

# 1. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.<sup>1</sup>

For faith in the end of the law leads to the view that its purpose is to take care of this world, not to prepare for the next. That means that **we do not possess absolute, unchangeable laws**. If the law no longer takes care of this world, it can and must be changed. As even Luther put it,<sup>2</sup> we must write our own decalogue to fit the times.<sup>3</sup>

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*“In our deliberations, the wisdom of Scripture and the tradition cannot be cited as ‘God’s answer’ to the matter, but neither ought that wisdom be summarily dismissed as irrelevant or outdated.”<sup>4</sup>*

# 2. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

At the same time, a theology seduced by nomism (all too often the case in the church) is ill equipped to do battle with antinomianism. **Since it has already compromised the eschatological gospel, it can fight only from the position of law** and charge its opponents with the ‘terrible heresy’ of being anti-law. Thus, the term ‘antinomian.’ One gets the impression that whereas other heresies are relatively mild, being antinomian is about the worst thing one could be! At any rate, to defend itself, nomism appeals to already given anti-gospel sentiments, compounding the confusion. **So the general victory of nomism over antinomianism in the church is hardly cause for celebration.** Nothing is solved. No insight into the nature of the problem is gained. The war of words is only inflated and the issues obscured.<sup>5</sup>

# 3. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

[The two kingdoms doctrine’s] great contribution to the problem of social ethics is exactly to **strip men of their mythologies**. For the very fact that it insists that whatever other Kingdom there is, **the eschatological one comes solely and absolutely by God’s power alone** means that the only real task for men is to repent, to turn around and take care of this world as best they know how – without myth, but with **reason, love and justice; to be pragmatic**: to solve problems concretely.

The eschatological vision makes it clear that **the secular is our sacred task**. It tears the mask from our pretensions and bids us become human beings. That, I think, is the real significance of Luther’s resistance to the Peasant’s Revolt, whatever we may think of his final action. He saw quite clearly that if one is to apply this principle, then there could be **absolutely no exceptions**. Not even those who undertake revolutions for the sake of so-called ‘Christian principles’ can be excepted. Nobody, Prince, Peasant, Preacher, President or what have you, carries out a revolution

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<sup>1</sup> Future additions to this collection of Gerhard Forde quotes can be found at [www.crossalone.us](http://www.crossalone.us), under Major Theological Issues, subsection: The Proper Use of Scripture.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther on the law as human and changing: *“Indeed, we would make new decalogues, as Paul does in all the epistles, and Peter, but above all Christ in the gospel”* (LW 34:112). *“This text makes it clear that even the Ten Commandments do not pertain to us”* (LW 35:165). *“The Gentiles are not obligated to obey Moses. Moses is the Sachspiegel for the Jews”* (LW 35:167). Emphasis added.

<sup>3</sup> Forde, *“Lex Semper Accusat? Nineteenth-Century Roots of Our Current Dilemma,”* *dialog* 9 [1970] 274.

<sup>4</sup> Don Juel, “Homosexuality and Church Tradition,” *Word & World* 10:2 (Spring 1990) 166-69.

<sup>5</sup> Forde, “Fake Theology: Reflections on Antinomians Past and Present,” *dialog* 22 [1983] 246-51.

or a political program in the name of Christ. That is so first of all because **Luther categorically refused to allow Christ to become a club with which to beat anyone (a ‘New Law’ as he called it)**, and secondly because revolutions and political programs can be carried through only in the name of humanity without appeal to either myth or religion. Luther means that quite radically. **You don’t need Christ, or even the Bible, necessarily, to tell you what to do in social matters. You have reason, use it!**<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

Once justification had again been reasserted in radical fashion, it was natural that heavy pressure would be brought to bear on the received understanding of law. John Agricola rightly sensed that justification by faith could not simply be combined with **the older idea of law as an eternal order**, still evident in some of Philip Melancthon’s theological constructions.<sup>7</sup>

#### 5. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

Law is to be used for political purposes, i.e., for taking care of people here on earth in as good, loving, and just manner as can be managed. **Reason**, i.e., critical investigation using the best available wisdom and analysis of the concrete human situation in given instances, **is to be the arbiter in the political use of the law.**<sup>8</sup>

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*“We do not believe there is a single heavenly code which religious people know better than others. ‘Natural law,’ through which God ordains order, is embodied in human codes – some better, some worse.*

