Orthodoxy Orthopraxis Orthopathy

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Assignment

### *Developmental Readings*

Review Assignment #3, the course essential elements, assigned readings, and recommended readings to identify selections of books and scholarly articles to identify and select developmental reading sources and entries.

* Refer to the “[Student Guide to Developmental Readings](https://drive.google.com/file/d/161V_FaYR2BnNGCSFUlWPjUSIQzcH04Hq/view?usp=share_link)” for updated information on sample comments, rubrics, and key definitions related to developmental readings.

**Source One:**

Morehead, J. (2020). Evangelicals and gross religions: Disgust and fear in multifaith engagement. In J. Morehead & B. Benzinger (Eds.), *A Charitable Orthopathy: Christian Perspectives On Emotions In Multifaith Engagement*. Pickwick Publications. <https://www.perlego.com/book/1482306>

**Comment 1:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

The author suggests that evangelical attitudes toward other religions downplay emotion and place a strong emphasis on maintaining doctrinal purity to avoid syncretism and compromise. He finds a psychological dimension to this in that evangelicals often react negatively to other religions that are perceived as threats which leads to avoidance fueled by disgust or engagement fueled by desire for apologetic refutation because of the perceived threat. Morehead believes that Christendom needs to move beyond these responses and follow the example of Jesus who chose mercy over ritual purity who they see as emphasizing compassion over purity concerns. This involves rethinking the balance between doctrinal purity and loving one’s neighbors. (Morehead, 2020, What This All Means for Evangelical Multifaith Engagement section and Final Thoughts About Purity section)

**Essential Element:** This material relates to the essential elements of Orthodoxy, Orthopraxis, and Orthopathy.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** The material is both additive and variant to my understanding of these topics. The exposing of the role of emotion in shaping our response to other confessions of faith, other religions, and other worldviews is well taken. However, there are cautions worthy to consider in the approach the author advocates for.

**Contextualization:**  Orthodox Lutheranism is known for its emphasis on the importance of doctrinal purity which places the doctrine of justification by faith at the center. Thus, we are hesitant to support any position that would be seen as compromising a clear witness to Christ which would compromise theological integrity. Downplaying the importance of doctrinal purity risks leading Christendom and Christians toward syncretism, doctrinal relativism and into what is not Gospel at all. (Galatians 1: 6-9)

 Morehead’s observation about the role of emotion is interesting. Avoidance and combative engagement certainly appear to have the potential for being motivated by strong emotional response to a perceived threat. Our base emotions of anger and fear in reaction to a threat stimulus tend to motivate behavior akin to attacking or fleeing. Thus being aware of our emotional triggers and motivations are important for Christians who are engaging those whose difference challenges our own worldviews. That said, Lutherans recognize the total depravity of the human being both mind and emotion, as Luther was so fond of saying, thoughts, word, and deeds. The classical world often saw risk in emotional motivation stressing the importance of filtering such emotion through a rational mind. Insight from Scripture, which speaks to the corruption also of the mind and reason, leads us to conclude that as we critically examine our own emotions and our responses that we move beyond reason to be guided by the revelation of Scripture. There is a role for good sound doctrine in the processing of our emotions and our decisions to take action. Thus we uphold a balanced view where doctrine shapes both understanding and response, encouraging Christians to approach others with both love and truth, without fear and hostility, but also without compromising the gospel.

 Within our postmodern, transmodern, post-Christian, antifoundational world there is a general skepticism toward ritual and universal expectations of any kind that might make a claim upon us. One will often hear the charge that genuine Christianity is about mercy and compassion and has nothing to do with moral obligation or a truth that exists outside and has claim upon us. Morehead presents a Jesus opposed to ritual purity, and we do find in His engagement with many of the religious leaders of the time a strong critique of the way they engaged in praxis and with their focus on works, ritual and tradition to the exclusion of true love and care for neighbor. But we do not find Jesus suggesting that truth is not important, for He Himself highlights the value of truth and that truth is found in Him. Jesus Himself partook of ritual, for example partaking of the Sedar meal and the gifting of the rite of Holy Communion to the church. Morehead simply extends his logic here too far to construct a narrative of Jesus that fits neatly into contemporary postmodern expectation but does not fit so neatly into a comprehensive Biblical view of Jesus. True love and compassion as commanded by Christ involves not just relational compassion but also sharing of the truth of the Gospel. Morehead simply creates a false dichotomy between compassion and doctrinal purity. Christ was deeply committed to truth, fulfilling rather than dismissing the Law. Jesus’ actions were not a rejection of doctrinal purity but an invitation to understand purity in the context of gospel truth. Doctrine and love are not mutually exclusive but harmoniously aligned in Jesus’ teachings.

**Source Two:**

McCain, P., & Engelbrecht, E. (Eds.). (2006). The formula of concord solid declaration. In *Concordia: The Lutheran confessions: A Reader’s Edition of The Book of Concord*. Concordia Publishing House.

**Comment 2:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

“Luther says about conversion that a person is purely passive [LW 33:157]. This means a person does nothing at all toward conversion, but only undergoes what God works in him. Luther does not mean that conversion takes place without the preaching and hearing of God’s Word. Nor does he mean that in conversion no new emotion whatever is awakened in us by the Holy Spirit and no spiritual operation begun. But he means that a person by himself, or from his natural powers, cannot do anything or help toward his conversion. Conversion is not only in part, but totally an act, gift, present, and work of the Holy Spirit alone. He accomplishes and does it by His power and might, through the Word, in a person’s intellect, will, and heart, “while the person does or works nothing, but only undergoes it.” It is not like a figure cut into stone or a seal impressed into wax, which knows nothing about it, which neither sees nor wills it. Rather, it happens the way that has just been described and explained.” (The Formula of Concord Solid Declaration, 2006 p. 734)

**Essential Element:** This material relates to the essential elements of Orthodoxy, Orthopraxis, and Orthopathy.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This material is additive to my understanding of orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy. I have done research into emotional processing in the past but have not until now considered this under a theological umbrella, orthopathy, which lead to research through our Lutheran confessional documents on the role of emotion which has turned out to be a productive endeavor.

**Contextualization:** Lutheran orthodoxy stresses the objective cognitive side of our mental processing with a concern for and emphasis upon a clear faithful understanding of the Gospel coming from and in congruence with Scripture alone. But to discount that people are emotional beings and with this being a significant influence upon our life, our thinking, our values and beliefs, our speaking and our actions would be naive. I appreciate here that the role of emotion is recognized in this passage that discusses the conversion of the person into the Christian faith. Stressing that our salvation is by grace alone dependent upon the work of Christ alone (I think Jesus picked the word “reborn” with a serious intentionality here that our coming to faith is His work on our behalf), this passage recognizes that the believer who may not be contributing by active works to the process, is nonetheless the passive recipient of the process and experiences this process. This not only awakens new awareness and new behavior (the fruits of faith), but as this passage suggests, may awaken strong emotions. I recently posted on a discussion forum a word of encouragement to folks to post something they were thankful about regarding our church body, their congregation, or perhaps even just a blessing from God. The responses ran a range of life dimensions but one stood out to me as a very unexpected response to a post soliciting thanksgiving. A woman discussed how she had recently come to terms with her growing disability due to aging and had to give up her home and move into a nursing facility. And without going into details, she gave thanks to God. My experience with such things would make me suspect a person would respond with fear, grief, trepidation and perhaps she has, but that was not her response. Her response was thankfulness. To see the Holy Spirit producing a public confession of faith in a spirit of thankfulness, touches back upon this passage that our salvation by Christ alone and our total dependence upon Him, our salvation by the objective justification that comes through the cross, and the imputation of His righteousness over us as a white robe washed in the blood of the lamb, does not mean “…no new emotion whatever is awakened in us by the Holy Spirit…” Amen.

