that his students could devote more energy toward understanding the course material than toward deciphering the language in which it was taught. But still he "restricted himself all too much to a study of individual passages in dogmatics and for preaching. Vigorously pursued direct biblical theology did not come until later."²⁹ By "later" I presume he meant the advent of Koehler in 1900, himself in 1902, and Schaller, who replaced Hoenecke upon his death in 1908 as seminary director and professor of dogmatics.

There doesn't seem to have been a drastic change in the seminary curriculum under the "Wauwatosa theologians." Our seminary's catalogs go back to 1907, the year before Hoenecke's death. At that time,

²⁶ Ibid., 117-118.

²⁷ The more-recent controversies regarding objective and subjective justification come to mind. The Confessions and Lutheran dogmatics of the 17th century are often (selectively) quoted as proof that there is no such thing as objective justification in Lutheran theology. While our Lutheran fathers *usually* (though not exclusively) spoke of justification by faith alone, they were not speaking to the issue of the relationship of justification and faith, but to the issue of the relationship of justification and works. District President Jon Buchholz has written an excellent paper in response to the present controversy entitled, "Jesus Canceled Your Debt!" The essay also serves as a fine example of the proper roles of exegesis and dogmatics. It is available for download at http://azcadistrict.com/sites/default/files/papers/Buchholz_2012-10.pdf. Accessed August 20, 2013.

Pastor Peter Metzger wrote his Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Thesis on revisions to the WLS Dogmatics Notes since Professor Meyer began teaching dogmatics in 1935. The most significant changes have been made in the areas of Christian Marriage and Family, the Ministerial Office, and the Lord's Supper. The revisions to the notes were not changes to doctrine. In the first case, more details were required by technological (though not always moral) advances in reproductive medicine and by the proliferation of divorce and various sins against the Sixth Commandment in contemporary society. In the latter two cases, clarification was required on account of controversies. Metzger's essay includes color-coded appendices that show the actual revisions. "A Redaction-critical Analysis of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Dogmatics Notes" is available for download at <http://www.wls.wels.net/sites/default/files/Metzger.pdf>. Accessed August 20, 2013.

²⁸ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 282.

²⁹ Ibid., 283.

classroom hours in dogmatics totaled about 500. Over the next ten years the total hours remained steady, though at some times they were spread over the second two years of study and at others over all three years.³⁰ In August 1919, an *ad hoc* “Education Committee of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and other States” reported to the synod convention its evaluation of the seminary curriculum together with recommendations. Regarding dogmatics instruction the report included,

[Dogmatics] runs three years, and 500 hours in all are devoted to it. Scriptural proof receives the chief emphasis, while polemics is not neglected ... [The committee members] are glad that the study of dogmatics no longer overshadows everything else, but consider any further limitation of dogmatic instruction as unthinkable. Nor may the importance of dogmatics be too-ill esteemed, since it processes, as Director Schaller correctly explained, what is gained in detail in exegesis, presents it in summary, contains it, defines it, and clarifies it.³¹

Neither the synodical committee nor the seminary faculty had any interest in cutting the number of classroom hours devoted to dogmatics. A shift in emphasis, however, is evident in the statement that “scriptural proof receives the chief emphasis.” In Wauwatosa, dogmatics would be taught primarily as topical exegesis. The Scriptures would become greater; the fathers would become less.

Today, dogmatics instruction totals about 300 classroom hours, spread across the Middler and Senior years. Classes meet five days per week. In the first semester of the Middler year, one dogmatics hour each week is now devoted to instruction in the student’s choice of theological Spanish, German, or Latin, reducing instruction in dogmatics *per se* by thirteen hours.³²

A reduction from 500 hours in 1919 to less than 300 hours in 2013 sounds significant. However, there are a few questions we should consider before concluding that there is actually less attention given to doctrinal instruction in today’s curriculum:

- Are we comparing apples to apples? Did students in 1919 spend more time overall in the classroom, so that dogmatic instruction made up roughly the same proportion of the curriculum?
- Has some of the content of 1919’s dogmatic instruction been absorbed into other courses today, which were not offered in the early 20th century?
- Is more homework required of today’s student, thus balancing out the difference in classroom hours?³³

What about the Wauwatosa ideal that the Scriptures must become greater; the fathers must become less? Does that live on at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary? What about in the WELS ministerium? Those questions are similar to asking whether Wisconsinites are avid Packers fans. In general the answer is yes without question. But still some fans are more avid than others, surely *some* root for the Vikings, and for pretty much everyone their relative avidness or non-avidness depends upon the day. Generally speaking,

³⁰ cf. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary catalogs, 1907-08 through 1917-18.

³¹ “The Goal of the Work at the Seminary,” (Philemon Hensel, trans.) *Faith-Life* 62:3 (May-June 1989) 14-15.

³² cf. Appendix A: “The Use of the Required Non-Biblical Language at the Seminary.”

³³ These aren’t rhetorical questions. I don’t know the answers.

I think God has blessed us with a seminary and ministerium for which *sola scriptura* is more than just a tagline, whose theology is firmly rooted in the Scriptures not only in theory but also in practice. I have observed that in my studies at the seminary, in my reading of the *Quarterly*, in papers and discussions at pastors' conferences and circuit meetings. But still exegetical ability and dedication to Scripture study varies from individual to individual and, in individuals, from day to day. There is a temptation for all of us to seek safety in what others have said about Scripture instead of standing directly on God's Word.

In preparation for this paper I conducted an unscientific survey of pastors of various ages. I asked them to describe their dogmatics instruction at the seminary. Professor emeritus Armin Schuetze, a student under Professor Meyer (and later a colleague), recalls that topical exegesis formed the core of instruction. Attention was also given to quotes from the orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians, which the students were expected to translate in class. He doesn't recollect that any pastoral theology was woven in directly.³⁴ A pastor who attended the seminary in the late 1960s remembers that instruction followed the dogmatics notes rather strictly. "The...practice was to go right down the line calling on students to read passages or to translate." Another pastor from the same era expressed thankfulness for his professor's emphasis on dogmatics as *habitus practicus*. A pastor who studied in the 1970s recalls a strong emphasis on translating Latin quotes. Teaching style and curricular emphasis vary not only from time to time, but also from professor to professor. As a dogmatics student from 2001-2003, my experiences varied between my Middler and Senior years. While both classes proved valuable, one had a stronger emphasis on topical exegesis and practical application; the other devoted more time to the broader theological landscape, sharpening our understanding of biblical doctrine by distinguishing it from that of other churches.

