

A Public Mystery

by OSWALD BAYER

Twenty-five years of *Lutheran Quarterly*! That is a good reason to pause, to look back; but also to look forward, and to inquire into the policy and aim of this journal in the past as well as in the future. *Lutheran Quarterly* claims to be “A Journal for the Evangelical Lutheran Church everywhere.” It is therefore not limited to any particular church organization. In keeping with its self-image and masthead, it aims “to provide a forum (1) for the discussion of the Christian faith and life on the basis of the Lutheran Confession, (2) for the application of the principles of the Lutheran Church to the changing problems of religion and society, (3) for the fostering of world Lutheranism, and (4) for the promotion of understanding between Lutherans and other Christians.”

It would be impossible for me to offer an assessment of the twenty-five volumes of *Lutheran Quarterly* based on these four aims—that would require a doctoral dissertation, not a lecture. Nor will I suggest any plans for the next twenty-five years. I would like rather to begin with the term “journal” and reflect on the logo of *Lutheran Quarterly* that appears on the front cover, the Latin initials VDMA, which, as you know, stand for the words *Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum*, “the word of the Lord remains forever.” And I would especially like to inquire into the particular understanding of “public” implicit in this logo. As I develop this understanding of “public”—I mean the public of God’s word, or better, the public character of God’s word—you will see the broad but determinate horizon in which the four stated aims of *Lutheran Quarterly* are cultivated in a theologically responsible manner and in which the day to day tasks involved in producing this journal find their criterion.

The term “journal” as such calls attention to daily events and their relevance and so to the aspect of time. What is up to date? What is the latest, or should I say, the very latest? Yesterday’s news is already ancient history. That raises the question: What is really up

to date? What actually is the latest? Is it that which immediately becomes old again? At any rate, like any jubilee, so too the silver jubilee of *Lutheran Quarterly* makes us mindful of the passing of time and our own transience. It raises the question: What remains? What is permanent? Will anything remain at all? All flesh is like grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. “The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever (Isa 40:6-8).¹ This lament from Deutero-Isaiah about the transitoriness of life as well as the prophetic announcement of God’s constancy in the face of change and decay are taken up in the First Letter of Peter which adds an interpretative sentence that identifies the word with the gospel: “That word is the good news that was announced to you” (1 Pet 1:25). The lament from Deutero-Isaiah, which bewails the transitoriness of life, ends on an upbeat note as introduced by the little word “but” that points to a divine intervention, or rather, a turn, a revolution that defies the normal course of human experience. In the face of worldly impermanence and transience, the prophet announces: “*But* the word of the Lord remains forever.”

Verbum Dei manet in aeternum, the word of God remains forever.² That was the defiant motto of Frederick the Wise and his successors as well as of Philipp of Hesse, whose servants wore it on their livery at the Diet of Speyer in 1526. It was also the defiant motto of the minority of the princes at the Diet of Speyer in 1529, but prior to that it was the motto of the peasants that followed Thomas Müntzer.³ From 1531 to 1547 it appeared on the coins, medallions, flags, cannons, and guns of the Smalcald League.⁴ In Electoral Saxony, Hesse and Württemberg, all officials had it on their sleeves, abbreviated as V.D.M.I.A, so that the old believer Thomas Murner scoffed: “*Verbum Dei manet im Ärmel*,” the word of God remains on the sleeve.⁵ Furthermore, worshipers have been confronted by these defiant words on the triumphal arches of many Protestant churches over the centuries right down to our own time; many bells also bore this inscription. Last but not least, the Barmen Declaration of 1934 closes with them on a defiant and confident note.⁶

Certainly, these words, like Luther’s hymn, “A mighty fortress is our God” were not and are not immune to being used in a proud triumphalistic way that brings dishonor to the memory of the