**Source Three:**

McCain, P., & Engelbrecht, E. (Eds.). (2006). Apology of the Augsburg confession. In *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions: A Reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord*. Concordia Publishing House.

**Comment 3:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

“The adversaries teach that we merit grace by contrition.” (p. 246)

“When will a terrified conscience be able to decide whether it fears God for His own sake or is fleeing from eternal punishments? The Psalms and the Prophets describe those serious, true, and great terrors, which the truly converted experience.” (pp. 246-247).

**Essential Element:** This relates to the essential element orthopathy.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** Continuing my exploration of the Lutheran confessional documents found in the Book of Concord, this material is additive to my understand of orthopathy.

**Contextualization:** Lutherans recognize the role that emotion plays in our lives. How can we not as we are human, and all people are emotional beings. Some are more cognitively dominant and some more emotionally dominant, but we all have feelings and we all process feelings. Some of us are more self-aware and others less, some of us are better at processing emotional information in clear and productive ways and others less. But we all have feelings.

As I reflect upon this passage, I recall a scene in the movie Luther (that was produced by Thrivent) where Luther is in the monastery in mental anguish yelling at the devil and again following his examination at Worms spending that evening portrayed in emotional turmoil and fear of death. Our sins can weigh upon us. Fear can arise when life is not kind, when others hurt us, when we have made mistakes for which we feel shame and regret, grief, and loss. Recently on one of my administrated discussion forums a mother responded to a prolife post with how a certain abortifacient medication saved her life from an entopic pregnancy. A respondent immediately pointed out that the vast majority of abortions are due to convenience. Even if true, that was not the case here. I heard within these short few words a degree of pain, perhaps even grief at the injustice that life places us into. Perhaps I am projecting my own emotion upon the mother here in empathic connection, but nonetheless, the realities of this world which give rise to the big questions, to the philosophies and many spiritualities, which drive human beings to try to make sense of the world, to interpret it, to try to find meaning in it or in the end despair of it, the real generates strong emotions at times. We can feel terrified, ashamed, despairing before God, when we recognize our faults, our own most grievous faults.

 The question arises then: how much shameful feeling is enough to qualify for repentance. This was the teaching of the medieval church. “The adversaries teach that we merit grace by contrition.” How bad do I have to feel to really be sorry for my sins so I can give my heart to Jesus? As the passage quoted above asks, do we ever really move beyond our own self-interest? Is our faith relationship with God really dependent on our right feelings? Our good orthopathy? What does God want from us in this regard?

 Here I argue the question is the wrong question. It is not about what God wants from us. The Gospel is never about what God wants from us. It is always about what God wants for us. And here we remember the balm for the wounded soul and the grieving heart, or even the heart whose emotions are in check. Jesus is the one for us, Emanuel, God with us.

**Comment 4:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

“The adversaries cannot say how the Holy Spirit is given. They imagine that the Sacraments give the Holy Spirit by the outward act (ex opere operato), without a good emotion in the one receiving them, as though, indeed, the gift of the Holy Spirit were a useless matter. We speak of the kind of faith that is not an idle thought, but that liberates from death and produces a new life in hearts. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. This does not coexist with mortal sin. As long as faith is present, it produces good fruits, as we will explain later.”

**Essential Element:** This selection speaks to the essential element orthopathy.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This selection is additive to my understanding of a Christian view of orthopathy.

**Contextualization:** Again, continuing my exploration of the confessional documents of the Lutheran church, I appreciate here both/and understanding of our awareness as an element of faith. I have often heard, and often teach, that faith has three key elements: content (we know something about God, specifically the promises of God are revealed), assent (saying that is true) and trust (that is for me, I can hang my hat on that). The Lutheran confession stresses salvation by faith alone by grace alone by Christ alone. Yet we remain thoroughly sacramental highlighting the mutually reinforcing roles of Word and Sacrament ministry. We confess that God who is boundless has bound Himself revealed through a Word of promise to operate through the tools of His design, has located His saving work in the places of His own creation and choosing: the proclamation of the Gospel, Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion. It was a problem in the medieval church that it was taught that the reception of the sacraments, specifically the Lord’s Supper, would by necessity bring blessing independent of one’s acknowledgment, understanding, or trust in them. Lutherans are consistent in affirming right reception of the sacrament involves faith.

But here in this passage we find that this faith is described as “good emotion.” To Lutherans this might come as a big surprise. Often in the discussion of praxis revolving around what we in my tradition sometimes call “the worship wars” about the place of traditional liturgical forms vs. more contemporary forms, I will hear commentary critical of emotionality and emotional response as if somehow our emotions are closer to our sinful nature and our objective cognitive rational mind is somehow closer to the mind of God. (A very classical and medieval view to be sure, but not necessarily a thoroughly Biblical one.) We tend to think of faith on the cognitive side, and within my tradition under the influence of right doctrine (orthodoxy) likely compounded by our classical western inheritance that elevates the mind over the heart in many cases, to discount the role of emotion. So, it comes as a welcome surprise to find recognition in this passage that emphasizes salvation by grace by God’s action through the means of grace, all very objective matters, generating, and necessarily so, an emotional response, a “good emotion,” an ortho-pathy.

**Source Four:**

Altman, J. (2020). The renewing of the mind: Cognitive and developmental implications of Romans 12:2. In D. R. Cullum & J. R. Middleton (Eds.), in *Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis.* Pickwick Publications.

**Comment 5:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

The author argues that Paul’s exhortation to be “transformed by the renewal of the mind” in Romans 12:2 refers to the transformation of not just cognitive abilities but also moral and emotional aspects of a person’s inner life, aligning with the broader Christian understanding that conversion should involve changes in perspective and behavior. The connection between mind and body is integral to this transformation, with Scripture rejecting a dualistic view and instead presenting humans as unified beings accountable for their choices and actions. While modern psychology may reduce spiritual experiences to material brain functions, research does affirm that genetics, social influences, and experiences shape the mind’s development. Epigenetics also shows that behaviors, like habitual overeating, can have lasting genetic effects across generations. Humans are biologically motivated to fulfill physical needs but also seek psychological fulfillment, such as autonomy, competence, and meaningful relationships. These complex roots of behavior imply that negative actions may not solely stem from sin, but also from genetic and environmental factors that require spiritual, physical, and mental remedies for wholeness, including professional therapy when necessary. Lastly, personal development has communal dimensions, underscoring that the Body of Christ is essential not only for spiritual but also for developmental health across the lifespan. (Altman, 2020)

**Essential Element:** This relates to the essential elements orthodox and orthopathy.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This material is additive to my understanding of orthopathy. A great deal of focus within Christendom and conversation is upon right belief and right action with much less conversation about right feelings or spiritually healthy emotional processing. I appreciate the author’s holistic view.

**Contextualization:** I have been privileged to conduct ministry for over 30 years in a variety of settings both parish and institutional. I have served as a parish pastor in many different settings from localized sole pastor to multipoint ministry as well as serving as senior pastor of a large congregation with multiple staff. I have served as a hospital chaplain and spent ten years as an active-duty military chaplain. I cannot count the number of times that pastor care revolved around not just dealing the objective specificity of the issue at hand but also the need to assist the person with their emotional processing of the experience. I have ministered to the dying and grieving, to rape victims, to injured service members, to those addicted to substance abuse, to grieving mothers who have miscarried children, even one whose child was murdered. I have ministered to a rapist, to child abusers, even a pastor who came forward and publicly admitted to molesting children. I have stabilized a congregation in grief and turmoil when their beloved long-term pastor died suddenly and unexpectedly from a heart attack, another who pastor left with no warning after telling them that everyone was full of, well you can fill in the blank. I have managed a staff in conflict and mentored or at least attempted to mentor a young pastor wrestling with balancing his strong views of what must be with the strong opinions of the people he served. So I absolutely see the place for more consideration and equipping of the saints including pastors and laity in the arena of emotional processing, both to help us with self-awareness but to help others with the same. Sometimes one will hear there are no “wrong” feelings, feelings are feelings. But anyone who has counseled a seriously depressed or angry individual will recognize that sometimes, often times our emotions fail us, mislead us, make the wrong call. That does not equate to discounting emotions and all of us become the equivalent of the Vulcan race on Star Trek. But the author’s suggestions regarding the renewal of the mind are well taken here.

