Dr. Schmidt is a master teacher. I was mesmerized by his wonderful apology for Christianity and its matchless positive contributions to society and the world in *How Christianity Changed the World*.

Now the good doctor has produced another classic. This book treats the distinctives of genuine Lutheranism in a palatable yet sufficiently thorough manner to provide information for the neophyte, while providing deep, yet clear, understanding for the person wanting to stretch his or her maturing knowledge of the faith. You’ll love this book. Read it and give it to a friend.

—Pastor Matthew C. Harrison
President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

This is a remarkable compilation of Lutheran wisdom by Professor Schmidt. It is both comprehensive and deep, offering the reader a complete account of Lutheran beliefs and practices.

—Robert Benne
Jordan Trexler Professor Emeritus of Religion
and Research Associate, Roanoke College, Salem, VA
Professor of Christian Ethics, Institute of Lutheran Theology, Brookings, SD

How many Lutherans understand the nature of their church and its theology? Sociologists tell us that among Lutherans, as among people of other denominations, the church is often viewed chiefly as a social phenomenon—a place to belong among folks of similar background and tastes. This may be inevitable in church bodies that have lost touch with their theological roots and the need to connect with the teachings of Holy Scripture and Gospel proclamation. Lutherans, however, should have no excuse for substituting sociology for theology. Dr. Schmidt’s book offers a clear and comprehensive corrective to this endemic danger.

—John Warwick Montgomery, PhD, DThéol, LLD
Director, International Academy of Apologetics, Evangelism and Human Rights, Strasbourg, France

I don’t think many confessional Lutherans know how much the rest of the Church needs them. Therefore, it is all the more urgent that Lutherans themselves know what they believe and why they believe it. I’m glad to learn from this book and highly recommend it to insiders and outsiders alike.

—Michael Horton
J. Gresham Machen Professor of Theology, Westminster Seminary California
How many erudite scholars do you know who are so brilliant that they are able to write simple English sentences to express their thoughts? That list is a very short one (including, for example, C. S. Lewis). But Dr. Schmidt avoids linguistic obscurantism like the plague! Few have the breadth of education to tackle what is such a “well-trodden path,” communicate to us lowly ones fact after fact, and weave it into a book that is consummately readable. But that is exactly what Dr. Schmidt has done.

—Rod Rosenbladt
Professor of Theology and Christian Apologetics (retired), Concordia University Irvine

Noting that many within the Lutheran community lack a broader familiarity with the theological tradition of which they are a part, Dr. Alvin Schmidt focuses on the hallmarks of Lutheran theology as faithfully confessed since the sixteenth century. Aimed specifically at a lay audience, the targeted and concise topics that make up this volume cover the Lutheran waterfront—from understanding the Scriptures and Confessions, to the history of the Church, to matters of practice. In the end, appropriately, all find their focus in Christ. Dr. Schmidt’s volume of vignettes on key Lutheran themes will prove invaluable for Lutheran pastors, teachers, and lay leaders as they guide people into an understanding of their rich story.

—Rev. Dr. Lawrence R. Rast Jr.
President, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN

Alvin Schmidt’s careful account of “Lutheran identity” offers readers a welcome explanation of the enduring contributions from Martin Luther’s legacy. The book is an attractive introduction to the main principles of Lutheranism for those with little earlier acquaintance but also a helpfully comprehensive refresher for Lutherans and others who may have already studied Luther’s catechisms or have some knowledge of Lutheran traditions after Luther.

—Mark Noll
Emeritus Professor of History, University of Notre Dame
Author of Protestantism: A Very Short Introduction

Dr. Schmidt, with his extensive academic and parish experience, writes at a level that can be understood by the layman while challenging those with a theological degree on issues that present themselves to the present-day Church. I especially liked the chapters on the biblical canon, worship, and the two kingdoms. With the provided questions at the end of each chapter, I can see this book used as a supplement in adult catechism training as well as for Bible classes. This work seems to fit well with other books produced by Concordia Publishing House, such as The Lutheran Difference, Lutheranism 101, and Being Lutheran, which along with Dr. Schmidt’s most recent tome, would all be useful for any Lutheran to have on his shelf. One might ask if the unique differences of Lutheran doctrine
and practice—the hallmarks of Lutheran identity—are worth maintaining, and Dr. Schmidt shows from the Scriptures and the Confessions that this is most certainly true!