Reformer and embarrassment to the church. Yet their misuse must not be allowed to obscure their proper use. In each case, both with Luther's battle song and with the original words of defiance and comfort in Deutero-Isaiah, *Anfechtung*, which calls everything into question, is fundamentally resisted—even if the situation is different in each case. According to Luther's battle song, the word of God, the gospel, is contested by powerful enemies, above all the papacy, *from outside*. According to Deutero-Isaiah, on the other hand, God's word opposes the experience of transience and futility, which can paralyze every preacher and theologian, in fact every Christian, *from inside*, in the very depth of their being: "Who has believed our message?" (Isa 53:1). What's the point? asks the preacher. "What shall I preach?" (Isa 40:6). What shall I preach if the people are like dry grass, like dead bones? (Ezek 37:11; see vv. 1–14). What do I preach if the most they can do, if they have any life left at all, is to complain: "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God"? (Isa 40:27; see 49:14: "But Zion said: The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me"). As he fights against the complaint of this hiddenness with the weapon of God's comfort, the preacher sees no success: "I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity" (Isa 49:4). The comfort that he is to bring to the people is the very comfort that he needs himself. And the only way he gets it is by letting that same word first address him. He becomes unshakably certain of God's comfort, and this in opposition and contradiction to every experience of transience and futility, so much so that he can say: "*But* the word of our God remains forever." This word is the word of divine comfort (Isa 40:1), of divine compassion (Isa 49:13), of divine love. Now, as we said before, when the New Testament takes up this word of comfort and defiance from Deutero-Isaiah, it immediately identifies it with the gospel. Thus, Peter writes: "This word is the good news that was announced to you" (1 Pet 1:25b).

The Apocalyptic Public Sphere

A journal like *Lutheran Quarterly* asserts a major claim when it chooses these words of comfort and defiance for its logo and motto.

They recall the struggle at the time of the Reformation. In fact, by choosing these words for its logo and motto, *Lutheran Quarterly* orients itself to the Reformation era and its witnesses, as do Lutheran pastors when they remain faithful to their ordination vows. This word of God, which remains forever, will not be removed (Isa 54:10), but as *verbum efficax*, an effective word, it enacts and accomplishes what it announces, it does what it says (Isa 55:10f; see also Ps 33:9). It will and must⁷ be made known publicly, against all opposition and in the face of all complaint, resignation, and all speechlessness.

The horizon in which we are being led cannot be called anything but apocalyptic—for as with Reformation theology generally, the fundamental matter at stake is that consciences are sharpened by the law and comforted by the gospel in view of the Last Judgment. The immediate counterpart to this forum before God is the public confession before the world: “Everyone who confesses me before men, I also will confess before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father in heaven” (Mt 10:32f.) It is before this double forum that Luther makes his great confession of 1528.⁸ Since God’s word of comfort remains forever and is therefore the criterion par excellence, responsibility for it must be exercised also in the political sphere and public square. That is clear, for instance, from the way in which the evangelical estates of the empire, assembled at Speyer in 1529, drew the consequences of the confession that God’s word remains forever. Thus, in their appeal and protest (*protestatio*), which earned them the name “Protestants,” they held that “in matters concerning the honor of God and the salvation and bliss of our souls, each [imperial estate] must stand by itself before God and render account [Rom 14:12], so that no one can use the actions and decisions of a minority or a majority to excuse himself.”⁹ It is mostly overlooked that the freedom of conscience, much-vaunted especially by neo-Protestantism, and central to Luther’s stance at Worms in 1521 and the protestation at Speyer in 1529,¹⁰ is not something vague and free-floating, not a waxen nose that can be shaped at will. On the contrary, Luther insisted that the conscience is captive to the word of God (*capta conscientia in verbis Dei*¹¹) so that for him the free

conscience is bound by the word, conformed to the word, and shaped apocalyptically by one's public confession before God and his Last Judgment. Even where there is an historical awareness of the apocalyptic significance of the freedom of the conscience, however, its relevance for systematic theology is often either unrecognized or denied. It is not surprising, therefore, that the validity of its truth-claim also for us today is questioned.

We need to pause here for a moment to ponder the implications of this problem. I am saying that today, unlike in the Reformation era, the freedom of faith and of conscience as well as the certainty of salvation are basically all misunderstood. For the reformers these key concepts had a distinctive character that was shaped by the theology of the word and an apocalyptic worldview. Since today this understanding has been lost, there is even more reason for us to inquire systematically into the Reformational character of these concepts in order to retrieve it. As a beginning, it would be an advantage if the apocalyptic character of the Augsburg Confession were recognized, at least historically.¹² Like Luther in his Confession of 1528 and the Protestation of Speyer in 1529, Melanchthon also, in his first draft of the "conclusion" to the Augsburg Confession, sees the confessional situation of 1530 in a completely eschatological—apocalyptic light: "May it please your imperial majesty to graciously consider that these matters do not concern temporal goods, land, or people, but the eternal salvation or damnation of souls and consciences; and God will demand that we render an account in the Last Judgment of our conduct in these matters."¹³ The confession of the word of God, which remains forever, must also become known in the political sphere and public square—as verse 46 of Psalm 119, that great psalm of the Word, testifies. It is not by chance that this verse is the motto of the Augsburg Confession:¹⁴ "I will also speak of your decrees before kings, and shall not be put to shame." We join in saying with the hymn writer Philipp Spitta: "Needful is a free confession / in our day and time, / an open clear confession / that in the face of opposition, / despite the raging of the foe, / despite the mockery of the heathen, / brings glory to our God / and magnifies the gospel of Christ."¹⁵