In my estimation, the highest praise for a dogmatics professor came from one of my classmates. With a hint of hyperbole, he commented that he didn't just learn dogmatics in dog class, but that he also learned more about exegesis and church history and practical theology there than he did in all the courses devoted to those particular disciplines. That professor's teaching was successful in demonstrating that dogmatics is both scriptural and practical.

One of the questions given me as part of this assignment was whether there is a different model or emphasis to consider in the seminary dogmatics curriculum. I have no drastic changes to suggest. I would like to offer what I consider to have been the most beneficial aspects of dogmatics instruction to my ministry (in descending order):

1. Classroom exegesis and discussion of the *sedes doctrinae* in their context
2. Discussion of the practical nature of various doctrines for the care of souls, including our own souls³⁵
3. Memorization of proof passages³⁶

³⁴ Telephone interview, May 9, 2013.

³⁵ I heard a high compliment given to Professor Deutschlander: "He can even make the attributes of God fascinating!" Professor Deutschlander is a master at making the doctrinal practical.

³⁶ I still have a stack of about seventy index cards from my Middler year, each with a doctrine on one side and a reference and passage on the other. By the end of the year, they were all fair game on our frequent quizzes. The professor would give us the doctrine. We would write the reference and passage. This mental treasure trove of passages has been tremendously helpful to me in my ministry.

4. Writing of papers
5. Required reading in dogmatics, aka “dog log”
6. Discussion of past doctrinal controversies and their present manifestations
7. Comparison of Lutheran scriptural doctrine to that of other churches
8. Reading of fathers’ quotes

With the proliferation of knowledge in all of the theological disciplines, the need for each professor to have a special area of study is understandable. However, I still think it would be beneficial for all seminary instructors, especially dogmatics professors, to teach at least one course in biblical theology. The time spent professionally with larger sections of Scripture would certainly be a blessing to their teaching of topical exegesis.³⁷

Three years in the seminary classroom isn’t a lot of time to begin with. Rising costs of education and shrinking synodical subsidy add to the work load of today’s students and steal time from study.³⁸ The ministry’s growing demands in counseling and administration call for further training in those fields. Yet I am thankful that biblical theology and dogmatics still form the heart of our seminary’s curriculum. They supply the pastor with the material he dispenses through his teaching, preaching, and counseling and also provide him with the strength to carry them out with a Christ-like heart and fervor. The finest wineskins will do the pastor no good if he has no wine to pour into them. The Scriptures must remain the heart of the seminary curriculum. Pieper would agree:

Dogmatics is altogether indispensable. Without it we cannot keep the gospel pure. But it is in constant danger of losing the spirit of the gospel and becoming a dead skeleton as a result of processes that involve the intellect alone. History is altogether indispensable. Only history teaches us to understand God’s government of the world. Homiletics, catechetics and all practical subjects are altogether indispensable. They teach one how to put the Word to work in the church. But they must get their content, spirit and power from Scripture. We can work effectively in the church only to the extent that we personally live in Scripture. That church will produce the best pastors which most effectively leads its high school, college and seminary students into Scripture both outwardly and inwardly.³⁹

³⁷ According to the WLS 2013-14 Catalog, already about 60% of professors teach courses in biblical theology.

³⁸ Many students also have the additional responsibility of caring for a family. I would be interested to see the average number of hours an MLC senior is able to dedicate to homework versus the WLS senior.

³⁹ Pieper, “Anniversary Reflections,” 283.

The Pastor as Dogmatician

My observations are based on ten years of ministry, shaped also by my research and personal reflection in preparation for this essay. After two years as a tutor at Luther Preparatory School, I have served Living Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church in Midlothian, Virginia, a suburb of Richmond, since 2005. Living Hope is on the outskirts of WELSdom. There are four congregations in our James River Circuit, which stretches about 250 miles east to west. The closest WELS congregation to Living Hope is a ninety-minute drive. I point out my relative isolation only to emphasize that I know my own failings and fears far better than anyone else's. However, I also realize that we pastors aren't so different from one another and that the similarities also stretch to the people we serve.

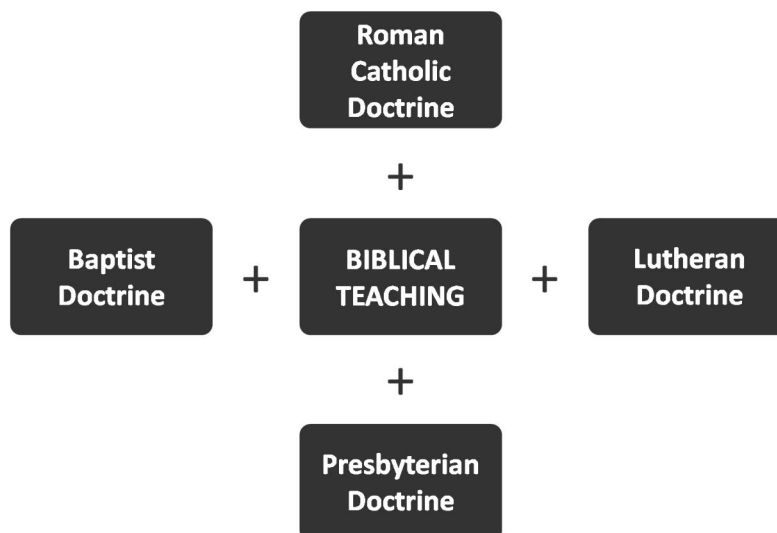
The two simple observations I would like to explore with you are these:

1. Dogmatics, properly practiced, is scriptural.
2. Dogmatics, properly practiced, is evangelical.

Dogmatics, properly practiced, is scriptural (and Scripture is dogmatic)

My wife has a good friend who regularly invites her to join her neighborhood's Community Bible Study. Each time my wife politely declines, explaining that she attends Bible studies led by people who share her beliefs. Her friend consistently responds that they don't get into doctrine in their classes. They just study what the Bible says.

I sense that many people, including many Christians, perceive a disconnect between Scripture and doctrine, as if what the Bible teaches is one thing and what a church teaches is quite another. My impression is that the general perception is something like this: Each denomination holds more or less to biblical teaching, but then adds its own system of doctrine to it. The Bible teaches us about Jesus, but each church has its own spin on "peripheral" teachings such as baptism, communion, creation, heaven, hell, faith—even forgiveness!