 So, while Lutheran orthodoxy would emphasize the transformation of the Christian that St. Paul discusses in Romans 12 is deeply rooted in the doctrine of the justification by faith alone. Any transformation in mind, behavior, or perspective is a consequence of God’s grace in justifying the believer through faith, rather than a human effort or psychological progression. Transformation is not merely moral or cognitive but a supernatural renewal where the Holy Spirit works through faith to sanctify the believer (Galatians 5:16-25). The author's emphasis on cognitive, moral, and emotional renewal aligns well with Lutheran thought but should always be understood as secondary to justification through Christ alone, not as prerequisites for salvation.

The author’s rejection of dualism aligns well with Lutheran anthropology, which holds that humans are created as unified beings, body, and soul, both fallen and redeemed in Christ. Lutheran Orthodoxy opposes a strict division between body and soul, which is reflective of the holistic unity of a person. In this way, Scripture presents human transformation as affecting the whole person, including body, mind, and soul (1 Thessalonians 5:23). This is consistent with Luther’s teaching on the means of grace, where God uses physical elements (water in Baptism, bread, and wine in the Lord’s Supper) with the Word to deliver spiritual gifts, underscoring the holistic nature of divine interaction with humanity.

 Regarding the suggestion that many behaviors whose motivates are rooted in genetic and environmental factors influencing our emotions and other cognitions, Lutherans can harmonize this with orthodox teaching. Lutheran doctrine teaches that original sin permeates the entirety of human nature, including genetic and environmental influences. Although modern psychology and epigenetics offer insights into how behaviors are influenced, Lutheran Orthodoxy holds that all human actions ultimately arise from a sin-corrupted nature, even when secondary factors play a role. Thus, while genetic predispositions or environmental factors might influence behavior, they do not negate the reality of sin but rather demonstrate the extent of human depravity that only God’s grace can remedy. That is not to be taken that we do not recognize the need for medication or other medical treatment to treat underlying physical and mental disorders. Nor would we claim the presence of such a disorder equates to punishment for a particular sin on a person’s part or the particular sins of a person’s parents, but rather reflects the fallen and corrupted nature of the world. This does not mean that wrong behavior resulting from these impulses is given a pass as not expressing sin or sinful corruption. And none of this may seem fair. In my contextualization class I am going to wrestle with the issue of transgenderism, which while having many dimensions, at least for some is grounded in the presence of a biological disorder. Life simply is not fair, and we cannot expect it to be so. Some are born with greater burdens than others. Thus, Lutheran Orthodoxy would recognize the value of psychological and physical interventions but would maintain that these remedies are limited in their ability to address spiritual matters. While professional therapy can aid in treating mental and emotional afflictions, Lutheran theology maintains that only God’s Word and sacraments can truly heal the spiritual aspect of human brokenness. This approach does not deny the potential role of therapy but emphasizes that spiritual renewal through Christ’s forgiveness is the primary means by which a believer experiences true wholeness and renewal.

 In my experience as a parish pastor, hospital chaplain and military chaplain my experience is that my church body which has a strong focus on orthodoxy, recognizes that human behavior is complex and influenced by both spiritual and biological factors, Lutheran orthodoxy supports a holistic approach to ministry. Pastors and Christian counselors may integrate pastoral care with psychological support, encouraging believers to address mental health needs while grounding their ultimate hope and healing in Christ. While professional therapy can provide help for managing specific emotional or cognitive struggles, it is seen as an aid to, rather than a substitute for, the spiritual renewal found in Christ. But we also recognize that we are not going to somehow cure cancer, depression, or suicidal ideation simply by baptizing or providing Holy Communion.

**Source Five:**

Whiteford, R. (2022). The second commandment: Contemporary Christians and honoring the name of God. In J. Pless & L. Vogel (Eds.), *Luther’s Large Catechism With Annotations and Contemporary Applications*. Concordia Publishing House.

**Comment 6:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

“We profane God’s name if we claim to have an authoritative word from God when it is merely an impression or feeling, whether or not it comes from the Holy Spirit. We profane His name if we misinterpret God’s Word for our own agenda, if we claim that God’s Word does not mean what it says, if we confuse what God wants with what we want, if we justify what we want by calling it “God’s will,” if we pray in God’s name without expecting Him to hear us, if we worship God with our lips but not in our hearts.”

**Essential Element:** This comment relates to the intersection of orthodoxy and orthopathy.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of the interaction of orthodoxy and orthopathy.

**Contextualization:** Luther in his small catechism in his treatment of the first table of the Law which contain the commandments regarding our relationship with God, highlights the importance of allowing God to be God and confessing God as God has revealed Himself to be. Thus idolatry and misusing the name of God are warned against. This short passage reminds that impressions and feelings are not solid ground for saying this is God or thus says the Lord. Where the previous authors and material would have us acknowledge and engage that human beings are emotional creatures and factor everything through our experience, we are reminded that too much of what is often presented as God must be this or that are reflections of our impressions or even more importantly driven by our emotional needs. In my next assignment I am going to consider how my emotional needs and the possible emotional needs of my associate lead to some fairly ineffective and harmful interactions in a matter touch on orthodoxy, orthopraxis and orthopathy. But perhaps the insight into the power of our emotional needs to shape and warp our impressions of God, what in the chaplaincy are often called “god images” so that they are not congruent with Scripture is needed. Perhaps self-awareness that sometimes our assertiveness that a certain position must be true and orthodox is not as reflective of Divine revelation as it is of our need for Divine revelation to be a certain thing.

I recall in a particular study group a fellow chaplain sharing that his biological daughter was not identifying as a homosexual man and had approached him for financial help to transition beginning with the removal of her breast tissue. He shared with us over a period of months his wrestling with this news. He ultimately concluded that the only way he could for himself make sense of the revelation of God’s Word and the experience he was undergoing which was heavily influence by his own anxieties and care and empathy for his daughter, that obviously God must grow and evolve as people do and while the Scripture might say certain things regarding sexuality and gender, that God has outgrown his previous views having learned from humanity through his interaction with homosexual and transgendered individuals. He was utilizing a particular application of Whitehead’s process theology, but this entire meaning making process in the end turned out to be an exercise in anthropomorphizing to a degree that even Feuerbach would be impressed by and in my opinion the bus was driven almost entire by emotional needs.

**Source Six:**

Cochran, E. (2020). Orthopathy in the Christian tradition: Promises and challenges. In J. Morehead & B. Benzinger (Eds.), *A Charitable Orthopathy: Christian Perspectives On Emotions In Multifaith Engagement*. Pickwick Publications. <https://www.perlego.com/book/1482306>

**Comment 7:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

The author writes the concept of *orthopathy*—right emotions in the Christian life—reflects longstanding theological insights into the role of emotions in faith. Christian tradition suggests that orthopathy should be embraced for two reasons: right emotions are fundamental to practicing faith, and they are exemplified in the life and ministry of Jesus. While intellectual belief is a key component of faith, as seen in Martin Luther’s association of faith with Gospel confession, faith also involves a heartfelt trust in God, emphasizing emotional engagement beyond mere cognitive assent. John Calvin echoes this, describing faith as more about the heart and affections than intellect. Christian life, therefore, cannot be limited to doctrinal adherence alone; it must include affective dimensions. Augustine noted the importance of Christ’s emotions, seeing Jesus as the model of pure and authentic emotion in His human nature. Thus, in the Augustinian tradition, Christ’s embodiment of certain emotions indicates that these are traits Christians should strive to emulate, integrating them into a full, emotionally engaged faith. (Cochran, 2020, Orthopathy and the Christian life section, paras 4-6)

**Essential Element:** This material relates to the essential element orthopathy.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This material is additive to my understanding of orthopathy, especially informing that while orthodoxy has received the lion share of conversation regarding church history, there is testimony that the previous generations of the church have considered the role of emotion in the spiritual life of Christians.