—Rev. Mark A. Miller
President of the Central Illinois District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Author Alvin Schmidt does not shy away from the important yet challenging topics Christians face today. From Islam and Mormonism to cremation and the positive influence of Christianity on Western civilization, he has brought his experience, insight, and the truth of the Bible and the Book of Concord to challenge, inform, comfort, and delight his readers.

After reading *Lutheranism 101*, *The Spirituality of the Cross*, *Has American Christianity Failed?*, or *Being Lutheran*, read Concordia’s *Hallmarks of Lutheran Identity* on your way to a more comprehensive reading of the Lutheran Confessions and your faithful reception of the Lord’s gifts of Word and Sacrament in the Divine Service.

Schmidt’s personal knowledge, extensive research, passion for the subject, and winsomeness help the reader better understand the solas of the Reformation, Lutheran theological emphases, faithful Lutheran practices, and Lutheran confessional documents, all truly “hallmarks of Lutheran identity.”

—Rev. Paul J Cain
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Sheridan, WY
Headmaster, Martin Luther Grammar School and Immanuel Academy, Sheridan, WY
Wyoming District Education Executive
Editor, Lutheran Book Review

In a day of generic and watered-down Christianity, Alvin Schmidt shows the beauty and treasure of the great Lutheran hallmarks. Christ is at the center, and everything flows from Him. For some, this material may be basic, but for most readers, the rich and dynamic quotes from Luther, the Church Fathers, and more recent theologians will resource and engage. This book is not superficial, but it also does not get the reader stuck in irrelevant detail. The author writes with conviction and passion.

*Hallmarks of Lutheran Identity* covers the great Lutheran themes and offers insight and thoughtful application for the local congregation and an individual’s devotional life. This work will fill in the gaps for many Lutheran teachings and practices that might be assumed or too readily dismissed. I read this book with interest and along the way, my curiosity grew. Lutheran theology at its best will lead to a faithful and passionate mission for the sake of those disconnected from the Church and the spiritually lost.

I am grateful for the confession of this book. While I did not come to all the conclusions and applications Schmidt does, that’s okay. It is a worthwhile read!

—Rev. Allan Buss
Senior Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Belvidere, IL
With the heart of a pastor and the mind of a scholar, Alvin J. Schmidt provides a welcome resource for Lutherans living in a diverse culture. Do you want a clear and thorough understanding of Lutheran “hallmarks” such as the distinction of Law and Gospel, the blessing of the Sacraments, and life as sinner and saint? Schmidt has done a remarkable job of covering the ground. That he is able to bring this knowledge forward in such a full and accessible way is a true benefit to Lutheran laity and families.

—Rev. Warren Graff, STM
Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church, Albuquerque, NM

Dr. Schmidt addresses what has become an all-too-common problem in the Lutheran Church, especially in America, with many Lutherans “not knowing or not being conscious that they possess a theological heritage that is significantly different from other Christian denominations” (p. 11). This deficiency in Lutheran identity among Lutherans often results in their sacrificing that heritage—but they do so without realizing that they are losing a valuable and truly biblical and evangelical heritage. Schmidt sets out to halt and reverse this drift away from a genuine Lutheran piety and ethos, wishing to see instead the emergence of “an observable Lutheran mystique” among an informed Lutheran laity. Anyone who shares these concerns, as well as these hopes for a renewal of Lutheran consciousness and commitment, will find this book to be an extremely helpful resource and tool.

—David Jay Webber, STM
Pastor, Redeemer Lutheran Church, Scottsdale, AZ

This book addresses a serious predicament even within committed Lutheran churches, and that is the biblical and confessional ignorance so widespread in our time. With clear words, Alvin Schmidt opens the door for Lutheran Christians to reclaim their spiritual heritage. Careful reflection on the topics he presents will contribute to a growth in the maturity of Christ’s people, making their confession more honest because they’ve gained a clearer understanding of what it means. Parish pastors will find plenty of useful material here for Bible class and other adult discussion groups.

—Rev. Dr. Robert Bugbee
President, Lutheran Church—Canada
HALLMARKS of LUTHERAN IDENTITY

Alvin J. Schmidt
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ABBREVIATIONS

AE Luther’s Works: American Edition
KJV King James Version of the Bible
LSB Lutheran Service Book
NIV New International Version of the Bible
NKJV New King James Version of the Bible
RSV Revised Standard Version of the Bible
TLH The Lutheran Hymnal

ABBREVIATIONS FOR DOCUMENTS IN THE BOOK OF CONCORD

AC Augsburg Confession
Ap Apology of the Augsburg Confession
Ep Epitome of the Formula of Concord
FC Formula of Concord
LC Large Catechism of Martin Luther
SA Smalcald Articles
SC Small Catechism of Martin Luther
SD Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord
Tr Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
DEDICATION

To three faithful Lutheran women: my wife, Carol, and daughters-in-law, Carole Ann and Brooke

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In my previously published books, I expressed gratitude and appreciation to my wife, Carol, for her patience in tolerating my social isolation while writing those books. She extended her patience again as I wrote the present book, and she also proofread the manuscript before it went to the publisher. I would be remiss if I did not thank her again. So, many kind thanks, Carol.