Not to be ashamed of the word of God, which remains forever, means to confess it publicly; "not to be ashamed" is almost a

technical term for “to confess.”¹⁶ In his Letter to the Romans, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, asks the Christians in Rome to support him in his plans to take the gospel to Spain. His mission activity is undertaken with an apocalyptic expectation: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith’” (Rom 1:16f.).¹⁷

Public and Mystery—Some Distinctions

First Timothy 3:16 says that the mystery of faith is great and goes on to speak of the person of Christ who¹⁸ “was revealed in flesh, vindicated in Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.” He is to be publicly “proclaimed,” “confessed” and thus revealed, in a radically apocalyptic way, and yet he is and remains a mystery—but an eminently “proclaimable” mystery (according to Luther’s translation of 1 Tim 3:16).¹⁹ He²⁰ is not a mystery to be kept secret but a mystery to be openly proclaimed.

In what follows we need to ponder this public mystery which embraces and penetrates all times and spaces.²¹ However, we must make some distinctions here regarding the concept of “mystery” as such. For it would be misleading if we were to follow the tendency of the last two hundred years to totalize and inflate the concept of “revelation”²² and thus too quickly promote a unifying concept of “mystery” associated mainly with an epistemological interest aimed at the abstract distinction between God and the world, or God and human beings, along the lines of the three ways of the Areopagite.²³ The topics covered by the word “mystery” and the epistemological approaches associated with them are different. The mystery of evil or the mystery of iniquity (2 Thess 2:7) is a completely different mystery from the mystery of God’s love which has conquered evil. Evil is a riddle, and like the mystery of the incomprehensible hiddenness of God and his incomprehensible wrath, it will be solved in the eschaton. But the mystery of God’s love is not a riddle that

can be solved and put aside, but a mystery that remains forever. This mystery is one that we are never done with, for it only ever intensifies, because God's love is inexhaustible and never ends.

The Public Mystery of God's Name

Let us begin our discussion not by speculating on the silence that God would break with his revelation, but by attending to his speech, his word, the word that he is and speaks.²⁴ "The Mighty One, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth . . . our God comes and does not keep silence" (Ps 50:1, 3). God speaks and summons, he addresses the creation, he creates a community by his promise and waits for an answer. He waits for us to call upon him in complaint and praise and in this way to perceive his name and to take it seriously. He wants us to live in thankfulness to him and to praise him as our Creator, just as the Psalter ends with the Hallel Psalms—which is a bit like ending an organ piece with full organ: "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!" (Ps 150). Whoever joins in this jubilation of the whole creation, the jubilation of the earthly and heavenly choirs—even if he sits alone in a prison cell—lives in a public realm that far transcends the space-time framework of our human thinking and experience. He lives in that world which, as Bonhoeffer says in his song, "stretches invisibly around us"; he hears "your children's highest songs of praises."²⁵ The Apocalypse of John and the Letter to the Hebrews²⁶ know this public; the liturgy of the Eastern Church, especially the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, lays claim to it.²⁷ It characterizes the *todah*, the thank-offering for God's deliverance from the distress that the psalmist complained about: "I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you" (Ps 22:22). But it applies not only to the declarative praise of the *todah* but also, in a far more comprehensive way, to the descriptive praise, such as we have in Psalm 104, which is a public confession of the mystery of creation. Goethe spoke, in a way remarkably close to biblical wisdom, of the "public mystery" or the "open mystery" of nature, which is "mysteriously open" and discloses "the open mystery of her beauty."²⁸