**Contextualization:** I found particularly interesting the information on St. Augustine and his emphasis on the holistic Christ, the union of humanity and God in the person of Jesus Christ. Lutherans stress the communication of attributes, that the Divine nature of Jesus informs His human nature so that He is not limited by His human nature are we are limited by our human nature. This is especially important when we approach for instance the question of the real presence of the physical body and blood in the Holy Supper. But Augustine is important here for he reminds us to not subordinate or diminish the humanity of Jesus. This study led me to explore the Gospel accounts where Jesus expressed strong emotion, strong enough that the Gospel authors made note of it. I very much appreciate the author’s comment: “According to this way of thinking, particularly emphasized in the Augustinian tradition, the incarnate Christ embodies those character traits that are to be emulated. Because Christ embodies certain emotions, it would seem to follow that these emotions should be incorporated, at least in some manner, into the Christian life.” (para 6)

 These insights informed my most recent sermon presented on All Saints day about the importance of recognizing and processing emotionally our losses, particularly the loss of loved ones dear to us. A portion of that sermon walked through various times Jesus was sad or angry and highlighted His feeling overwhelmed to the point of fallen on His face and asking His Father to take a different course in the garden on the night He was betrayed. So adding to the previous entry above, while we recognize the sinfulness of our emotional side, its fallenness from glory, we do well with Augustine to recognize that emotion is not by nature sin (though by nature it is fallen as our entire nature is fallen) in its creation and not somehow lesser than our cognitive side. Jesus we are told in Hebrews was like us just without sin. The issue is not the presence of emotions as these are part of our original creation. The issue is the fallen corruption of the human person: mind, body, will, thoughts, and feelings. So in the sermon I sought to normalize our emotional processing, to acknowledge it, to recognize in the face of loss that a faithful Christian might indeed feel angry, or resentful, or despair and that not mean that we discount our faith. But such normalizing is normalizing only in the degree that we recognize it is a true reality of our human existence, shared by all, not some huge frailty on the part of some individuals. But nonetheless corruptible, sometimes wrong, sometimes inaccurate, often colored by sinful self-interest. But to feel grief, pain, loss… Jesus felt these things and strongly. So, I wrestle with emotion. I once told a group of chaplains in a CPE forum who kept asking me how I feel about an experience when I maintained that I was not experiencing particular strong emotions at the time, when they kept pushing because they thought I simply did not want to share, that emotion is the root of much evil. I still believe this has the potential to be true. Emotion is certainly the root of much suffering. But emotional information and process is part of our daily life, part of who we are, part of how God made us to be.

**Comment 8**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

The author suggests Luther’s emphasis on adherence to Scripture might seem to contrast with an ethic that prioritizes love, yet a balanced view of orthodoxy and orthopathy grounds emotions within the specific narrative of Christ. This framework defines Christian love not as a general virtue but as a distinct way of embodying faith through the self-giving love revealed in Scripture. He finds in Jonathan Edwards an emphasis on the importance of emotions (or "affections") in religious life, arguing that these are central to both Christ’s nature and the Christian experience. Edwards departs from thinkers like Augustine by asserting that the religious affections of love and joy are not limited to human earthly existence but continue in “heavenly” life, forming the essence of true religion. For Edwards, religious practices, such as prayer and sacraments, nurture these affections, with love and joy characterizing the perfected Christian life. Aware of the challenge of discerning authentic religious emotions, Edwards proposes signs for evaluating true affections, noting that mere intensity does not indicate authenticity, as fervor alone can be misleading. His guidelines in *Religious Affections* reveal a nuanced approach to the role of emotions, underscoring their centrality in faith while cautioning against superficial displays of religious zeal. (The Risks of Pure Orthopathy section, paras 2-6)

**Essential Element:** This relates to the essential element orthopathy.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This material is both additive and variant to my understanding of orthopathy. The first part of this section where the author argues that orthodoxy and orthopathy are not competing or conflictual aspects of the faith but complimentary as he finds in Luther fit with what I wrote earlier. His turning to Edwards as a crucial figure to return emotion to the center of life and faith reminds me of the pietistic movement within the Lutheran tradition during the modernist era.

**Contextualization:** As I recall, Edward would be identified with the Reformed tradition and was a key figure in the Great Awakening movement in the US. The Lutheran pietist movement first originated in the 17th century within German Lutheranism. But in my opinion, both reflected a certain angst with the perceived sterility of rationality connected to the modernist movement. Thus, we currently find a renewed interest and emphasis on a personal heartfelt relationship with God. I grew up in a tradition that was formed about this same time, and very much that salvation was “emotive centric” and that the experience of a personal heartfelt relationship with God was a mark of saving faith. This is very contrary to my confession today for I understand theology to be grounded in Christ (Christocentric) who exists outside of us and that the marks of the church are the proper proclamation of the Word and the proper administration of the sacraments. Thus I confess to entertaining the traditional skepticism toward the value of an emotive centric approach to salvation nor would I advocate for an emotive centric approach to theology or Christian faith. But I would also not discount the role of emotions and experience, as I have said before, to pretend these are not present and important would be naive. I believe the author does better when he is inspired here by Luther (cue my Lutheran bias) to recognize that healthy spiritual living which involves right feeling is grounded in that which is outside us, in Christ alone. Certainly, Lutherans recognize the dangers of a disconnected tyranny of a dry intellectualized faith. Lutherans like Spener and Franke were inspired to address the over rationalization of the modernist era with a call to return to renewed feeling and living. But in the end the verdict was they went too far. Too much focus on personal experience, too much demand to have the right heartfelt emotional experience takes the form of works righteousness. It is one thing to recognize what God is doing to transform our inner selves, and in entirely different thing to suggest or advocate that salvation is contingent on our emotional or moral renewal. There are two aspects to this. Paradox. It is not an either/or proposition of feeling vs. intellectual apprehension of Divine truth but rather a booth and where these aspects of ourselves exist in tension in paradox. And secondly the proper orientation to these matters is not what God wants from us but what God wants for us.

**Source Seven:**

Christofides, P. (2024). Dealing with the trustworthy gospel in a post-Christian Australia. *Religions*, *15*(6), 685. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15060685>

**Comment 9:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

Christofides outlines the shift from the authority of the Church and Scripture to reason during modernity, which brought Christian doctrines under scrutiny, demanding rational evidence rather than divine authority. Modernity’s limits are exposed by political, social, and environmental issues, as well as its failure to ground morals in reason alone. Christianity, traditionally skeptical of human wisdom due to the impact of sin, acknowledges reason’s limitations, as seen in Scriptural appeals for spiritual renewal. Postmodernism further diverges by rejecting universal truth, coherence, and authority, embracing relativism and personal experience as guiding principles, which undermines traditional appeals to Biblical authority. Yet, postmodernism remains open to transcendence and the relational aspects of Christianity. This openness aligns with Christianity's relational core, seen in the Trinitarian nature of God and the central ethic of love. Christofides encourages a balance, urging Christians to avoid both secular rationalism and postmodern relativism, emphasizing a faithful yet flexible witness that addresses both the spiritual and present-life needs of individuals. This relational approach to faith emphasizes humility and authenticity, grounded in an ongoing, reformative engagement with the world. (Christofides, 2024, pp. 6-14)

**Essential Element:** This relates to the essential elements orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This material is variant to my understanding of a big picture understanding of how Christian orthodoxy should practice its engagement with the contemporary postmodern, and I argue, transmodern world.[[1]](#footnote-1) While I agree with his call to move away from “idolatrous compromises” and to move toward “Biblical fidelity” in the end his rejection of the notion of authority because of its unpopularity with a growing number of people moves us into a praxis that is based on pragmatism, which is very American but not necessarily going to move us toward Biblical fidelity.