Coupled with this perceived disconnect may be a negative attitude toward doctrine. People would rather study what the Bible teaches rather than what institutions dictate. *Why do we need to be so dogmatic? Besides, doctrine divides. There's so much evil in the world, so much work to be done. If we could just get past the things that divide us and concentrate on what unites us, everyone would be better off.* Might this attitude play a role in the popularity of the Evangelical movement, non-denominational churches, and interdenominational Bible studies? They advertise biblical teaching with minimal doctrinal baggage.

We and our members are shaped by our environment, so we should not be surprised if its theological worldview rubs off on us. Ten years ago, a cover article in *U.S. News and World Report*, citing a recently-published book by Boston College sociologist Alan Wolfe, observed that “many characteristics of the evangelical style...[including] a certain theological fuzziness—have permeated other faith traditions in America, including Roman Catholicism and Judaism. Wolfe says, only half-facetiously, ‘We are all evangelicals now.’”⁴⁰ If American Lutherans in the 19th century were influenced by their environment to be more doctrine-oriented than Scripture-oriented, perhaps the pendulum has now swung in the opposite direction so that the tendency is to be more Scripture-oriented than doctrine-oriented.

Of course, the dichotomy is false. It is not an either/or proposition—as if one person could argue, *I think the Bible is more important*, while another counters, *I think doctrine is more important*. Dogmatics, properly practiced, is scriptural, and Scripture is dogmatic. A person cannot study the Bible without doing dogmatics any more than he can study the Bible without doing exegesis and practical theology.

Our synod’s pastors are not immune to this “theological fuzziness” either. However, thanks in large part to our thorough grounding in biblical doctrine at the seminary, we are well-equipped to see the danger of subjective theology and to guard against it. Perhaps for us the ditch on the other side is still the greatest threat. Struggling to be faithful to our Lord in a religious environment where everyone believes as he sees fit, we might be tempted to seek refuge in our fathers rather than in Scripture. There is a feeling of safety in the arms of the heroes of old. Luther, the Confessions, Gerhard, Walther, Pieper, Koehler—they got it right! So we might feel as if we say what they said, the way that they said it, we will have it right too.⁴¹

Yes, they did get it right. They were gifts from God to his church. They got it right because they discovered and demonstrated Christian doctrine. We are right to stand on their shoulders. But we must beware of relying on their work in the Scriptures at the expense of our own. Biblical doctrine does not change, but still each generation must discover it anew. We believe and proclaim Lutheran doctrine

⁴⁰ Jay Tolson, “The New Old-Time Religion,” *U.S. News & World Report*, December 6, 2003, 38.

⁴¹ Koehler, “Historical Disciplines,” 440: “There are times when certain people appear upon the scene who contend for a cause with intense mental energy. The second or third generation rests upon the shoulders of their predecessors in this matter and does not treat it in the same original manner as they. They simply accept this or that idea as a finished product without having to go through the mental effort which the fathers put forth. So quite spontaneously it comes about that in this matter there is a lack of mental effort which gives the impression of inflexibility. Not only is there no more investigating, but there is also a vigorous championing of the matter because that which has been received from the fathers has taken on the character of something that must be revered.”

because the Bible teaches it, not because Luther taught it. It bears repeating that the goal of theology is not only the product of the labor. It is the labor itself.

When our dogmatics is scriptural, we are well-positioned to show the people we serve that Scripture is dogmatic. Recall the *New American Oxford Dictionary* definition of dogmatics as “a system of principles laid down by an authority, especially the Roman Catholic Church, as undeniably true.” The popular connotation of *dogmatics* as a system of principles laid down by an institutional authority is, first of all, false and, second, negative. When we teach our doctrine from Scripture, we demonstrate, first of all, that its authority is not institutional but divine and, second, that it is something good, not bad. Christian teaching is undeniably true. In other words, it is full of certainty.

To the extent that one’s theology is subjective, it has no certainty. Much of American Christianity has run low on doctrine and therefore, low on certainty. Sometimes I get the sense that Jesus has become more of a mascot than a teacher and Savior. As long as you wear his tee-shirt you’re on the winning team. But what you believe, that’s your business and really beside the point. Over the past eight years I’ve had the opportunity to present “God’s Great Exchange” to prospects in about fifty homes—almost all of which claimed some Christian background. All except four of them have responded to the opening questions with something along the lines of, *I would tell God that he should let me into heaven because I’ve been a good person.* The follow-up question: *How certain are you that he would let you in?* almost invariably results in pensive silence.

Demonstrating to people the uncertainty of doctrineless theology and the certainty afforded by the doctrine of objective justification creates a good opportunity to invite them to a class where they can learn more about Christian doctrine. Even so, for me the biggest challenge involved with teaching BIC has been getting people to start. I find this to be especially true with people coming from other denominations—especially other Lutheran denominations. In some cases the invitation is perceived as an insult to their intelligence or their faith—*I’m already a Christian/Lutheran. I know all this. I already took a class.* In other cases the abnormality of the whole thing may be a turn-off: Very few church bodies require such an extensive class. The proposition of a *doctrine* class may also connote the idea of something boring and irrelevant.

In my experience, however, once people start taking the class, they actually enjoy it! The notion, *This is an obligation I need to fulfill in order to join the church,* usually gives way to the realization that what they are learning is exactly what they were missing. Perhaps they had initially viewed the class as a chore because they had viewed all of Christianity as an obligation: *I need to find a church in order to keep God happy.* But then they learn the doctrine of creation in Genesis 1-2 and see God’s special love for people stamped all over his creation. They learn about the devil, temptation, and sin in Genesis 3 and they see a scene that has played out a million times in their own lives, complete with the shame and fear and destruction to their relationships. Then they encounter an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God who seeks them out, not to punish, but to forgive and restore at his expense, not theirs. Beginning in Genesis and then on through every lesson, they see that dogmatics is scriptural and Scripture is dogmatic. To return to the diagram on page 14, they see that “BIBLICAL TEACHING” and “Lutheran Doctrine” aren’t two separate entities. They are one and the same and they are exceedingly relevant.