*“In the realm of the law, **reason** and not revelation is **primary**. God has not revealed any specified code for life. Yet God wills order for our well-being, and we are given **the gift of reason and common sense** to derive laws to that end. The question to ask is if there are **good reasons** to make rules limiting the right to sexual expression. If so, given the public character of pastoral ministry and the exemplary nature of that office, we would be obliged to insist that pastors abide by such rules and that the church do nothing to undermine them for the rest of society.”<sup>9</sup>*

#### 6. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

It is not enough just to say that a given command is ‘The Word of God’ ... **in questions of the civil use of law ... each case has to be argued individually** .... The fundamental concern of the civil use of the law is for the care of the social order . . . What the law enjoins is love of and service to the neighbor. That is its fundamental and ineradicable content.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Forde, “The Revolt and the Wedding: An Essay on Social Ethics in the Perspective of Luther’s Theology,” in *The Reformation and the Revolution* (Sioux Falls, S. Dak.: Augustana College Press, 1970) 85-86.

<sup>7</sup>Forde, “Justification and This World,” *Christian Dogmatics* Vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 448.

<sup>8</sup>Forde, “The Viability of Luther Today,” *Word & World* 7 (1987) 27.

<sup>9</sup>Juel, “Homosexuality and Church Tradition,” 168.

<sup>10</sup>Forde, “Law and Sexual Behavior,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 9:1 (Spring, 1995) 8-9, 18.

## 7. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

The only way to overcome the problem of the hiddenness of God not preached is by God preached. But that will **not happen by attempting to infer God's will from the law.**<sup>11</sup>

## 8. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

Unable to rhyme Matt. 5:17-18 with Rom. 10:4, the dogmatic tradition has experienced nothing but trouble over the law.... **Paul and Matthew are at irreconcilable odds.** [The tradition tried to arrive at a compromise.] The result was the idea that in Christ the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament were abrogated....while the 'moral' law was not....But that is patent nonsense.... Neither Testament makes that kind of distinction between ceremonial and moral law.

... The outcome of such confusion was, in general, that natural law [understood as an eternal order of law] became the arbiter. Natural law decides what is moral and what is not. But therewith **the fate of the church's understanding of law was sealed**, as well as of its eschatological outlook. Natural law became the structural backbone of the theological system, displacing eschatology.

Once the eschatological outlook has been displaced by **an eternal order of law**, antinomianism is the attempt to remedy the situation with a false and realized eschatology.

Once justification had again been reasserted in radical fashion, it was natural that heavy pressure would be brought to bear on **the received understanding of law**. John Agricola rightly sensed that justification by faith could not simply be combined with **the older idea of law as an eternal order**, still evident in some of Philip Melancthon's theological constructions.<sup>12</sup>

## 9. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

First of all, if justification proceeds by way of negation, then the judgment is indeed universal and **all causes are relativized**. This flows from the **very nature of the gospel** and cannot be compromised.

Secondly, for Luther's theology, it seems to me that the only way from such universal negation back to the concrete is the way of freedom....The Kingdom of God indeed comes by God's power alone, and thus one is turned back into the world for the time being to serve the neighbor....If we are to remain true to the gospel, we must realize that **there are no levers here**. If the movement is not one of freedom, all is lost. Moralists, social reformers, ideologues, revolutionaries, and even just plain zealous religious people may no doubt find this frustrating and maddening, but it is of the **very essence** of the matter. Whenever a cause is exempted from the negation, so as to exert a pressure which destroys this freedom, we come to a serious parting of the ways.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Forde, "Postscript to the Captivation of the Will," *Lutheran Quarterly* 19:1 (2005) 79.

<sup>12</sup> Forde, "Justification and This World," *Christian Dogmatics* Vol. 2 (1984) 447.

<sup>13</sup> Forde, "The Viability of Luther Today: A North American Perspective," *Word & World* 7 (1987) 29.

## 9a. What does the above Forde quote mean?

When Forde writes in the previous post:

1. "... all causes are relativized" and "... there are no levers here," this means:

- a. There is no "revealed" or "natural" law except the basic content of the law: love and care for the neighbor. Forde: **"What the law enjoins is love of and service to the neighbor. That is its fundamental and ineradicable content."**<sup>14</sup>
- b. There is no third use of the law, no particular revealed law(s) for the Christian, nor can one see through any "natural law" to discern divine intention.