Considerable gratitude is also due to Beth Hoeltke, Public Service Administrator at the library at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. She helped me obtain some special interlibrary materials. I also appreciate the assistance Lyle Buettner, Special Collections Librarian at Concordia Seminary, provided me with German and Latin books authored by some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Lutheran theologians. My research also benefited from the helpfulness I received from Daniel Harmelink, Laura Marrs, and Todd Zittlow at Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis. I also thank the personnel at St. Louis University’s rare book collection for making available a thirteenth-century papal document. And not to be overlooked is my appreciation for the help received from several librarians at Washington University, St. Louis. And finally, I was impressed with the professional editing done by Laura Lane, Scot Kinnaman, and Barbara Shippy, along with designer Vicky Schaeffer. They were superb.
Five hundred years on, does the Lutheran Reformation matter to most Americans? The sociological evidence is rather sobering. According to a recent study of American religiosity, there has been a sharp increase in the “nones,” those who identify with no particular religious affiliation. This includes a minority of confessed atheists and agnostics, but most of the nones simply reject the idea that it really matters which religious tradition one follows, either because they think religion in general is unimportant or because they see no value in any specific set of religious teachings. And the problem does not end there. A decade ago, Christian Smith and Melinda Denton showed that many American youth who do claim a religious affiliation are either ignorant of, or indifferent toward, the central doctrines that define their tradition. Instead, their main guiding belief is moralistic therapeutic deism. This eclectic set of convictions directly conflicts with the most basic Christian teachings. It “is not a religion of repentance from sin . . . of building character through suffering . . . of basking in God’s love and grace. . . . It is about attaining subjective well-being . . . and getting along amiably with other people.” On this view, people are basically good (not infected with original sin), God is not involved in most of our lives (deism), and when He is, it is only as life-coach and therapist, not as our only hope of salvation.

It is difficult to imagine attitudes further removed from the clear, biblical confessions of the Lutheran Reformation. Evidently, many people do not understand the incredible achievement of the Lutheran reformers in recovering and articulating God’s truth about our

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sinful condition and Christ as our only Savior. Nothing, therefore, is more desperately needed than a book like this one: a fresh, accessible account of the great teachings of the Lutheran Reformation that explains why they are not outdated cultural relics but rather faithful expositions of the Word of God with eternal value, a gift to Lutherans and non-Lutherans alike.

Alvin Schmidt is known to many for his combination of a highly accessible style with meticulous historical research, as evidenced by such splendid works as *How Christianity Changed the World*, *The Great Divide*, and *The American Muhammad*. In the present volume, Dr. Schmidt uses the same approach, giving a clear and concise presentation of distinctive Lutheran contributions to the Christian faith, and also noting many misconceptions that persist even among contemporary confessional Lutherans. Dr. Schmidt makes it very clear where he stands on disputed matters, and even if some readers disagree, they will learn why the issue is important.

As one might expect, Dr. Schmidt begins with an exposition of the three great *solas*—we are saved *sola gratia* (by grace alone), *sola fide* (by faith alone), and *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone). But he points out that these three affirmations are actually subordinate to a fourth, *solus Christus* (Christ alone), which emphasizes that for Lutherans, all theology is rooted in Christ. It is in Christ alone that the true God is revealed to us, and it is by attending to Christ and His actions that we come to know God, not by speculations about the “God of the philosophers.” And it is the centrality of Christ that accounts for what is distinctive in Lutheran theology. We see this in Luther’s central “breakthrough”: our works make no contribution to our salvation, but we are saved purely by Christ’s works and the loving, gracious gift of His righteousness. And we see it in Luther’s understanding of the contents of the New Testament canon, which depended not only on a text’s apostolicity but also on whether it preaches Christ. It is also vital in understanding the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, Word and Sacraments as Means of Grace, and the real presence of Christ in, with, and under the elements of Holy Communion.