A couple times I have tried to work with prospects coming from the Missouri Synod or returning to the Wisconsin Synod on the basis of “This We Believe.” To read through it with them as a summary of our

confession and then to go over any questions or objections they may have is certainly less time-consuming than a fourteen-lesson BIC—attractive not only to the prospects, but also to the busy pastor. It’s never turned out well in my experience. While the booklet clearly, concisely, and correctly lays out true biblical doctrines, in my opinion it does not lend itself well to catechesis, nor was it intended to. The connection between Scripture and doctrine is much clearer when the student is allowed to draw the teaching from the clear words of Scripture in their context. The student can then see for himself that *this is what the Lord says*. When the doctrine is presented first and the reference is given to back it up, the connection between Scripture and dogmatics is reversed, the doctrine appears more institutional than divine, and the student is more likely to become defensive and argumentative. And we haven’t even opened the Bible yet!

After Sunday worship a few years ago I tried to reason with a first-time visitor who was infuriated by our practice of closed communion. His face was red. He had never seen anything like this in a church. *So loveless! So judgmental!* For several minutes my references to “what God says in the Bible” got nowhere with him. Finally, I grabbed a Bible from the coffee table next to us, opened it to 1 Corinthians 11 and pointed him to Paul’s warnings about unworthy reception. After reading it, he calmed down a bit, admitting, “I’ve never heard that before.” We were able to talk a little further in a more civil manner. He never returned to our church, but he did at least realize that our practice is rooted in the Bible. I’ve found that instruction and counseling seem to go better when I go further than making reference to Bible passages or quoting them from memory or throwing them up on a screen, but actually open up a Bible and allow people to see the passages in their context: *This is what the Lord says*.

When we operate that way in our instruction and counseling, we are also training people to read the Bible on their own. They can see that it’s not rocket science. It’s not just a book for pastors. It’s a book for people. They don’t have to know “where all the passages are” in order to get anything out of it. They can simply start reading and listen to God speak. They don’t know Greek or Hebrew, but they can still do exegesis. They can read Ephesians 2 and see for themselves the doctrines of original sin, justification, and sanctification. They haven’t taken any Practical Theology classes, but they can still read Ephesians 5-6 and see its application for their family. When we teach doctrine from Scripture, we’re also teaching how to study Scripture. People realize that it’s readable and relevant. They begin to see themselves on every page. They are well-prepared to continue their study even after the class is over.

When we present Christian doctrine in its scriptural context, its evangelical nature also stands out clearly.

Dogmatics, properly practiced, is evangelical

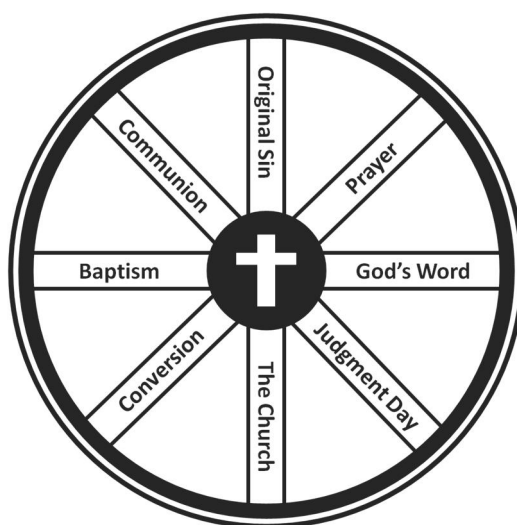
Earlier this year I took a man through BIC who found our congregation through a friend’s referral. He had grown up in a church-going Roman Catholic family, but grew disenchanted with the church as a young adult. In his thirties he began looking for a new church. He bounced around from church to church for about ten years until he came to us. When we were in the middle of the second lesson, he interrupted me with a question something along the lines of, “What’s your thing?” I wasn’t sure what he meant. He went on to explain that every other church he had attended had a “thing” that they always talked about. At one

church it was end times: Everything was always about the end of the world. At another it was speaking in tongues. At another it was getting people to make their decision for Jesus. At another it was healing.⁴²

What's our thing? Justification! Or, as I said to him, forgiveness. Properly speaking, it's not just our thing. It's the Bible's thing. From the beginning of Genesis where the need for it begins to the end of Revelation when the need for it ends, the Bible's "thing" is forgiveness through the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. For all you Latin fans, it is the *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*.

Every doctrine of Scripture is related to justification. If we don't get justification right, we won't get any other doctrine right either. If we don't get another doctrine right, we stand in danger of losing the doctrine of justification.

I've found it helpful to use a wheel to illustrate the centrality of justification in Christian teaching:



The cross is the hub of the wheel. If there is no hub, there is no wheel. We are saved through faith in Jesus our Savior. Every other doctrine serves the doctrine of justification.⁴³ What happens if a person denies the efficacy of baptism as a means of grace, or original sin, or the inerrancy of God's Word? That does not *automatically* preclude saving faith. At the very least, however, it weakens the wheel. It creates a theological inconsistency which, if carried out to its logical conclusion, destroys saving faith in Jesus. False teaching doesn't always destroy saving faith, but every false teaching carries the potential.

We've already mentioned the doctrine of justification as the hub of the wheel. Do any other doctrines belong to the hub? This is where the analogy limps. In a sense, they all do! People who recognize the importance of doctrine often make reference to a buffet: Being a Christian isn't like going to the salad bar at Ponderosa, where you take what you like and leave what you don't. That is true, but it's also more than that. God doesn't give us a hodge-podge plate of unrelated doctrines and say, *These things on this side of the plate are important because they save you. These other things are important just because I say so.*

⁴² This man is legally blind. He left one church because of the pastor's pressuring him to be healed in front of the congregation. The pastor emphasized that it would only work if his faith was strong enough.

⁴³ The doctrines that make up the spokes are illustrative, not exhaustive.

They are all important for the same reason, because they serve the doctrine of justification. Their relation to justification varies and some are more-closely related than others, but every doctrine serves justification. It is striking how frequently Scripture refers to its doctrine as a singular unit (e.g., Jn 8:31-32, Ro 16:17).

The relationship(s) of any particular doctrine to justification usually isn't hard to find if we go back to its source and observe how Scripture presents it. God does the work for us! Consider God's omniscience and omnipresence in Psalm 139. David says a whole lot more than, *God knows everything and is present everywhere*. A man not so different from you and me ponders what that means: *God knows my sin—even better than I do. I cannot hide from him. I cannot go where he is not*. His eyes are opened to his need for forgiveness. Then as the psalm progresses, confident of forgiveness and at peace with God, God's omniscience assures him that the Savior's sacrifice didn't miss any of his sins, that God knows his fears and his needs. God's omnipresence assures him that he's never alone, that he will never be where the faithful Lord is not. When we see doctrine presented in Scripture, it's the furthest thing from boring and abstract. It's relevant and it's certain.