2. The bottom line: "This flows from the very nature of the gospel and cannot be compromised," and the "very essence of the matter." If anyone exerts a "pressure which destroys this freedom, we come to a serious parting of the ways."

This means that any and every attempt to counter antinomism by bringing back "revealed" or "natural" law, even "evangelical counsels," to settle ethical issues, contradicts the gospel (Galatians 5:1).

## 10. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

The insistence that **scripture interprets itself** is simply the hermeneutical correlate of **justification by faith alone**.<sup>15</sup>

## 11. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

Second, the verbal inspiration theory has the increasingly obvious difficulty that it is unable to deal with facts gained both by research into the Bible and the world around us. For over two hundred years now it has demonstrated its **inability to cope with truths established by scientific and historical research**. In the face of the mounting knowledge of the world, **the verbal inspiration method has had no constructive counsel to give, but can only advise one to retreat from the world** and refuse to face those things which one finds uncomfortable. One does not need to go outside the Bible itself to show the inability of this method to cope with the facts. Clearly the belief that there are no mistakes of any sort in scripture simply is not true. The many discrepancies *within* the Bible itself – where the Bible disagrees with itself – demonstrate this fact.<sup>16</sup>

## 12. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

The line between this world and the next is drawn by God's grace. This establishes the world as a place under the law in which man can live, work, and hope.... Hope in the world to come creates

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<sup>14</sup> Forde, "Law and Sexual Behavior," *Lutheran Quarterly* 9:1 (Spring 1995) 18.

<sup>15</sup> Forde, "Authority in the Church: The Lutheran Reformation," *A More Radical Gospel: Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 66.

<sup>16</sup> Forde, "Law and Gospel as the Methodological Principle of Theology," in *A Discussion of Contemporary Issues in Theology by Members of the Religion Department at Luther College*, Decorah, Iowa; Luther College Press, 1964, p. 56. Emphasis added.

the faith and patience to live in this world; it gives this world back to us by relieving us of the burden of our restless quests. Freedom from the world makes us **free for it**...

This is what it means to say that whereas the kingdom to come is a kingdom of grace the kingdom of this world is a kingdom of law.... **Law belongs to earth, not to heaven. It is natural, not supernatural**....

That is why Luther did not speak of law as something static and unchangeable. **Laws will and must change in their form as the times demand. Luther, for instance, refused to grant eternal status even to the laws of Moses.** They are strictly ‘natural,’ he said, not unlike the common law of any nation. Men on this earth simply don’t have access to eternal laws. But men do have **the gift of reason and the accumulated wisdom of the ages as well as the Bible.** Here is the task for man’s reason and created gifts. Once cured of religious and mythological ambitions, they can be put to work as they ought: taking care of men. For in the final analysis, all man’s vocations are to be enlisted in the battle against the devil.<sup>17</sup>

### 13. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

The Bible says: “Repent and believe in the gospel.”<sup>18</sup> Does that mean that Forde was wrong? Does that mean that salvation is mostly God’s doing and partly ours?

Forde writes: “**We have to do something, don’t we?**” – that is the pious sounding cry. Rather than face the question of death and life, we hope to get by with a little something! As Luther remarked, this kind of semi-Pelagianism is **worse** than full-blown Pelagianism.”<sup>19</sup>

Luther knew that one could use a text like Mark 1:15 against Christ, that is, in favor of saying salvation is 99% what Christ does and 1% what we do – repent and believe.

As Luther points out again and again, infants have faith, which is no surprise because in baptism God snatches us<sup>20</sup> in spite of ourselves.

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<sup>17</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972) 110-11. Emphasis added.

<sup>18</sup> Mark 1:15.

<sup>19</sup> Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 142; emphasis added. See also Forde: “It is interesting – and significant – that Luther could see much more validity in out-right Pelagianism than he could in semi-Pelagianism of the so-called Christian humanists. At least, he said, the Pelagians believed that man could and should apply himself with his *whole being* to the pursuit of salvation, where the semi-Pelagians seem to think it could be gained for a pittance – exercising that **little bit of ability supposedly left in man,**” in Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, p. 51. Italics in the text; bolding added.

Luther: “These friends of ours, however, though they believe and teach the same, make dupes of us with deceptive words and a false pretense, as if they dissented from the Pelagians, though this is the last thing they do; so that if you go by their hypocrisy, they seem to be the bitterest foes of the Pelagians, while if you look at the facts and their real opinion, they themselves are Pelagians double-dyed” (*LW* 33:268).