**Contextualization:**

Lutherans emphasize the primacy and sufficiency of Scripture, holding firmly to *sola scriptura*, where Scripture alone is the ultimate authority in all matters of faith and life. Lutheran theology acknowledges the value of reason but insists that human reason is fallen and cannot be fully trusted in spiritual matters. Perhaps here Lutherans can find some affinity with postmodernists who question reason, but not much for the reason for that questioning is very different. Lutherans recognize the sinful corruption of reason. Post moderns would deny that there is anything out there of ultimate truth or meaning to reason about. Nonetheless, reason must remain subordinate to God’s Word. Lutheranism resists both modernity’s insistence on rational proof and postmodernity’s relativism, instead stressing that truth is revealed, objective, and grounded in the Scriptures. Christofides' focus on a relational Christianity aligns somewhat with the Lutheran emphasis on faith’s relational aspect. Faith is a living trust in Christ. However, Lutheran theology would caution against a portrayal of Christianity that veers too close to experiential or subjective interpretations of faith, as these can obscure the objective promises of God found in Scripture. This is not to say that Lutherans do not value humility and openness to dialogue. We advocate for the understanding of the church as the body of Christ and for the priesthood of all believers and the responsibility of all Christians to hear and understand the Bible on its own terms for oneself. I do not believe his approach which includes rejection of authority and what he his criticism of churches who confess belief in a universal truth elevating Scripture as an authority alone, which he calls “bibliolatry” (Christofides, 2024, p. 14) will bring us either toward Biblical fidelity or help us to avoid relativism. Nor do I believe that putting the stress on orthopraxis and experience rather than orthodoxy will do the same. His opposition to modernist rationalism and rejection of the concept of authority leads him to set up a false dichotomy between orthodoxy and orthopraxis. He would have us focus upon our lived experience as the unifier of our confession. Here he quotes Buhlmann. “’. . . to live the faith in a secularized and unjust world. The sole credible response is orthopraxis, the self-evident actions of persons who encountered Christ and now go through the world as his disciples, bearing witness to his lifestyle: performing good works everywhere and freeing persons from every ill (Acts 10:38)’ (Buhlmann 2001, p. 183).” (p. 14) In the end Christian transformation and the Christian faith is not a process of adapting to cultural trends, nor a process of seeing how we work it out through our lived experience, but of humbly conforming to God’s will as revealed in Scripture, particularly through the lens of Law and Gospel with Jesus Christ as the center as our redeemer.

**Source Eight:**

**Comment 10:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

“Orthopathos points in the direction of the question as to how we deal with human brokenness within the existential and unavoidable ontic polarisations: Life and death; light and darkness; healing and weakness; love (grace) and hatred (evil). The core question about the healing of life (cura vitae) (Louw 2008) shifted in the direction of the aesthetic endeavour, namely how pathos could contribute to finding meaning within the painful trajectories of loss, anxiety, guilt, despair, and suffering?” (Louw, 2021, p. 80)

“Orthopathy implies that Christian spirituality cannot avoid suffering, frailty, weakness, loss, and the reality of mortality within the realm of death and dying. Bonhoeffer (2020: n.p.) accepted this truth as a core pillar in Christian spirituality: “Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.” For Bonhoeffer (2020:n.p.), this kind of sacrificial ethics does not imply the loss of joy and beauty.” (p. 80)

“Thus, the basic presupposition: The challenge in Christian spirituality is not to avoid the emptiness of loss and pain, trying to sidestep the threat and anxiety of suffering and death, but to engage with frailty, weakness, and vulnerability. However, in the words of Bonhoeffer (2020:n.p.), we should not fill the gap of emptiness with the image of a punitive God: It is wrong to say that God fills the emptiness. God in no way fills it but much more leaves it precisely unfilled and thus helps us preserve even in pain – the authentic relationship. We should rather engage the transitoriness of life within the mode of frolic gratitude: Gratitude transforms the torment of memory into silent joy. One bears what was lovely in the past not as a thorn but as a precious gift deep within, a hidden treasure of which one can always be certain (Bonhoeffer 2020:n.p.).” (p. 81)

**Essential Element:** This material relates to the essential element orthopathy.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This material is additive to my understanding of orthopathy. This course has been helpful in helping me to frame my experience of thirty years of ministry looking at the emotional content of that ministry through the lens of Scripture.

**Contextualization**

With Louw I affirm the need to engage with human frailty and suffering as real parts of the Christian experience. Often times pastors are influenced by the preponderance of our systematic theological training to approach such existential issues solely through the lens of propositional proclamations. Within my faith group I recall not a single moment of training in how to help parishioners emotionally engage and process “the gaps.” It would be naive to not recognize that in the midst of these experiences the human being interprets and creates a way to make sense of it all as we are all the makers of meaning. The importance here is to proclaim a news that while the gaps are not necessarily filled in and smoothed away, we are not left alone in the gap to try to make sense of what in the end many early existentialists like Camus saw as ultimately meaningless. God speaks into the gap and the word He speaks is a word of hope. Thus, for the Christian the primary path to meaning may be through the path filled with gaps, through the valley of the shadow of death, but it toward the call of the rod and the staff that comfort me. Our ultimate solace and healing are found in God’s promises of forgiveness and eternal life. While the pastor and the neighbor are called to come alongside and walk with the person dealing with the real in life, to seek to be an instrument of healing for the suffering, we offer more as Christians than a therapeutic engagement limited to self-directed meaning making and inner transformation, for these alone are ultimately insufficient for dealing with the reality of injustice and sin in this fallen and often disappointing world. Comfort and healing come not from suffering as a hidden treasure, though we recognize Scripture speaks to the burden of the cross as opening avenues for spiritual growth. Comfort and healing come from the objective work of the crucified Christ who broke the power of death with the open tomb so that death does not get the final word, if any word at all. Scripture offers us far more than subjective interpretation or reinterpretation in the midst of the pain and griefs or even joy of our experiences, but rather points us to Christ’s redemptive work which transforms us, transforms from feeling to bone in ways that a fallen human being can never accomplish on his own, not even with the help of his neighbor. But here the neighbor is essential for in the end this comes down to faith. For while everyone who calls out of the darkest night upon the name of the Lord will be saved, how can they call if they do not believe. And how can they believe in someone they have never heard. And how can they hear unless someone shares His Word? For faith comes from hearing. (Romans 10).