Recognizing the evangelical nature of all Christian doctrine helps to guard against liberalism and legalism. Let's return to the wheel: When the spokes are removed from the hub, they are no longer serving their purpose as spokes. What are they? Just sticks. Unless a person believes that he is declared righteous before God on account of God's Son, believing that there is an omniscient God will do him no good. If the spokes are detached from the gospel, one of two things will happen: The sticks will be thrown away as useless or they will be taken up as weapons. The former we would associate with liberalism; the latter with legalism.

When I read Pieper, Koehler, and Schaller, their *primary* concern about the imbalance between exegesis and dogmatics wasn't that our dogmatics as *corpus doctrinae* wouldn't remain pure.⁴⁴ It was that our dogmatics as *habitus practicus* wouldn't remain evangelical. Koehler warned about the "bravado of orthodoxy" that is more concerned about being right than the good of the church. Dogmatics becomes a contest of sorts—whoever has the best doctrine wins. A similar vein of legalism he calls the "bravado of sanctification"—whoever has the best behavior wins.⁴⁵ Both are always clear and present dangers for the church militant, but they are inevitable when the gospel no longer dominates its preaching and practice. And when the church no longer lives and breathes in the Scriptures, the gospel will not long remain dominant. I wonder if this "bravado" was what Paul had in mind when he admonished Timothy, ***What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus*** (2Ti 1:13). Dogmatics, properly practiced, is evangelical.

Evangelical does not mean wishy-washy. If there is no certainty, there is no gospel. The evangelical pastor is jealous for God's truth and defends it with vigor according to his Savior's example and command. For him there is no such thing as harmless false teaching. He is well aware that a little bit of yeast works through the whole batch of dough. But evangelical means that his goal in defending and promoting the

⁴⁴ Though that was a concern.

⁴⁵ John P. Koehler, "Legalism among Us," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol II (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 229-282.

truth isn't the exaltation of himself at the expense of others, but the good of the church and the glory of God through the gospel. He is guided by the law of love.

AND he is strengthened by the love of God. Does doctrine ever make you timid? It does me. But it's not doctrine that's the problem. I am. I don't notice it so much when discussing with brothers Walther's collection of "Theological Axioms" recently published in the *Quarterly*. The timidity strikes more so when I get to the lesson on the church with the prospect whose boys are into scouting, or on gender roles with the woman who just got out of an abusive relationship—or anytime I know I need to apply a biblical teaching that I'm pretty sure someone isn't going to like. Most of us know from experience that the faithful proclamation of God's Word doesn't always produce a happy ending. Sometimes it drives people away—even when it's chock-full of great patience and careful instruction. That's a hard thing. We care about the people we serve. We don't want to drive them away from Christ. It's rightly hard on us. I imagine there were also tears in Jesus' eyes when he lamented over Jerusalem. But he wasn't timid. Timidity drives us to silence or purposeful obfuscation. Maybe we reason with ourselves that they're not ready for this doctrine yet. Milk before the meat is the proper order, but sometimes the meat never comes.

We're not the first or the only preachers to be afraid of rejection. The prophet Jeremiah spoke boldly to Pashur (or should we call him Magor-Missabib?) when he was released from the stocks, but his subsequent complaint revealed the struggle in his heart (Jer 23). Timothy's faith was sincere, but he still needed encouragement toward confidence in his preaching (2Ti 1). And whether we're talking about Prophet Jeremiah or Pastor Timothy or Pastor Seifert, the needed encouragement and the strength for the struggle are always the same: ***The LORD is with me like a mighty warrior... He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked*** (Jer 20:11,13). ***Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day*** (2Ti 1:12). Timid? For what reason? The Lord is on our side and he works through his words which we speak. He works in our hearts through our personal devotions and professional study and he opens our eyes of faith ever-wider to see that his truth is always rooted in his love. Evangelical doctrine doesn't only serve to the glory of God, but also for the good of those who believe it.

Consider again Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees about marriage and divorce. It doesn't just give us an example of scriptural, authoritative teaching, but also of evangelical teaching that serves for the good of those who believe it. He wasn't just concerned about being right. The bottom line of his concern was people. Do you recall what follows this encounter in Matthew 19 and its parallel in Mark 10? ***Let the little children come to me*** (Mt 19:14; Mk 10:14). God has designed the home to be the primary means of passing the gospel from one generation to the next. When a husband loves his wife and the wife submits to her husband, when they are faithful and forgive, they create a refuge for their children where the gospel may flourish. Divorce turns that refuge into ruins—often even a battlefield. I think we've all seen the damage to souls that almost always follows. The doctrine of marriage serves the doctrine of justification.

Of course, the passing on of the gospel to children isn't the only reason God instituted the family and jealously protects it. That's just one example of how this and every doctrine serves justification. For pastors to draw those connections for ourselves and for our people is critical for evangelical practice. Take, for example, the pastor who is counseling a marriage that is damaged and breaking. Evangelical doctrine guards against a legalism that reasons, *Let's take a look at those exception clauses and see if we can make one of them fit*, as well as a legalism that says, *Sorry. You're both stuck in this. Try your best to*

make it work. Instead, without ignoring the “exception clauses” (and how they serve the gospel too), the evangelical pastor allows the gospel to predominate as he counsels his sinful, hurting people to make decisions that serve to the glory of God and for the eternal welfare of themselves and their family.

We believe, therefore we speak. We speak for a God who loves and cares for the people we serve even more than we do. Therefore we frame his teaching the same way he does—in a way that demonstrates that everything God teaches is full of his love for us and serves the doctrine of justification, his forgiveness of our sins in Christ. And then we pray that God would work through his Word in them just as he has worked in us.

The Pastor Grows as a Dogmatician

A seminary is a nursery. There the theological seeds are sown and take root. Professors nurture future pastoral candidates through their studies until they are ready to be transplanted into the harvest field where they can survive and thrive. That is to say the seminary graduate has not finished growing—neither academically nor spiritually. Like a plant, some of his fastest and most influential growth has already taken place in the first years. But it is outside of the nursery where he grows strong and bears fruit. The seminary prepares its students to be pastors in the field. But out in the field, the pastor remains a student. He must continue to grow even as he nurtures others in their growth. Below I would like to offer some ideas on how a pastor grows in this area.