<sup>20</sup> See Luther: “[E]ven if infants did not believe – which, however, is not the case, as we have proved – still their Baptism would be valid and no one should rebaptize them...” Large Catechism, Baptism, #55, *BC* 443.

In baptism the infant receives the Holy Spirit (SC, Baptism #10, *BC* 349), who, of course, cannot be quantified as if the infant only receives a portion of the Holy Spirit or a kick-start. Nor, again of course, does baptism depend on a “decision” made by the infant. Some also misunderstand the metaphor “gift”

## 14. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

If our Melancthonian based free-choice pietism has lost its substance, and if we are appalled or at least worried by the drift of the church toward cultural Protestantism, **where do we turn?** Here is where the hermeneutic will tend powerfully to influence the choice. If the kind of interpretation suggested by Lindbeck is right, there would seem basically to be **two possibilities**. The **first** and most obvious is to **turn back towards Rome**. If we are a confessing movement in the church catholic, and if, in Tillichian terms, we have pushed our protestant principle to the degree of losing our catholic substance, then the only real way to find our substance again is to go back to Rome, that preeminent custodian of such catholic substance. Rome has had long experience with this sort of thing. Rome knows how to grant free choice with one hand and take it back with the other!

**The other possibility** would be the old Protestant move: **back to the Bible**, to move, perhaps, in the direction of so-called evangelical or fundamentalist Protestantism, lately dubbed fundagelicalism. If we are denominational Lutherans, basically critical of or anti-Rome, and yet fear the loss of substance, we would likely be attracted by the so-called evangelical or maybe even neo-pentacostal movements in contemporary Protestantism. They too, you might say, have a certain ability to grant freedom of choice with one hand and take it back with the other. You are free to choose Jesus, but once you do you better toe the mark! And one cannot overlook the fact that around the globe these days such movements manifest considerable vitality!

Disenchanted Lutherans today are attracted by both possibilities... When free-choice pietism has lost its moorings in the external Word, the only way to get it back in line is by turning to **authority structures** with the clout to do it. **One can find that either in Roman-type hierarchicalism or in Biblicism**. In either case, *satis est non satis est*. The gospel and the sacraments are not enough. They never are when they don't bring the eschatological end and new beginning. **An authority structure above and beyond the gospel must be added** – a kind of substitute eschatology to assuage our impatience!

Do these hermeneutical alternatives define the parameters of our fate today? Are these the only possibilities available to us? I believe not. But I do think that if there is any fire left now, it will have to come **more from Luther** than our Melancthonian tinged pietism.<sup>21</sup>

## 15. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

Romans 3:24: “[T]hey are justified by his **grace as a gift**....”

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(e.g., Romans 3:24) to imply that what God does in baptism is a “gift” that has to be “accepted” even though the context (Romans 3:19-23) does not allow such a misunderstanding.

“[W]hat a great and excellent thing Baptism is, which **snatches us** from the jaws of the devil...” LC, Baptism, #83; BC 446, emphasis added.

“I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him” Small Catechism, Creed, Third Article, #6; BC 345.

See also John 6:44: “No one comes to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” And John 6:65, 15:16, Eph 1:4.

<sup>21</sup> Forde, “*Satis Est?* What do we do when other churches don't agree?” Unpublished lecture given to ELCA Teaching Theologians' Conference, August 1990, pp. 11-12. Emphasis added.

This verse is used by some to justify a **semi-Pelagian** view of salvation: To be saved, the gift of faith must be received by responding in faith. Thus the believer has a crucial role in salvation.

Forde on why this semi-Pelagian interpretation of Scripture is wrong:

The assertion of “justification *by faith*” in the sixteenth-century Reformation can be understood only if it is clearly seen as **a complete break with ‘justification *by grace*,’** viewed according to the synthesis we have been describing, as a complete break with the attempt to view justification as a movement according to **a given standard or law, either natural or revealed.** For the reformers, justification is “solely” a divine act. It is a divine judgment. It is an imputation. It is unconditional. All legal and moral schemes are shattered. Such justification comes neither at the beginning nor at the end of a movement; rather, it establishes an entirely new situation. Since righteousness comes by imputation only, **it is absolutely not a movement on our part, either with or without the aid of what was previously termed “grace.”** The judgment can be heard and grasped only by faith. Indeed, the judgment creates and calls forth the faith that hears and grasps it. One will mistake the reformation point if one does not see that justification “by faith” is in the first instance precisely a polemic *against* justification “*by grace*” according to the medieval scheme. Grace would have to be completely redefined before the word could be safely used in a reformation sense.<sup>22</sup>