Declarative and descriptive praises,²⁹ such as we find in the Psalter, are “missional”—not as a second step, but they are missional as such, already from the outset. The constitutive missionary character of public mystery, which we are contemplating here, has been expressed by Luther in a most memorable way in his Preface to the Babst Hymnal (1545): “God has cheered our hearts and minds through his dear Son, whom he gave for us to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil. He who believes this earnestly cannot be quiet about it, but must gladly and with pleasure sing and speak about it so that others also may come and hear it.”³⁰ “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Mt 12:34). “I believe; therefore I speak” (2 Cor 4:13)³¹—with boldness and candor, against all threats and opposition. “For we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). It is impossible, of course, to “gladly and with pleasure sing and speak” in every situation. Jeremiah knew that. Violence had been done to him. He was forced to preach; he had no choice in the matter; God “overpowered”³² him, and God prevailed (Jer 20:7, 9). This is comparable with Paul’s version of the *amor fati*: “An obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16).³³

The gospel is public and, whether we wish it or not, it will and must be proclaimed in public throughout the world—and not only to all people but also to the “whole creation” (Mk 16:15). This all-encompassing public character of the outer breadth and extent of world mission corresponds exactly to the inner depth and intensity with which we praise of God and love him with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind. The breadth and depth of the universal public is given with God’s uniqueness (Deut 6:4f.) and the first commandment (Ex 20:2f.). Thus, we can speak of a concept of “public” which, as I said, is inconceivably broad and deep. The source of this public is the ever “bounteous”³⁴ God who is relationally rich and therefore living; as the triune God, he is in a threefold conversation with himself. He does not wish to remain apart but moves out of himself and comes to us in order to communicate with us. He does this by giving himself to us with an overflowing bounty and generosity that knows no bounds. He does not do this

to first realize himself, to become what he is. Rather, he reveals himself spontaneously, without compulsion, in the freedom of love, the same love that he always is in himself.

With his appearance in our world, God enters the public, bodily realm of earthly life. He allows human beings to call on him, to complain to him, to praise him, to make requests of him, to dispute with him; he even allows them to force him to keep his promises. However, this revelation speaks against the understanding which is represented by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel interprets God's revelation through Christ in the Holy Spirit as totally transparent or diaphanous so that the apprehending, conceiving, and knowing philosopher may be permitted access to the "cabinet of divine intellect"³⁵ in order to be able to read there the "cabinet orders in the original" and "take notes" from them.³⁶ Hegel did not take into account that even though the triune God appeared in the public realm for all to see, he still is and remains a mystery: the mystery and wonder of God's inexhaustible liveliness in his freedom and love. God in his freedom enters the creaturely word, binds himself to it, and limits himself by it (*verbo suo definit sese*).³⁷ By condescending to assume a particular creaturely form, and so in his love, he becomes vulnerable and open to attack; he is not untouched by suffering and death.³⁸ It is precisely in his utter self-abasement, that he is with us on the way and brings with him the utterly reliable promise of his free and undeserved presence where and when he wills. And since in any case his presence is beyond the grasp of our theory and praxis, it remains a mystery. When Moses asks God for his name, he is given the answer: "I am who I am; I will be who I will be" (Ex 3:14). I am the One who "will be with you" (Ex 3:12)—a God merciful and gracious (Ex 34:5–7).³⁹ The revelation of his name is at the same time a concealment, for it eludes every human attempt to grasp him, possess him, and pin him down. God's name will always be a mystery, forever.

The Mystery of Evil, Its Fractured Public Character

This mystery of the revealed God is a thoroughly delightful mystery that will forever remain unfathomable and inscrutable. It is

as clear and as brilliant as light and in its own way can be understood very well. On the other hand, there is another mystery, entirely opposite in character, the “mystery of evil” (*mysterium iniquitatis*) (2 Thess 2:7). It is not clear but dark. It is the mystery of the inexplicable, ontologically impossible revolt of the creature against his Creator and of his bid for omnipotence; in short, it is the inscrutable mystery of evil that is narrated in a special way in Genesis 3.⁴⁰ This mystery is also public—if only in its universality—but in an entirely different manner than that of the revealed God. Lies, betrayal, murder, war, and so on, are all symptomatic of a radical disturbance within creation, the community created by God, and, to the extent that it is felt by all people, it is “apparent.” Yet the mystery of evil is not fully perceived or publicly understood because in many crucial respects, it remains hidden, concealed—especially in the life of lies: the lies we tell ourselves as truth. Sin is not transparent to itself. It is hidden from the sinner and for that reason is not apparent. It must first be disclosed to him and in this sense be “revealed.” “You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance” (Ps 90:8).⁴¹ The sinner overlooks himself.