**Source Nine:**

Mayer, F. E. (1953). The formal and material principles of Lutheran confessional theology. *Concordia Theological Monthly*, *24*(1). <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol24/iss1/46>

**Comment 11:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

“The Lutheran Confessions have no special angel on the divine character of Scripture because their interest was centered so prominently in a Christocentric approach to the Scriptures. They have no interest in an atomistic, prooftext, concordance approach to the Scriptures. The Confessions state that the entire Scriptures must always be presented according to their two main pans, Law and Gospel, for God's two most significant works are, first, to frighten and slay man and then to justify and vivify the frightened person. Thus, according to the Lutheran Confessions, the main thought of all the gospels and epistles of the entire Scriprures is to believe that in Christ Jesus through faith we have a gracious God.” (Mayer, 1953, p. 3)

“When in 1537 the Lutherans were confronted by the question whether for the sake of peace they could yield anything. Luther states concerning the ‘office and work of Jesus Christ, or our redemption’: Of this article nothing can be yielded or surrendered, even though heaven and earth, and everything should sink to ruin (Acts 4:12; Is.53:5). Upon this article all things depend which we reach and practice in opposition to the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore, we must be sure concerning this doctrine and nor doubt, otherwise all is lost, and the pope and the devil in all things gain the victory and suit over us. Smalcald Articles., B, II, 1-5” (Mayer, 1953, p. 6)

**Essential Element:** This relates to the essential element of orthopraxy. As I have been focusing on orthopathy against the backdrop of orthopathy, it is good to touch base with the center of my theological approach. Integrity and congruency are vital to any theological framework, especially when engaging new ideas and contemporary issues.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This material is additive to my understanding of orthodoxy. While these points are not new to me, the recognition of how the Lutheran Confessions approach the authority of Scripture is something I have not considered for some time.

**Contextualization:** The terminology of formal and material principle is an old traditional way of answering a couple of questions. What is the core content or central teaching that holds a theological system together (the material principle)? What is the source of authority that speaks to how we know what we belief as expressed in our theological system (the formal or forming principle). Within my tradition the core teaching is the doctrine of the justification by faith alone which places Christ at the center and more precisely the cross, making our theology both Christocentric and staurocentric. Our formal principle is certainly *sola scriptura*. The Bible is considered the sole and ultimate source of authority for faith and practice. This does not mean that Lutherans do not recognize the operative influence of tradition, human experience, or reason. We simply recognize these as tools and perhaps even systemic filters both individual and corporate through which we hear the authoritative proclamation of the Word. In any case, we keep the latter three in ministerial service as instruments to be shaped and critiqued by Holy Scripture. Coming from a non-Lutheran but protestant background, specifically the Church of God (Anderson) which has many similarities with the Baptist traditions, and indeed having frequented many Baptist churches growing up with friends, I have to remind myself there is a distinction in the way Lutherans view *sola scriptura* and the view I was raised within. My childhood taught me a deep respect for the Holy Scripture. It was a rite of passage for me when my father presented me with my very first own leather-bound copy of the King James Bible. But there are distinctions that are important. For while I recognize the importance of fundamentalism’s counter voice to the hyper rationality and Biblical criticism of the 1800s, it tends to discount some important aspects to the Word of God. The Lutheran understanding of *sola scriptura* differs in important ways despite both traditions upholding the Bible as the highest authority.

For Lutherans, *sola scriptura* means that Scripture is the final authority on matters of faith and doctrine, yet we recognize that not every issue is explicitly addressed in Scripture. Thus, they are open to engaging church tradition, reason, and theological reflection to aid in interpreting and applying biblical teachings, particularly on topics where the Bible is less direct and certainly on issues to which God has not spoken. In contrast, the fundamentalist congregations I grew up in tended to interpret the Bible literally and narrowly, often treating it as a source of direct answers to nearly every question of faith, morality, and sometimes even science. This approach can lead to a suspicion of outside sources which is why Fundamentalists often minimize the role of historical traditions or creeds. The church I was a member of was most certainly anti-credal. Now why would this be important?

This was a church that had a high degree of respect for the Bible. But it had fallen into the misguidance of the semi-pelegian approach of decision theology. Every Sunday the emphasis was upon our repenting and giving our hearts to Jesus. My father, who grew up in this tradition, who served as an elder very much took this to heart and translated this to myself and my brother. One day when I was in seminary and sitting at the dining room table in our house over a Thanksgiving break typing away on my big not very portable new computer, my father who was curious about the new-fangled machine leaned over my shoulder, read what I was reading and proclaimed assertively: Jesus is not God. Now, knowing the stubbornness of my father, I simply encouraged him to talk to his pastor. I found out much later that he did and that the pastor affirmed Jesus was God. But why did my father not know this most essential truth. For a number of reasons but not the least related to the fact that the theological approach was more anthropocentric than Christocentric and certainly not staurocentric for all its talk of the cross. The credal expressions of the church are important for helping us remember to keep the main thing the main thing. They do not provide new information. Rather they highlight what Scripture has said to the most essential of matters so that we remember not only what is said, but what is essential.

Another difference lies in the approach to biblical interpretation. Lutherans encourage responsible, contextual interpretation, which includes the use of reason, linguistic study, and historical background, allowing for an informed understanding of Scripture. Fundamentalists, however, tend to prioritize a straightforward, literal reading of the Bible, which may overlook or resist figurative interpretations even when the context suggests them. This approach may also miss significant historical and cultural elements that can influence how we understand the issue addressed in the Scripture. This difference extends into views on science and modern knowledge. Lutherans generally see science as part of God’s created order and are open to dialogue between Scripture and scientific discoveries, though recognizing the limitations of human knowledge and keeping it in a servant position.

At its core, Lutheran *sola scriptura* because of the Gospel. Because Jesus is who He is and did what He did and the church is given to convey this message, this Gospel, the Word becomes the vehicle to convey the Gospel. For Lutherans, the legitimacy of the Word flows from it containing of the Gospel. In contrast in the churches I grew up in *sola scriptura* seemed to exist on its own two feet, and the Gospel was not clear in the preaching I heard from the pulpit, but I heard a great deal that the Bible is infallible (which I affirm) and the ultimate authority (which I affirm) but with an emphasis in the pulpits of my youth on the Book being about providing rules for all areas of life, with an expectation that Scripture should offer explicit guidance on a wide array of topics. This is not entirely inaccurate, it simply is not the whole story, for in the end the story of the story of Jesus and Jesus must remain in the center, and specifically His cross and the revelation of justification by faith alone by grace alone because of Christ alone revealed alone in Scripture but proclaimed through witness, tradition, and the faithful heritage of the Holy Christian Church must remain at the center. Faith without works may be dead, but faith based on anything other than Christ alone is folly.

**Source Ten:**

Olson, R. E. (2012). Pietism and postmodernism: Points of congeniality. *Christian Scholar’s Review*, *41*(4), 367–380.

**Comment 12:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

Olson contrasts Pietism, often seen as “super-spiritual fundamentalism” and emotional, with Postmodernism, perceived as “relativistic, suspicious, and anti-absolute.” While Pietism and Postmodernism appear divergent—one stressing inner spiritual transformation and the other rejecting totalizing truth claims—they share points of convergence in epistemology, spirituality, and ethics. Both movements have been criticized for individualism and subjectivism, and each questions dominant rationalist assumptions in religion and truth. Pietism, originating in the 17th-century German Lutheran Church, sought personal spiritual transformation, emphasizing heartfelt faith, devotion to Jesus, and conversional piety rather than strict doctrine or ritual. Key figures like Johann Arndt, Philipp Jakob Spener, and Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf emphasized an “experiential approach to religious knowing,” where faith and religious experience, rather than strict rationalism, are central. Pietism asserts that feelings and spiritual affections are a mode of receiving truth rather than generating it. This subjective reception aligns with Postmodernist critiques of Enlightenment rationalism, which they argue creates a "philosophical idol" of God. Pietism thus resonates with Postmodern thinkers like Peter Rollins, who see faith as an experiential commitment rather than a product of rational demonstration.