See also the footnote below to the above paragraph:

The recent penchant for combining grace and faith into the formula “justification by grace through faith” is perhaps understandable given certain modern developments, but (in spite of words suggesting such a formula in the Augsburg Confession IV) it is strictly speaking at best redundant and at worst compounding a felony. When one misses the complete interdependence of grace and faith (grace *is* the gift of faith; faith alone lets grace *be* grace), **one turns faith into a “subjective response” and can only then cover one’s tracks by saying, “Of course, it comes by grace!”** *Faith* then simply takes the place once occupied by “works” or “merit” in the medieval system and all the problems repeat themselves. Given such misunderstanding it is clear that one cannot use the formula “justification by faith” today without careful work of reclamation.<sup>23</sup>

## 16. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

Forde: Neither inerrancy, nor Heilsgeschichte, nor existentialism

From Forde’s theological autobiography:

But in the seminary it soon became apparent that **the ancient tradition was under attack.** The attack, however, was not from without but from within. It was not, that is, the inroads of criticism and liberalism, etc., that were the ultimate source of trouble. Such inroads could temporarily at least be sidestepped, accommodated, or moderated. So we read Brunner (the most used in dogmatics classes as I recall), and Sittler, and Kantonen, and Nygren, and Tillich, etc., and they assured us that all was well in the “Neo-Orthodox” camp. Yet there was, for me at least, a certain unease. The surrender of

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<sup>22</sup> Forde, “Justification,” *Christian Dogmatics* II:407. Italics in the original, bolding added.

<sup>23</sup> Forde, *Christian Dogmatics* II: 407, footnote 7, on page 423. Italics in the original, bolding added.

biblical inerrancy to various versions of “truth as encounter” and other **existentialist** ploys seemed to lack the bite of the older views of biblical authority. Perhaps it was that something of the offense was gone. Yet there was no way back. Older views of **biblical inerrancy** were not an offense, they were just intellectually offensive. I was looking, I think, for **something deeper and more compelling, a gospel authority that establishes itself by its own power and attractiveness, not a legal authority that simply demands submission.**

*Heilsgeschichte*, then in vogue, dominated our theological classrooms. But it was at best a half-way house. It freed us from older views of authority based on biblical inerrancy but left us rather with serious questions about history. A Bible that is an authoritative mine for data to construct a historical scheme is, in the end, **only somewhat better than a Bible of texts used to “prove” dogmatic propositions.** The inchoate desire of my younger days for a more solid foundation was not satisfied.

My own theological education began one day when I was impelled to set off on my own search. That certain independence and reluctance to rely just on the word of my professors once again asserted itself. While attending **a class on Galatians** one day the question that was to occupy center stage for the rest of my theological career was posed, the question of the relation between human “responsibility” and divine election. The professor, bless his pious heart, stretched out his arms and said, “Men (there were only men in those days!), there are just some things we have to learn **to hold in tension!**” Something within me **shouted NO!** There are no doubt some things we might hold in tension, but not this thing, not the question of human salvation! I came to suspect that this was the real threat against the ancient tradition. I had to ask myself, **“Was this the theology for which Luther was willing to see the church torn apart?”** Was this the position over which he argued so desperately with Erasmus? I couldn’t believe it. This touched off my quest. And that questing centering around **divine election, the bondage of the human will, and being a theologian of the cross** accounts for **the sum and substance of my theology.**

The search for an answer to the question about Luther ushered me into a strange and exciting new world. **Modern Luther research** was just beginning to be imported from Europe. I poured over Luther on Galatians, read and reread Luther’s *Bondage of the Will*; I gobbled up the essays and monographs I could find on Luther’s “reformation discovery” and his theology in general (Wingren, Nygren, Prenter, Watson, Boehmer, Pauck, Rupp, etc.), as well as on related exegetical questions about the righteousness of God, justification, law and gospel, and so on.<sup>24</sup>

See further:

The theology at which I have arrived is **the result of a quest for faith. It is not really an option for me.** I do not see it, ultimately, as though it were one of many possible “expressions” of faith – even though I try to be as charitable towards those other expressions as I can. I have sought **a theology which repeatedly calls me back from the brink of unbelief by its own intrinsic power.** I believe I find this particularly in Luther’s understanding of being **a theologian of the cross.** For me that is not a matter of traditionalism or whatever pejorative charges those who like to play at such games like to hurl around. **For “beyond” or “outside” such theology, I am threatened simply by**

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<sup>24</sup> Forde, “The One Acted Upon,” *dialog* 36:1 (Winter 1997) 57-58.