In his own way, Immanuel Kant was aware of this fractured public character of evil as untruth. He realized that it was not fully evident, and opposed it with his principle of “transcendental publicity [transparency].”⁴² According to this, for anything to be true, it must be able to be maintained in the civic public forum.⁴³ That makes the public forum “the final decision-making body” for what people can say and think.⁴⁴ Johann Georg Hamann protested against this tyranny of the public, beginning with his first treatise, the *Socratic Memorabilia* (1759) and asserted the truth that lies “hidden” (Ps 51:6): that “faith...is not for everyone [2 Thess 3:2], and that faith is not communicable like a commodity”⁴⁵ or like money.

“Not Communicable like a Commodity”

This critical thesis of Hamann concerns not simply the mystery of evil, including sin, and certainly not the mystery of divine love that overcomes it. For, if this love is not embraced, or is even rejected, we should not immediately blame the sinner. This peculiar mystery,

understood as the hardness of heart,⁴⁶ is also a divine destiny that we cannot explain or understand.⁴⁷ The fact that people fall into the abyss of incomprehension and blindness when they hear the gospel, or even worse, are pushed into it by the gospel, is a scandal and an offense—and that not only to believers. It is as such a public mystery. Nevertheless, it is a riddle that Christian hope knows will be solved once and for all in the eschaton along with the question of why some are elected and others are rejected.⁴⁸

Even believers do not always understand, as we see from the many passages in the New Testament where the disciples either misunderstand something or do not understand at all. Even though they already share in the promise of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17), they still have to struggle against the old Adam within themselves and the old world around them. The new being and life of the individual Christian and the entire church⁴⁹ is “hidden” (Col 3:3) “and not laid out before the eyes of the world, like commodities in the market place.”⁵⁰ The new life, therefore, has to be believed and will only *become* revealed: “When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory” (Col 3:4).

In the word usage of the New Testament, the verb “to reveal” can refer to the salvation-event that has occurred definitively in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and it can also refer to his (second) coming. In the latter case, it refers to the still-expected and ardently-awaited consummation of the world through the Last Judgment and thus it refers to the removal of the difference between faith and sight (2 Cor 5:7).⁵¹ But the hope of this coming revelation is based on the revelation that has already occurred, which is decisively defined by Jesus’ crucifixion and his resurrection, as paradigmatically expressed by the hymn of praise in 1 Peter 1:3: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

The marked differentiation in the concept of revelation has its counterpart in the different meanings of the word “public”: the public of the One who will come and the public of the One who

has already come.⁵² The mystery that in the past has been completely hidden and that now has been brought to light through the revelation that has occurred is the identity of the Messiah, the Son of Man and the Son of God, with Jesus of Nazareth. Indeed, *the mystery is the identity of God himself with this one particular man.*⁵³ “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30). Thus a solid stake is driven into the quicksand of utopian expectations; the game of blind man’s bluff with God is definitely over. Luther hits the nail on the head: “No one could imagine that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ.”⁵⁴ This revealed mystery is in no way self-evident, it is not obvious to anyone, as Jesus’ answer to Peter’s confession shows: “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven” (Mt 16:17; see 1 Cor 12:3).⁵⁵ It is in this sense that the mystery revealed to the disciples is hidden—and not only before Easter but also after Easter. In this sense then there is no public mystery but only a revealed mystery. Yet this revealed mystery will become a public mystery, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the proclamation that Jesus is the Messiah—a public mystery that is revealed and known to the “whole creation” (Mk 16:15).

The mystery of salvation, however, remains hidden to unbelief before the eschaton. Salvation is even hidden to believers insofar as they believe, against all appearances to the contrary, that God’s love did not fail at the cross of Jesus, that God did not forsake his Son in his hour of death. But if faith can make that confession, it can do so only by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. In this sense we can speak of the hiddenness of revelation. Yet it is our hope that all hiddenness and non-understanding will one day turn out to be like a riddle that is solved by sight. The one and only mystery that will remain forever, and that we will continue to marvel at and adore for all eternity, is the mystery of God’s love, a love that rent the heavens asunder to seek and to find us in our lost estate. It is the mystery of the eternal Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the living and therefore inexhaustible God. And it is this mystery that we confess publicly in the creed, for it is here, as Luther says in the Large Catechism, that “God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart and his pure, unutterable love.”⁵⁶

Conclusion

The word of God, which remains forever (Isa 40:8), . . . enters the apocalyptic public realm . . . , and yet it remains a mystery. The mystery is that of the divine name, which, unlike all other mysteries especially the agonizing mystery of evil and the hardness of heart, is not a riddle that once solved is put aside. It is the mystery of the eternally rich, living, and therefore inexhaustible God.