Pietist spirituality, called “Christ-mysticism” by contemporary theologians like Donald Bloesch, prioritizes a personal relationship with Jesus, love of God, and service to others, rooted in a “biblical personalism” rather than a more abstract or Platonic mysticism. This type of faith emphasizes transformation in service and everyday actions—a worldview Olson believes could appeal to Postmodernists, who value authenticity and ethical action over abstract doctrine. Olson argues that Pietism, unlike strict rationalism, offers a “fideistic epistemology of transformative reception” where faith is caught through the Spirit rather than taught or reasoned through evidence alone. This resonates with Postmodern thinkers’ skepticism of foundationalist rationalism, which claims objective, provable religious truths. Postmodernists like John Caputo criticize rationalist theology’s portrayal of God as an idea to be proven, preferring instead an approach where faith is deeply personal and experiential. Olson concludes that Pietism could serve as a bridge between Reformation and Postmodern perspectives, offering a Christian spirituality centered on inner transformation, action, and personal relationship rather than rationalistic or purely doctrinal faith. He suggests that this “orthopathy” (right experience) and “orthopraxy” (right action) found in Pietism can address Postmodern concerns by highlighting a lived, embodied faith focused on transformation and community service. This approach, while distinct from intellectualism, resonates with Postmodern interests in authenticity and meaningful experience within the framework of personal faith. (Olson, 2012)

**Essential Element:** This relates to the essential element orthodox and orthopathy.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This material is both additive and variant to my understanding of the intersection of orthodoxy and orthopathy. The pietist movement having roots in German Lutheranism, garners conversation within my faith tradition, usually from a critical, suspicious, and certainly skeptical position because of its criticism of objective propositional theology which it finds insufficient. Orthodox Lutherans are skeptical that this adds a “and” to the understanding of salvation by grace through faith. It is also skeptical of experience being a useful lens to move into a magisterial position in the formation of our spirituality. This article drew my attention not only because of its discussion of pietism which has direct bearing on a Lutheran consideration of orthopathy, but also because of the connection to postmodernist trends which is a major area of my doctoral research and has been for thirty years.

**Contextualization:**

Olson begins by comparing and contrasting both the pietist and the postmodern approach to how do we know, the subject of epistemology. He recognizes that in the modern era in which pietism is born as a reactionary voice, that reason was the king and “God is brought before the court…” (p. 370) It is ironic that the modern era with its elevation of reason flowing out of the enlightenment’s rediscover of classical thought, seeking to establish truth on the basis of empirical evidence, which first turned its critical eyes to the propositional truths of revelation, would in the end evolve into eating itself through the antifoundational spirit of postmodernism. So, to a degree there may be some of the same reaction to authority and propositional truth on the part of both the pietists and the post moderns, though for different reasons. The pietist finds the elevation of reason (and remember Luther himself was highly skeptical of reason and critical of its magisterial use) not helpful for spiritual life leading to a faith built on sterile cognitive ideas. Whereas the postmodernist rejects reason as it rejects the idea that there is objective truth universal for all to discover and be accountable to. An orthodox Lutheran position recognizes the in the end neither of these will do, for the deemphasis on propositional revelation and the transcendent nature of the Gospel simple is not faithful to what God is doing in the world through Jesus Christ. It may be pragmatic to suggest we adopt some of the methodologies of pietism to reach post moderns, but it would not be wise, for in adopting the ways of the world we hinder the way of the Spirit.

Now it is true that the Lutheran pietists in particular tried to keep experience in a subservient place, “a receptive medium than a productive source of revelation.” (p. 371) But in the end it failed to do so. In the end the de-emphasis on objective external truth (not its rejection, just its de-emphasis) and the elevation of experience contra reason to stand just a step below, lead to experience taking the center stage in religiosity in this movement just as reason took the center stage in the cognitively dominant wider modern culture.

It is notable that pietism arose in the fertile time of the post-reformation. In the late reformation era, theologians such as Martin Chemnitz were instrumental in not only encouraging the writing of the Formula of Concord to get Lutherans on the same page on important questions, but also in the assembling of what came to be known as the Book of Concord. This and the following generation were the high time of Lutheran orthodoxy, to which pietism is reacting. But this reaction was driven not just in part to the highly scholastic and organizing work of the orthodox theologians who as Olson notes were focused on “right thinking and right worshiping” with a general skepticism toward “inwardness” (p. 373) pietism was also reacting as was romanticism to the elevation of what was seen as a sterile reason and a sterile worldview that diminished humanity. In the focus on the mind, there was a neglect of the heart, and the heart will not be ignored. In this Olson finds a place to bridge faith communities and postmodern skeptics in what he sees as the common ground of orthopathy and orthopraxis.

“Allow me to go out on a limb and suggest that two words best express the common spiritual ground shared by Pietism and Postmodernism: orthopathy and orthopraxy (or orthopraxis). Without denigrating or denying the value of orthodoxy, Pietism elevates to greater importance, especially for spiritual vitality, right experience, and right action. Postmodernists may cringe a bit at the adjective “right,” but they can relate to experience and action as lying at the center of spirituality.” (Olson, 2012, p. 375)

While I recognize the potential similarities between pietism and postmodernism, I cringe at the elevation of praxy and praxis, for it is naive to discount that pietism diminished the importance of the doxy while postmodernism discards it entirely as a human creation force for oppression. While the author may not be advocating for the elimination of doxy, the elevation of pathy and praxis even if a step below, or alongside, simply drops theological engagement and discernment so much into the earthly plane that we become blind and deaf to the transcendent Word of God speaking doxy into our existence. While there is much insight in Olson’s exposition here into the similar causes that fed pietism and today’s postmodernist worldview, and a significant warning to take to heart that we cannot ignore the heart, we cannot forget the transcendent revelation of God that spiritual matters make no sense to the natural man or mind but that these are spiritually discerned by the Holy Spirit. Pietism ironically stressed the inner working of the Holy Spirit but left behind its Lutheran roots not disputing but potentially forgetting that God works through the means of grace. The Holy Spirit comes through the Word, through the propositional revelations of the Word, and the validity and value of that revelation which may generate experience and emotion and shape our lived experience, is not contingent upon it. These approaches advocated by Olson simply put the cart before the horse. Olson advocates for an emphasis on ethics, drawing from Pietisms emphasis on inner transformation of the individual related to the postmodern focus on virtue ethics focused on love. And as important as this is to God in what He wants for humanity, to limit or even build a theological approach of engagement built on this at the center, moving Christ and atonement from the center, simply is not faithful to the work God is doing in this world. In the end it becomes just one more accommodation, one more appropriation by the world of Christian material adopting and adapting to create an anthropomorphized idol of the God we desire to facilitate the building of the life we desire. God is not called into our courts to be judged nor is He called into classrooms or boardrooms to be set straight. Rather God’s Word both as Law (critique and judgment) and Gospel (promise, transcendental grace, and hope) draw us into His court where Christ sits ascended at the right hand of the Father.