**unbelief.** Which is to say, I suppose, that I simply cannot live on a “theology of glory.” If I fight adamantly in ecclesiastical circles, that is the reason.

Second, just a note about my work itself. Upon reflection I think that Christology, both the understanding of the work of Christ in atonement and of the person of Christ, might have been highlighted a little more than was immediately evident in Professor Nestingen’s article. Perhaps as a historian he is less impressed by “systematic” theological achievements! But I have been preoccupied not only with atonement, but also with the person of Christ, and it does seem to me – or at least it is my hope – that some of my most significant contributions to theology have been in this area. This is, of course, vital to the task of being a theologian of the cross today. What I have striven for throughout is a theology which **relentlessly brings the cross and resurrection home to us, “does” it to us.** It has seemed to me that the biggest problem systematically is that theology constantly gets in the way of the cross. I have sought **a theology which gets out of the way for the cross.** Rightly or wrongly, I think some of my best work is the fruit of that search.<sup>25</sup>

## 17. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

This is the source of what we might call the inner and outer aspects of Lutheranism’s crisis. The attempt to combine two incompatible views means that internally it has always had to battle its fundamental scepticism, **its uncertainty about the basis for its faith.** So in its practice it has resorted mostly to a dogmatic absolutism largely dependent on a view of **scriptural inerrancy,** which usually brought with it disguised moral absolutisms of various sorts as well. A will which supposedly begins in a state of freedom ends in captivity. The message becomes a perverted mirror image of itself: ‘Yes, you are free, but you jolly well had better choose to believe in justification by faith alone or you will go to hell. The Bible says so! And then you had better show your thanks by your sanctification.’<sup>26</sup>

Is the law eternal? It could be and will be if Christ is not preached so as to end it for us....To the degree that the theological use of the law comes to an end in Christ, to that degree **a political use of the law for others becomes a possibility.** If somehow this could be grasped, perhaps we could cease the silly debates about whether the church’s mission is proclamation *or* development, personal salvation *or* social justice, etc., and get on with the business of taking care of this world and the neighbor as lovingly, wisely, and **pragmatically** as our gifts enable.<sup>27</sup>

## 18. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

The distinctive character of current Lutheranism, however, is largely the result of its continuing search for its own roots in the Reformation and Luther’s thought itself. Beginning in about the 1840s, when J.C.K. von Hofmann appealed to Luther in the argument over atonement, **Luther was for the first time set against Lutheran orthodoxy on a substantive doctrinal issue** (Hirsch, 1954, vol. 5, p. 427) **and the uniqueness of Luther’s own thought began to emerge as a viable alternative.**<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Forde, “Response to James Nestingen’s article,” *dialog* 31:1 (Winter 1992) 34-35.

<sup>26</sup> Forde, “Radical Lutheranism,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 11:1 (Spring, 1987) 12-13.

<sup>27</sup> “Radical Lutheranism,” 17.

<sup>28</sup> Forde, “Lutheranism,” *Blackwell’s Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, Ed. Alister McGrath (Cambridge, MA; Blackwell, 1993) 357. Emphasis added.

## 19. Forde got out of Biblicism; you can, too.

The “post-liberal Lutheran” is, of course, something of a shadowy, if not menacing, figure on the contemporary scene, perhaps not yet clearly defined, often a puzzle to both friend and foe, usually mistaken simply for a hard-line conservative confessionalist or orthodoxist. But that is seriously to misread the situation. It is a post-Enlightenment, post-liberal position. A post-liberal Lutheran is one who has been through the options spawned since the Reformation and realizes that they have all been used up. Least of all does infallibilism or reactionary conservatism of any sort provide an answer. In any case, Lutherans have always been uneasy with infallibilist solutions to faith’s questions. Even where they have flirted with the ideas of scriptural infallibility they have had some anxiety and suspicion that it might be contrary to a gospel appropriation of the scriptural message.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Gerhard Forde, “The Catholic Impasse: Reflections On Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Today,” *Promoting Unity. Themes in Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue*. Eds. H. George Anderson and James R. Crumley Jr. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989) 67-77; here 72.