It is my wish for the future of *Lutheran Quarterly* that it continues to lead readers into a deeper understanding of this profound public mystery, which stands at the very center of the Christian faith.

Translated by Jeffrey Silcock.

NOTES

1. According to the Vulgate and the Masoretic Text, “of our God,” according to the Septuagint, “of the Lord.”

2. 1 Peter 1:25 (Vulgate), not Isaiah 40:8 (*verbum autem Dei nostri stabit in aeternum*). See Frederick John Stopp, “Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum: the Dissemination of a Reformation Slogan, 1522–1904” *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (1987): 54–71.

3. See Rainer Wohlfeil, “Bauernkrieg: Symbole der Endzeit?” in *Rottenburger Jahrbuch für Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 20 (Stuttgart: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2001), 61f.

4. See Wohlfeil, “Bauernkrieg,” 70, as well as Hugo Schnell, *Martin Luther und die Reformation auf Münzen und Medaillen* (Munich: Klinkhardt Biermann, 1983); the evidence can be found in his subject index under the entry “Verbum Dei manet in aeternum (VDMIAE)” (380).

5. On Thomas Murner’s scornful reading “*Verbum Dei manet im Ärmel*,” see *Horaz und Celtis*, edited by Ulrike Auhagen, Eckard Lefèvre, Eckart Schäfer (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2000), 79.

6. *Die Barmer Theologische Erklärung. Einführung und Dokumentation*, ed., Martin Heimbucher and Rudolf Weth (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 7th ed. 2009), 43.

7. See Jer 20:7 & 9; 1 Cor 9:16; Acts 4:20. For more, see below under “The Public Mystery of God’s Name.”

8. *Vom Abendmahl Christi. Bekenntnis* (1528): *Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, 57 vols. Eds. J.F.K. Knaake et al. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883ff.), 26:499.2—500.9. (Hereafter cited as WA.) *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, 55 vols. Eds. Pelikan and Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955ff.), 37: 36a. (Hereafter cited as LW.) “In the last part of this treatise, I desire to confess my faith before God and all the world, point by point. I am determined to abide by it until my death and (so help me God!) in this faith to depart from this world and to appear before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . I know what I am saying, and I well realize what this will mean for me before the Last Judgment . . .” (*trans. alt.*). Compare the closing words of the *Formula of Concord* (SD XII): from *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen:

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), 1000. (Hereafter, BSLK.) “Therefore, in the presence of God and all Christendom among both our contemporaries and our posterity, we wish to have testified that the present explanation of all the foregoing controverted articles here explained, and none other, is our teaching, belief, and confession in which by God’s grace we shall appear with intrepid hearts before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and for which we shall give an account.” See *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds., (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 633. (Hereafter cited as BOC.)

9. *Deutsche Reichstagsakten* (Acts of the German Imperial Diet), Earlier Series, Vol. 7/2, edited by the Historical Commission of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences (Munich, 1963), 1277.29–33.

10. See Irene Dingel, “Die Speyerer Protestation von 1529 in ihren geschichtlichen Zusammenhängen,” *Pfälzisches Pfarrerberblatt* (2004), 212–23. Its great cultural significance, especially for neo-Protestantism, became clear at the 2004 centenary of the Memorial Church of the Protestation in Speyer.

11. Luther at the Diet of Worms, 1521: WA 7:838.4–8; LW 32:112. Kurt-Victor Selge, “Capta conscientia in verbis dei. Luthers Widerrufungsverweigerung in Worms” in *Der Reichstag zu Worms von 1521. Reichspolitik und Luthersache*, edited by Fritz Reuter (Worms: State Archives, 1971), 180–207.

12. This apocalyptic character has been worked out in a commendable way by Steven Paulson, “What Kind of a Confession is the Augsburg Confession?” in *Kirkens bekjennelse i historisk og aktuelt perspektiv* (Festskrift til Kjell Olav Sannes), eds., Torleiv Austad, Tormod Engelsen, and Lars Östnor (Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag, 2010), 111–21.

13. BSLK 136. 6–9; see also 83c, 11–15.

14. BSLK 31; BOC 31.

15. Philipp Spitta, “O komm, du Geist der Wahrheit . . .,” *Evangelisches Gesangbuch Württemberg* (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Medienhaus, 2007), 136.4. (Hereafter, EG.)