- **Read the Bible.** Dogmatics is scriptural, so the better acquainted we are with the Scriptures, the better acquainted we will be with dogmatics. When we read and study *sedes doctrinae* in their larger context, the evangelical nature of the doctrine shines clearly. I have found that always having a class going on at church on a book of the Bible is tremendously beneficial to me on a personal level. Let the prepackaged lesson be the exception. Study a book in the original language, glean from commentaries, and share the harvest with your people. It also serves as a model of Bible study for the congregation: biblical, historical, dogmatic, and practical theology all in one!
- **Read dogmaticians.** The Confessions, Luther, the *Quarterly*, Pieper, Walther, the online WLS Essay File,⁴⁶ the WLS Dogmatics Notes.⁴⁷ Independent theologians can still learn from others (2Ti 2:2). Rarely do I read a doctrinal article without learning something that I had never really thought too much about before.

I wish that the WLS Essay File would include more material. I have a hunch many good essays have been written that have cycled no further than their original conference audience. Could district praesidia serve as clearing houses for conference papers, submitting to the seminary library papers from their district that they believe would be beneficial to the church?

I also wish that the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* would be available online. I do a poor job of keeping my collection in order—and an even worse job of remembering the volume of something I read several years (or days) ago. Could a subscription-based, up-to-date, online digital repository

⁴⁶ www.wlsessays.net

⁴⁷ The latest revision of the Dogmatics Notes is available at <http://www.wls.wels.net/library/dogmatics-notes>.

of *Quartalschrift/Quarterly* articles be developed? It would have at least one paying customer. Another option would be to update the Logos volumes more frequently.

My heresy shelf isn't too extensive, but I find it worth my while to read doctrinal articles from outside of our fellowship from time to time. I'm prone to make straw men. Reading them in their own words helps me to treat them honestly and to hone my understanding of the biblical position.

- **Do dogmatics.** In his college history courses, Professor Deutschlander would distinguish between *reading* history and *doing* history. The same distinction applies to theology in general and dogmatics in particular.

We *do* dogmatics when we read dogmaticians critically—not only the obvious heretics but also the respected fathers: Is it true? Is it clear? Is it based on a correct exegesis of the passage in its context? What other passages speak to this doctrine?

We *do* dogmatics when we read the Bible with our eye on doctrine: Make note of passages that teach, for example, the divinity of Christ—especially those that you never noticed before. Why does that passage emphasize his divinity? Practical applications and devotional thoughts pour off the page.

We *do* dogmatics when we write papers and discuss them with brothers. Our own Colonial South Conference has realized the blessing of satellite courses presented by seminary professors at our spring conferences. However, with just two meetings per year, a drawback is that our own conference produces only three papers annually. A pastor in the Colonial South can expect to write about one paper per decade. Satellite courses are great, but so is the professional exercise of writing and discussing our own papers. I don't have an answer as to which of the two goods is better, but I think it is a question worthy of each conference's discussion.⁴⁸

Finally, we have expanding opportunities to *do* dogmatics through our seminary's Summer Quarter⁴⁹ and online courses. Summer Quarter especially offers a peaceful setting away from the normal pressures and distractions, where iron can sharpen iron in the classroom and the pastor can spend extra time alone with Jesus in his study, *do* theology, *do* dogmatics, and *write* lots of papers for the same professors whose satellite courses got him out of writing papers in the first place!

I'll close with Paul's parting words to the Ephesian elders, sound encouragement for every pastor of every age: ***I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood...Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified*** (Ac 20:27-28, 32).

⁴⁸ Just to be clear that I'm not griping: I serve on our conference's steering committee and regularly promote satellite courses.

⁴⁹ cf. Appendix C: "Systematic Theology Department Summer Quarter Course Offerings."

Permit me to express a few words of thanks:

To the Lord, who has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

To the seminary Anniversary Committee for extending the invitation to present today and to Professor Brug for his help as my advisor.

To Living Hope Lutheran Church in Midlothian, Virginia for allowing me the time to work on this project and for putting up with a few recycled sermons. (Hopefully they didn't notice!)

Second only to the Lord, to my wife, Sarah, who bore the real brunt of the labor by caring for our three boys this summer even more than she usually does.

Some questions for group discussion or personal consideration

Do you share Professor Meyer's reservations about a dogmatics textbook for the seminary curriculum (footnote 5)? For the same reasons? Would you have any other reservations?

In what way could Koehler's terminology of "descriptive" and "constructive" disciplines be misconstrued? Do you think that his two-fold division of the theologian's work is helpful? Is it better to reserve the bulk of study in the "constructive" disciplines for the last two years of seminary study, after the student has more biblical theology under his belt?

Is the hermeneutical principle "Scripture interprets Scripture" the same as "the analogy of faith" in our usage? Can doctrine play a proper role in exegesis? If so, to what extent?

For personal consideration: Do I rely more heavily on "fathers" (whether past or contemporary) than on my own independent study of Scripture? Professionally? Personally?

Do you agree with Wolfe's generalization of American religion (page 15) that "we are all evangelicals now"?

How can we grow in a better understanding of each doctrine's relation to justification?

What doctrines are especially worthy of study today: For us? For our people?

Are there any doctrines you exclude from BIC on account of students' relative spiritual immaturity? If so, do you have a plan in place to cover them later?

Appendix A

The Use of the Required Non-Biblical Language at the Seminary:

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary expects that all students who have pursued the regular pre-seminary course will have taken the equivalent of three college years of a language other than the biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew prior to entering the seminary. The seminary will require all such students to make use of their non-biblical language during their seminary years. The professor with whom the student completes the requirement will report this to the registrar, who will record this information on the student's academic record. Naturally, students are encouraged to make use of the languages beyond the minimum requirement.

Confessional Languages

We anticipate that the majority of these students will be able to do theological research in at least one of the two confessional languages (German, Latin). We consider the ability to work in German of primary importance because of the rich doctrinal heritage of the Synodical Conference: the writings of such men as Walther, Hoenecke, *et al.*, commentaries, theological journals, and historical material. Latin also makes valuable contributions, especially in understanding the Latin terminology used in teaching various classes at the seminary and in using sources important for the study of doctrine and church history. German and Latin are the non-biblical languages that can most easily be put to direct use in the current theological curriculum of the seminary. We will do this through special German and Latin sections correlated with curricular classes, through incentives to do research in German or Latin, and through electives.