**Source Eleven:**

Patrick Oden (Director). (2020, March 13). *TH559-O4 Orthopathy* [Video recording]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmgkSOnSV7g>

**Comment 13:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

In the monastic works (Philokalia) in the Eastern tradition pathos is defined as “…that which happens to a person or thing, an experience undergone passively; hence an appetite or impulse such as anger, desire, or jealousy, that violently dominates the soul. Many Greek Fathers regard the passions as something intrinsically evil, a ‘disease’ of the soul:  thus, John Klimakos affirms that God is not the creator of the passions and that they are ‘unnatural,’ alien to man’s true self.” (Oden, 2020, 7:30) Other Greek fathers saw the passions as impulses put there by God and so fundamentally good but distorted by sin. (8:15) Oden argues we must recognize the role that emotion plays in our spiritual life. “Our emotions tell us more about our response to the world than our intellect does” (18:51)

 Oden is inspired by Anthonyof Egypt a founder of western monasticism. Anthony warns us against the evil devices of the devils who seek us to be lost with him. Anthony believed we need to develop discernment about the evil ways of this world and to be attentive to the way of God and not listen to our inner impulses. “…called to be sensible but have put on an irrational mind” so that we do not live as the world wants us to live nor give attention to such ways. Oden describes this as a form of irrationalism though not ant-intellectual but rather not living according to the world’s narrative, the “rational” way the world says to live that leads to other’s approval and happiness. This is not necessarily the way of God to live according to the systems of this world. To live according to the systems of this world is to give our way over to these systems and we need to be aware and live in light of God’s narrative.  The counter “irrational” work is to enable true depth and understanding. Anthony focuses on avoiding the evil and demonic forces that seek to distract and disorient us from our true self and God and other around us. Oden applies this to highlighting our ego which leaves us alone and embittered even though the allure is to be like everyone else to be accepted but in the end everyone’s ego is competing against each other trying to dominate and win. In the end the winner is isolated and separated from the life of God and God for we wind up in a “false expression of ourselves and the life we are to live in.” (26:15)

**Essential Element:** This material is related to the essential element orthopathy.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This material is additive to my understanding of orthopathy. There is a great deal in this video that is insightful and though inspiring, but I focus on this particular material as it draws insightful material from traditions that are normally highly discounted in my faith tradition especially in these days where the idea of propositional truth is under substantial pressure.

**Contextualization:** It is well known that Luther first began to formulate his ideas through an increasing awareness of the Gospel which he learned from his personal engagement with the Scripture, inside the monastery. Luther before he was a priest or a university professor or a reformer was a monk and engaged in the mental, spiritual, and emotional rites of discipline that was essential to the monastic way of life. And he became highly critical of these approaches, of placing our hope for salvation in inner transformation. With this influence within Lutheran circles any mention of monasticism is looked upon with skepticism.

In the past in my philosophical and historical studies I have read some in the mystics of the reformation era, particularly Eckhart, but have not examined the monastics, something this video has inspired me may be worth the time. So, I lead heavily here on Oden as I process these ideas.

The primary point that stands out here is that engagement with our emotional side, with a focus on discipline, or right feeling (orthopathy) need not necessarily be discounted as another form of work’s righteousness. Now this certainly is how it evolved in the medieval time period leading to its critique in the reformation. But I agree with Oden that if we do not know ourselves and how emotions function, we are not likely to interpret our feelings and experiences correctly nor properly discern the role our emotions play in our interpretations. He is correct, ignoring subjectivity makes our interpretations imprecise (1:15:45) and I would argue potentially incongruent with Scripture. Oden is correct when he shares that just because we feel something does not mean those feelings are correct. (1:17:54) Here Oden’s treatment of Anthony, albeit through a postmodern lens, is suggestive. There are many external forces that generate emotional response in us that flows more from the Old Adam than the new, what Anthony would consider the true self. I would argue that it is not just external forces, but inner forces that are responding to our situatedness. To be attentive to the way of God and self-aware so we can recognize the inner impulses of our fallen nature is a highly valuable spiritual skill. As the monastic movement evolved it may have believed that the only way to cultivate such a skill was to enter into isolation away from the many voices of the outside world to isolate our inner voice and make room for the voice of God, whereas the Lutheran response took firm comfort in the clear proclamation of the Gospel as citizens of a kingdom that is not of this world but is engaged with this world rather than withdrawing from it. But it may very well be that in the earlier rejection of monasticism due to its losing its way as it evolved and the later rejection of pietism for its losing its way not intentionally setting out to discount the value of propositional revelation, (but as they say the road to hell is paved with good intentions), Lutheran tradition has not exactly rejected the importance of our very human and earthy side, but has not spoken the deep insights of God to this clearly enough. There are many things that Lutheran theology says to the deep earthy humanness of our lives. Luther himself in his Small Catechism encourages us to daily remember our baptism and drown out the old Adam. But in our reaction to the attack on propositional truth that has been ongoing now for generations, our emphasis on objective propositional truth (which certainly exists and is the principle upon which all doctrine is formed aka *sola scriptura)* we have neglected our pastoral voice and over energized our prophetic voice. It is not an either/or. God calls us to both.

**Source Twelve:**

Magezi, V., & Madimutsa, W. (2023). Theological education and character formation: Perceptions of theological leaders and students. *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, *79*(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8543>

**Comment 14:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**

Speaking of the education and training of pastors, the authors are strong advocates for an emphasis on character formation. Character which is highly distinctive, and individual is also formed by shared roles and expectations flowing from society. Integrity, service, loyalty do not come naturally but are a moral dimension of action that form as part of a process. (pp. 2-3) He recognizes this discussion is properly placed in the arena of sanctification rather than justification. (p. 3) His specific research highlights the important roles of leaders in shaping the character of students complementing the influences of home and community. That leaders should cultivate their skills of mentorship and see their educational program as more than the passing of objective knowledge but to inspire and guide the character formation of pastors. (pp. 7-10)

**Essential Element:** This relates to the essential elements of orthodoxy and orthopraxis.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This material is additive to my understanding of orthodoxy and orthopraxis as it relates to the formation of Christian character and identity.

**Contextualization:** This article is particularly relevant for me on a number of levels. As a pastor who before his first parish spent ten years in school, five in undergraduate work heavily influenced and mentored by professors some of whom became friends and five years in seminary, after thirty years of ministry I am very aware of the strengths and weaknesses inherent in my seminary education. There was a strong focus on the apprehension of objective facts. I experienced in seminary a far less emphasis on thinking for oneself as in my undergraduate work and a far stronger set of expectations of learning as pedagogy and conformity to community expectations. It is ironic that the setting that was established with laser like focus to form pastors, was in my opinion somewhat ineffective in the formation of spiritual character. Certainly, there were plenty of opportunities for students to engage this time from this perspective. There were daily chapel and evening devotions and there were many professors who were willing to take the time to develop personal relationships with students. But the school in general made these optional with a strong focus on learning the right answers and providing back the right answers. There was a massive volume of material which rather consumed the hours of the day.

For a more timely relevance, as I am engaged in parish ministry in various levels, I am here reminded of the importance of character formation and sanctification. These past ten years my focus has been on entering into congregational systems in stress, sometimes grief, sometimes conflict, always anxious, sometimes near despair, to stabilize and mentor these exact things: the formation of a Godly mind, a Christian character, both as individuals and as a corporate body of Christ in a particular time and place.

I selected this article for my final source for consideration for a deeply personal reason. As I turn 60 soon, the question of retirement is on my mind. And the question is on my mind of what to do with all my learning from book and stone, from words read and words spoken and heard from propositional truth and … well, life. This article leads me to consider that even though unlikely that I will ever be asked to come to the seminary and teach, for every open position that materializes there are usually 100 or so applications as my faith community is awash with doctorates, many from well known and highly prestigious institutions, yet I mentor here and among my people are many young minds whose character need the formation that comes from God through the proclamation of His Word both in pulpit and pastoral care. And with this observation, with much more to be done and many more thoughts in my head and far more material gleaned to consider than can be considered here, I lay down my pen with this final observation.

I thought this class would be easy. Right up my alley. It is theology and applied theology. My field. My mastery. And as usual, I have learned that there is much left to learn. Thank you.

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1. I am beginning to utilize the word transmodern to refer to what I believe is a shift that is currently underway from the postmodern era into a distinct but related way of viewing the world. Postmodernism was a strong reaction against many of the essential elements of modernism though it did adopt and adjust a few of its key themes. But it was primarily reactionary. I am seeing in my engagement with younger generations a movement beyond postmodernist thought into a unique synthesis that is more open to the transcendent and to a universal reality while also recognizing a place for individual and diverse understandings or participations in it. I am very much in the nascent stage of this formulation, but I believe we are moving beyond postmodernism. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)