16. See the entry on ὁμολογέω by Axel Horstmann in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds., Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 42: “As a fixed formula, the negative form ἐπαισχύνομαι of Rom. 1:16 replaces ὁμολογέω (‘confess’);” see 2 Tim 1:8 (*trans. alt.*).

17. See Peter Stuhlmacher, “Der Zeugnisauftrag der Gemeinde Jesu Christi” in *Biblische Theologie und Evangelium* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 279–291.

18. It is significant that the mystery of faith is centered in a person (a “who”) and not a thing (a “what”) (see notes 53 and 54). Pilate’s famous question “What is truth?” (John 18:38) misses the point, for truth is a person. The question is rather is: Who is the truth? Jesus answers that himself in John 14:6.

19. The 1545 version of the Luther Bible renders 1 Tim 3:16: “kündlich groß ist das gottselige Geheimnis” (“proclaimably great is the divine mystery”), while the 1984 version says: “groß ist, wie jedermann bekennen muß, das Geheimnis des Glaubens” (“great, as everyone must confess, is the mystery of the faith”).

20. Text critically, as well as materially, the masculine personal form is to be preferred to the neuter.

21. See the concise and insightful article by Johannes von Lüpke in *Evangelisches Lexikon für Theologie und Gemeinde*, edited by Helmut Burkhardt and others, vol. 2 (Wuppertal and Zürich: Brockhaus Verlag, 1993), 673–75.

22. See Paul Althaus, "Die Inflation des Begriffs der Offenbarung in der gegenwärtigen Theologie," *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 18 (1941): 134–149.

23. See Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Mystical Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 135–141.

24. This is not saying anything against silence as qualified speech and as an indispensable element of worship (Hab 2:20), or even as a hallmark of the voice of God (1 Kings 19:12). But the neo-Platonic approach to silence and its reference to Wisdom 18:14 is difficult to reconcile, say, with Luther's theology of the word. See Paul Rorem, "Martin Luther's Christocentric Critique of Pseudo-Dionysian Spirituality," *Lutheran Quarterly* 11 (1997): 291–307; Paul Rorem, "Negative Theologies and the Cross," *Lutheran Quarterly* 23 (2009): 314–331.

25. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Von guten Mächten ..." (EG 65:6); "By Gracious Powers," *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 626. (Hereafter, ELW.)

26. Heb 12:22f.

27. See Otfried Hofius, "Gemeinschaft mit den Engeln im Gottesdienst der Kirche. Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Skizze," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 89 (1992): 172–196.

28. All citations are from *Deutsches Wörterbuch* by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, vol. 5 (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1897; reprint: Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), col. 2363. [Translator's note: It should be noted that the key German word here, *Geheimnis*, and indeed throughout the lecture, can be translated as "secret" as well as "mystery." Even though the standard English translations of Goethe normally render *Geheimnis* in these phrases with "secret," we have opted for "mystery" so as to be consistent with the rest of the lecture.]

29. On the distinction between "declarative" and "descriptive" praise, see Claus Westermann, *The Praise of God in the Psalms*, trans., Keith R. Crim (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965).

30. WA 35:477.6–9; LW 53:333.

31. The English versions translate in the past tense. The reference is to Psalm 116:10: "I believed, even when I spoke," where the psalmist stresses that he persevered in faith even while suffering affliction. But Luther, like Paul, in 2 Cor 4:13 follows the present tense in the Greek (LXX) translation of the psalm: "Ich glaube, darum rede ich, I believe; therefore I speak."

32. The corresponding Hebrew word is used for rape or sexual assault.

33. See Ernst Käsemann, "A Pauline Version of the 'Amor Fati,'" *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 217–235. He shows that Paul's destiny, which is to preach the gospel, is at the same time the object of his love.

34. Martin Rinckart, "Nun danket alle Gott ..." (EG 321.2): "Der ewigreiche Gott ..." ("This bounteous God ...") in "Now thank we all our God," ELW 839.

35. Thus Hamann's apt criticism that anticipates Hegel (see below n. 36): Johann Georg Hamann, "Golgatha und Scheblimini" (1784) in Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke*. Historisch-kritische Ausgabe, ed., Josef Nadler, Vol. 3, (Vienna: Herder: 1951), 303, 37f. Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, trans. and ed., Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: University Press, 2007), 180.

36. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte II*, Theorie-Werkausgabe in 20 Bänden, edited by Eva Moldenhauer und Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971), 19: 489.