Along the way, Dr. Schmidt points out where Lutherans disagree with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and other Protestant denominations. Commendably, he seeks to show that these differences emerged because Lutherans insist we should take Christ at His Word, neither altering nor adding to His teaching. This explains
why Lutherans accept Christ’s real (supernatural) presence in Communion without adopting a man-made theory of *how* He becomes present, and why Lutherans follow Scripture in affirming single (not double) predestination.

The Lutheran reformers believed there could be no reformation of the church without a reformation of education, and they not only promoted universal education but also created pedagogical materials of tremendous enduring value. Schmidt provides expositions of the purpose and contents of Dr. Luther’s Small Catechism and Large Catechism, as well as Luther’s contributions to music and liturgy and the main concepts of Reformation theology. The last includes the ideas that Christians are simultaneously sinners, condemned by the Law, and saints, saved by grace; that God governs His people in two ways: by coercion and Law in the secular sphere, but by the free gift of grace in the spiritual sphere; that all Christians are priests; and that all our stations and occupations in life are sacred and God-pleasing vocations, through which we love our neighbor as God provides for His people. Dr. Schmidt also provides helpful introductions to important doctrinal statements, including the Augsburg Confession, which gave birth to the Lutheran Church, and the Book of Concord, a handbook including all of the Lutheran confessions.

Alvin Schmidt’s timely book will admonish and inspire, correct and encourage faithful Lutherans. And it will provide an accessible introduction to Lutheranism for non-Lutherans who know it is only *God’s* opinion about the human condition and how we are saved that matters, and who may realize that making that opinion crystal clear was the whole point of the Lutheran Reformation.

Dr. Angus Menuge, Professor and Chair of Philosophy, Concordia University Wisconsin
INTRODUCTION

Throughout my career, at various speaking engagements over the past four to five decades, I have interacted with numerous Lutherans in different parts of the country. In these contexts, I have often observed that many Lutheran laypeople do not know (or even believe) that their personal theological beliefs are at odds with the biblical teachings Lutheran theology has historically confessed and taught. My observations, of course, are not unique. In 1970, a nationwide representative survey asked Lutherans what they believed as members of the American Lutheran Church (ALC), the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), all three bodies representing about nine million Lutherans. Two years later, the survey’s findings appeared in A Study of Generations. The study reported that many Lutherans held a number of beliefs incompatible with basic Lutheran theology. For example, it stated, “The humanity of Jesus is a hollow, empty humanity for most Lutherans.”

Most surprisingly, the study revealed that four in ten Lutherans believed they were saved and justified by works, rather than by faith alone in Jesus Christ. The magnitude of this finding shocked many Lutheran pastors, given that ever since the Reformation in the 1500s, faithful Lutheran pastors had taught and preached the words of St. Paul: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Then, in 1997, Lutheran Brotherhood published a study that surveyed 2,247 American Lutherans from the The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Wisconsin Evangelical Synod (WELS), and other Lutherans. One of the questions asked, though not exactly the same as the one asked in 1970, was quite similar. The results revealed that 56.2 percent of the Lutherans surveyed believed that “God is satisfied if a person
lives the best life one can." Among Lutherans under the age of 35, the figure was even higher: 67.4 percent felt that way. Clearly, these respondents believed they were saved by their works.

Thus, there appears to be a need for Lutheran laypeople to have access to a book in nontechnical language that states and explains what confessional Lutheran theology has taught and practiced since the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. This book focuses on the hallmarks of Lutheran theology that in most instances are also hallmarks of Lutheran identity. Most of the hallmarks are the Lutheran Church’s major theological teachings. They distinguish Lutherans from Christians of other denominations. And when Lutherans recognize and know these hallmarks, they have the answer to the question “What do we Lutherans believe?”

Many laypeople who ask what Lutherans believe have been members of a Lutheran Church since infancy. In confirmation classes, students (usually in seventh or eighth grade) receive doctrinal instruction that commonly includes memorizing and explaining much of Luther’s Small Catechism.

Having served for nearly four decades as a college and seminary professor, I, as a Lutheran pastor, was privileged to preach in numerous congregations in six American states and also in Canada, usually filling in for pastors on vacation. When asked to teach the adult Bible class, I discovered that sometimes half of those in attendance had never even seen Luther’s Small Catechism. This seemed to indicate that many of these individuals likely became members of the church as adults who had received minimal or abbreviated instruction, frequently without Luther’s Small Catechism—traditionally thought of as the basic text for instruction in the faith.