Living Languages

We also recognize the benefit to the church from increased study of Spanish and other living languages. This benefit will come mainly through pastoral use of those languages in evangelism, teaching, and preaching. In respect to these languages, therefore, the seminary's focus will be on providing opportunities for students to use these languages in pastoral work in the field or in directed research and reading. We hope that we will also be able to offer special sections of curricular classes or electives in Spanish if there are a sufficient number of students and instructors available.

Implementation

Currently the following courses are available for students to meet the non-biblical language requirement in German and Latin:

- ST 4223 Theological Latin, 1st semester, 1 hour/wk. Especially for middlers.
- ST 4224 Theological German, 1st semester, 1 hour/wk. Especially for middlers.
- ST 4225 Theological Spanish, 1st semester, 1 hour. Especially for middlers.
- ST 4027 Readings in Theological Latin, either semester 1hr/wk
- ST 4028 Readings in Theological German, either semester 1hr/wk
- ST 7023 Readings in Theological Latin, winterim, 1 or 2 hours/day.
- ST 7024 Readings in Theological German, winterim, 1 or 2 hours/day.
- ST 7080 SPICE Spanish immersion program, 2 weeks of field study during winterim

ST 7020 Directed Reading, 1 or 2 hours equivalent, winterim
ST 7021 Directed Research, 1 or 2 hours equivalent, winterim

Obtaining credit through off-campus practical experience in other non-biblical languages can be arranged through your advisor or another faculty member.

Students who do not have a non-biblical language can fulfill the requirement by 750 pages of additional dogmatics readings. See your dogmatics instructor for details.

Appendix B

Dogmatics Professors at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

This list of seminary professors and their tenure is taken from Professor John Brug's "Foreword to Volume 110: KICKOFF 150/110," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 110:1 (Winter 2013), 4. Dogmatics professors are in bold print.

The years each professor taught dogmatics are taken chiefly from WLS catalogs, which are extent from 1907. My thanks to Professor John Hartwig for sifting through the catalogs. Thanks also to Pastors Peter Prange and Jeremiah Gumm.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Tenure</u>	<u>Taught dogmatics</u>
Edward Moldehnke	1863-1866	1863-1866
Adolf Hoenecke	1866-1870, 1878-1908	1866-1870, 1878-1908
Eugen Notz	1878-1902	
August L. Graebner	1878-1887	
Gottlieb A. Thiele	1887-1900	
Reinhold Adelberg	1897-1901	
John P. Koehler	1900-1929	1920¹
August Pieper	1902-1941	
John Schaller	1908-1920	1908-1920
Hermann E. Meyer	1915-1920	
John P. Meyer	1920-1964	1920-1964
William Henkel	1920-1929	
Gerhard Ruediger	1921-1927	
Frederic Brenner	1929-1940	
Max Lehninger	1929-1952	
August F. Zich	1931-1939	
Paul W. Peters	1939-1966	
Adalbert Schaller	1940-1952	
Edmund Reim	1940-1957	1954-1957
Carl J. Lawrenz	1944-1982	
Hilton Oswald	1945-1960	
Frederic E. Blume	1952-1974	
Gerald O. Hoenecke	1952-1978	
Arthur P. Voss	1954-1955	
Heinrich J. Vogel	1956-1982	1958-1982
Armin W. Schuetze	1958-1990	
Martin Albrecht	1962-1985	

¹ According to Pastor Peter Prange's research, Koehler most likely assumed the dogmatics position for the remainder of the year following Schaller's death in February 1920.

Wilbert R. Gawrisch	1965-1993	1965-1993
Martin W. Lutz	1966-1971	
Irwin J. Habeck	1966-1984	
Siegbert W. Becker	1969-1984	1970-1984
John C. Jeske	1969-1995	
Edward C. Fredrich	1970-1991	
Joel C. Gerlach	1971-1981	1971-1981
Richard D. Balge	1971-2002	
Martin O. Westerhaus	1972-1995	
David P. Kuske	1973-2003	
Paul E. Nitz	1974-1997	
Armin J. Panning	1975-2001	
Ernst H. Wendland	1978-1986	
Leroy A. Dobberstein	1982-1999	1982-1999
James J. Westendorf	1982-2011	
John F. Brug	1983-	1984-
David J. Valleskey	1984-2004	
Wayne D. Mueller	1984-1990	1985-1990
James P. Tiefel	1985-	
Harold R. Johne	1986-1998	
Alan H. Siggelkow	1991-2010	
John M. Brenner	1991-	2011-
Forrest L. Bivens	1993-	1993-
John P. Hartwig	1995-	
Mark G. Zarling	1996-2007	
John D. Schuetze	1997-	
James F. Korthals	1997-	
Daniel P. Leyrer	1998-	
Richard L. Gurgel	1999-	1999-2011
John C. Lawrenz	2000-2004	
Paul O. Wendland	2001-	
Paul E. Zell	2002-	
E. Allen Sorum	2004-	
Stephen H. Geiger	2005-	
Kenneth A. Cherney	2006-	2007-
Michael J. Quandt	2007-	
Bill J. Tackmeier	2010-	
Joel D. Otto	2011-	

Appendix C

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY DEPARTMENT SUMMER QUARTER COURSE OFFERINGS

Courses which this department has already offered:

1972	ST 430	The Doctrine of the Word in the Holy Scriptures, in Luther, and in Modern Theologians	Becker	3.0
	ST 441	The History of Doctrine --The Post-Apostolic Period	Gawrisch	1.5
1973	ST 442	The History of Doctrine --The Pre-Reformation Period	Gawrisch	1.5
	ST 476	Contemporary Significance of the Formula of Concord	Koelpin	3.0
1974	ST 433	The Theology of the Holy Spirit	Becker	3.0
	ST 443	The History of Doctrine --The Reformation Period	Gawrisch	1.5
1975	ST 470	Christian Ethics	Gerlach	1.5
1976	ST 439	The Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel	Vogel	3.0
	ST 444	The History of Doctrine --The Post-Reformation Period	Gawrisch	1.5
1977	ST 445	The History of Doctrine --The Modern Period	Gawrisch	1.5
	ST 491	Apologetics in Lutheran Theology	Gerlach	3.0
1978	ST 437	Eschatology in the Old Testament	Vogel	3.0
	ST 466	Doctrinal Controversies in the Lutheran Church 1546-1577	Lawrenz	3.0
1979	ST 452	The Biblical Principles of Church Fellowship	Lawrenz	1.5
1980	ST 401	The Inerrancy of Scripture	Becker	3.0
	ST 451	The Doctrine of Church and Ministry	Gawrisch	3.0
1981	ST 487	Comparative Symbolics - Catholic, Calvinists, Arminian, Holiness Groups, etc.	Fredrich	3.0
	ST 453	Neo-Pentecostalism	Gerlach	1.5
1982	ST 460	Biblical Eschatology and Current Chiliastic Views	Gawrisch	3.0
1983	ST 434	Justification in Contemporary Thought	Gawrisch	3.0
	ST 444	The Doctrine of the Lord's Supper	Becker	1.5
1984	ST 430	The Doctrine of the Word in the Holy Scriptures, in Luther, and in Modern Theologians	Brug	3.0
	ST 466	The History of Doctrine -- The Post-Apostolic Period	Dobberstein	3.0
1985	ST 467	The History of Doctrine --The Pre-Reformation Period	Dobberstein	1.5
	ST 403	The Christian and the Law	Brug	3.0
1986	ST 468	The History of Doctrine --The Reformation Period	Dobberstein	1.5
	ST 461	Exegetical-Dogmatical Study of the Book of Revelation	Brug	3.0

1987	ST 469 ST 452A	The History of Doctrine --The Post-Reformation Period The Doctrine of Fellowship from a Historical Perspective	Dobberstein Gawrisch	1.5 3.0
1988	ST 470 ST 492	The History of Doctrine --The Modern Period Contemporary Moral Issues	Dobberstein Mueller	1.5 3.0
1989	ST 493 ST 494	Eastern Religions and their Impact on the Western World Catholicism Today	Johne Brug	3.0 3.0
1990	ST 420 ST 478	Doctrine of Christ and Present Day Aberrations Apology of the Augsburg Confession	Dobberstein Schuetze	3.0 3.0
1991	ST 471 ST 495	Martin Chemnitz: Doctrine of the Word Charismatic Movement Today	Dobberstein Gerlach	3.0 3.0
1992	ST 497 ST 496	Evangelicalism Today Menace of the Cults	Fredrich Dobberstein	3.0 3.0
1993	ST 483 ST 413	Doctrine of Sanctification in the Confessions Luther's Bondage of the Will	Lange Dobberstein	3.0 1.5
1994	ST 451 ST 480 ST 472	The Doctrine of Church and Ministry Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation Period Doctrinal Controversies in the Lutheran Church 1546-1577	Dobberstein Brenner Balge	3.0 3.0 3.0
1995	ST 442 ST 477 ST 402	Theology and Practice of Prayer Luther's Large Catechism Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel	Brug Bivens Dobberstein	1.5 3.0 3.0
1996	ST 544 ST 535	The Doctrine of the Lord's Supper Election and Conversion	Bivens Dobberstein	3.0 3.0
1997	ST 538B ST 556 ST 528	Doctrine and Practice of Church Fellowship History of Doctrine - The Post Apostolic Period The Theology of the Holy Spirit	Brug Bivens Dobberstein	3.0 3.0 3.0
1998	ST 557 ST 512	History of Doctrine – Pre Reformation Period Angelology and Demonology	Bivens Schuetze	3.0 3.0
1999	ST 558 ST 579	History of Doctrine – The Reformation Period The Smalcald Articles	Bivens A. Koelpin	3.0 3.0
2000	ST 559	History of Doctrine – Post-Reformation	L. Dobberstein	3.0
2001	ST 560 ST 531 ST 543	History of Doctrine – Modern Period The Doctrine of the Word The Sacrament of Baptism	F. Bivens J. Brug J. Schuetze	3.0 3.0 3.0
2002	ST 589 ST 547	Christianity and Science The Life and Afterlife of the Soul	Sponholz Bivens	3.0 3.0
2003	ST 582 ST 590	Comparative Dogmatics Christian Ethics	R. Gurgel F. Bivens	3.0 3.0

2004	ST 5090 ST 5282	The Menace of Islam Comparative Theology: Christology and Soteriology	J. Brug R. Gurgel	3.0 3.0
2005	ST 5003 ST 5049 ST 5283	The Christian and the Law Israel and the End times Comparative Dogmatics: Soteriology and Eschatology	J. Brug F. Bivens R. Gurgel	3.0 1.5 3.0
2006	ST5048 ST5094	Heaven and Hell Catholicism Today	J. Schuetze J. Brug	3.0 3.0
2007	ST5083 ST5060 ST5037	Devotional Classics Bioethics The Doctrine of the Ministry	F. Bivens J. Schuetze J. Brug	3.0 3.0 3.0
2008	ST5010 ST5010.1 ST5054 ST5061 ST5062	Heirs Together: Study of Man and Woman Heirs Together: Study of Man and Woman The Theology of Adolf Hoenecke Apologetics The Theology of Church Growth and the Emerging Church	R. Gurgel R. Gurgel J. Danell F. Bivens J. Schuetze	3.0 1.5 2.0 1.5 3.0
2009	ST5006 ST5032	Cross and Comfort: Seeking the Hidden God in Providence The Doctrine and Practice of Church Fellowship	J. Schuetze	3.0 2.0
2010	ST5064 ST5065 ST5065.1	Eastern Religions Bondage of the Will Bondage of the Will	K. Cherney F. Bivens F. Bivens	3.0 2.0 1.5
2011	ST5010.1 ST5033 ST5046	Heirs Together: Man and Woman Study Doctrine & Practice of the Lord's Supper Understanding Futurism and Dispensationalism	R. Gurgel J. Schuetze F. Bivens	1.5 2.0 3.0
2012	ST5034 ST5034.1 ST5155	Principles and Practice of Prayer Principles and Practice of Prayer History of Doctrine I	J. Brug J. Brug F. Bivens	1.5 1.5 3.0
2013	ST5098 ST5255	The Menace of Islam History of Doctrine II <i>Cancelled</i>	J. Brug J. Brenner	3.0 3.0

For future consideration

ST	Readings in Latin from Early Lutheran Dogmaticians
ST	Chemnitz Two Natures of Christ
ST	Chemnitz Examination of the Council of Trent
ST	History of Doctrine Series