37. WA 18:685 (14–24) 23; LW 33:140 (The Bondage of the Will, 1525).
38. “But you have burdened me with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities” (Isa 43:24).
39. See Ex 33:18–23; 6:2f.; 20:2: God’s primal promise in his self-introduction, in his name: “I am the Lord your God.”
40. See Oswald Bayer, “Adam, wo bist du?” in *Anthropologien der Endlichkeit. Stationen einer literarischen Denkfigur seit der Aufklärung* (Hans Graubner zum 75. Geburtstag), ed., Friederike Felicitas Günther und Torsten Hoffmann (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011), 403–410.
41. In order for sin to be revealed to the sinner, he must, like David through Nathan (2 Sam 12), be convicted of it by the *verbum externum* of the preaching of the law.
42. For a detailed account, see Wolfgang-Dieter Baur, *Johann Georg Hamann als Publizist. Zum Verhältnis von Verkündigung und Öffentlichkeit* (Berlin /New York: de Gruyter, 1991), 280–99. For Kant, “criticism” must be essentially public. See Oswald Bayer, *Vernunft ist Sprache. Hamanns Metakritik Kants* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, 2002), 67–90: “Der Begriff der ‘Kritik’ im Streit zwischen Hamann und Kant.”
43. Baur, *Johann Georg Hamann als Publizist*, 292. Wolfgang Huber, *Kirche und Öffentlichkeit* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1973), 13: “Behind Kant’s transcendental principle lies the conviction that the function of a pragmatic truth-testing should be ascribed to the public consensus of the critically debating public.”
44. Baur, *Johann Georg Hamann als Publizist*, 292.
45. Johann Georg Hamann, *Briefwechsel* Vol. VII, ed., Arthur Henkel (Frankfurt/M: Insel Verlag, 1979), 176.6f. (Letter to Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, 30. April 1787). See Oswald Bayer, “Kommunikabilität des Glaubens;” in Bayer, *Autorität und Kritik. Zu Hermeneutik und Wissenschaftstheorie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 108–116. Hamann anticipates “readers in secret who know and understand God better than I do” (116). Therein lies their freedom. Truth communicates non-coercively; therefore, its testimony will not compel them. It takes place freely and is the sovereign right of that author who finally interprets and judges all things.
46. Isa 6:9f.; Mk 4:11f.; Mt 13:10–16; Lk 8:10; Jn 12:39f.; Acts 28:26f. See especially Isa 63:17, and Claus Westermann, *Das Buch Jesaja: Kapitel 40–66* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 313.
47. See, however, Ulrich Luz on Mt 13:14f. *Evangelisch Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* I/2 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag 1990), 314: “The final μήποτε is probably a reference to Israel and not to God: Israel has closed its eyes and ears so that it is impossible for it to understand and repent. μήποτε puts the emphasis on Israel’s guilt and not on God’s predestination.”
48. This is also Luther’s hope at the end of *de servo arbitrio*, *The Bondage of the Will* 1525: WA 18:784.35–785.38; LW 33:289–292.
49. See Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, translated by Thomas T. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 278–281: “The Hiddenness of the Church.”
50. WA DB 7:421.10f.; LW 35:411 (Second Preface to the Revelation of St. John, 1530), *trans. alt.*
51. Both meanings are found side by side, for example, in 1 Peter 1. See, on the one hand, verses 5 and 7 (future) and, on the other, verses 12f. (present). For the overall findings in the NT, see the article, ἀποκαλύπτω, by Traugott Holtz in *Exegetical Dictionary of the*

New Testament, edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 130–32.

52. Difference and relatedness are clearly expressed in Johann Heermann's hymn "Frühmorgens, da die Sonn aufgeht . . .," EG 111 verses 6–10.

53. See Günther Bornkamm, Art., *μυστήριον*, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. IV, 2nd. ed., ed., Gerhard Kittel, trans., Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 819: "The *μυστήριον τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ* which is revealed to the disciples, is Jesus Himself as Messiah." Compare Peter's confession in Mt 16:16: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." To which Jesus replies: "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven" (v.17). See 1 Cor 12:3.

54. WA 19:207.3; LW 33:55 (Lectures on Jonah, 1526; *trans. alt.*)

55. In the language of the Small Catechism: "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit . . ." (BSLK 511.46–512.2; BOC 355)

56. BSLK 660.29–31; BOC 439.