But even Lutherans who received good instruction as junior catechumens were really too young at
the time to understand fully what they learned. Then, soon after the Rite of Confirmation, many Lutherans fail to keep their knowledge from going dormant by not attending Bible classes, taught Sundays in most Lutheran parishes. Most confirmed members also fail to use Luther's Small Catechism as a prayer book, even when they take time for home devotions. Thus, in time, much of what Lutherans once learned is soon forgotten, and so it is not surprising that many Lutherans sometimes ask, “What do we Lutherans believe?”

In 1992, Mark A. Noll published an article titled “The Lutheran Difference.” The article noted Lutherans in America have made little or no difference in American culture, in spite of Lutheran theology being notably different than the culture in which it finds itself. Noll does not say, but one wonders whether the reason Lutherans have not made any real difference in American culture is perhaps the result of their not knowing or not being conscious that they possess a theological heritage that is significantly different from other Christian denominations.

Not long after Noll's essay appeared, Lutheran author Robert Benne, in his book The Paradoxical Vision (Fortress, 1995), wondered whether the Lutheran difference (he could have said “Lutheran hallmarks”) would survive among Lutherans, particularly in regard to the relevancy of Lutheran theology concerning America's social and political issues. Benne’s question implies that American Lutherans either do not know what the Lutheran difference (to use Noll’s term) is or, if they do, they are not very interested in maintaining and defending it.

Apparently, Lutherans living in the presence of America's large numbers of non-Lutheran Protestants, whose beliefs and values differ notably from Lutheran theology, have been affected by them, even though these non-Lutheran bodies have very different views regarding some basic Christian doctrines. For example, they usually put more emphasis on sanctification (being or becoming holy) than on justification (being declared righteous before God because of a Christian's faith in Jesus Christ). They see less value in the symbolism of the cross in church services or in church art and architecture. Many tend to confuse the two spheres of government (sacred and secular) in regard to social and political issues. They also lack the Lutheran understanding of work and vocation that contends God sees all work having equal value, for He does not assign social status to different kinds of work, as most societies do. Nor do they see God hidden in people's work (Luther referred to this as “His mask”) by which He keeps His created world
functioning. These non-Lutheran Protestant beliefs and values, which in many ways are a part of American culture, have deterred numerous Lutherans from being conscious of their church's distinctively different teachings, the hallmarks of their theology and identity.

Historically, Lutherans have been blessed with doctrines and practices drawn from the Holy Scriptures and reinforced by the Lutheran Confessions in the Book of Concord. These Lutheran doctrines and practices are often seen by many non-Lutherans as the hallmarks of Lutheran theology. Since these hallmarks are recognized by many non-Lutherans, it seems fitting to cite and explain them to Lutheran laypeople, many of whom do not seem to be conscious of them. Lutheran pastors may also appreciate the discussion in this book, which they can share with their parishioners. These hallmarks, if more consciously recognized, stand to benefit Lutherans in today's American culture with its diverse, often conflicting, religious beliefs and practices, many of which run counter to the historic hallmarks of Lutheran theology.

It is said that Roman Catholics have a mystique; namely, a complex of quasi-mystical beliefs and practices. This mystique is evident as Catholics revere the pope, adore and pray to Mary, pray the rosary, celebrate the Mass (the Roman Church's term for celebrating the Lord's Supper), bless themselves with the sign of the cross, do not allow their priests to marry, value the work of nuns, believe in purgatory, have cardinals who elect the pope, and do not want to be like Protestants. This mystique is recognized by both Catholics and non-Catholics.

Lutherans, however, do not seem to have a mystique, though they certainly have the ingredients for one; namely, solus Christus (Christ alone), sola
gratia (by grace alone), sola fide (by faith alone), sola Scriptura (by Scripture alone), the sacramental presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper, Law and Gospel, Luther’s Small Catechism, the doctrine of two spheres of government, the theology of the cross, an outstanding musical heritage that includes Luther’s well-known hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” an annual celebration of Reformation Day, and so on. These are all distinctive Lutheran hallmarks that merit being seen and recognized as the Lutheran mystique. But thus far these hallmarks have not resulted in an observable Lutheran mystique in the minds of Lutherans or in the perceptions of non-Lutherans. Sometimes it appears many Lutherans do not mind being identified with Protestants in general. Apparently, many Lutherans do not know or believe they have a theological heritage that differs from non-Lutheran Protestants.

This book seeks to help Lutheran laity come to know, understand, and appreciate their church’s treasured teachings and help them not to be tempted to think it makes little or no difference whether they or their children remain Lutheran in our diverse culture. To help today’s Lutherans overcome the latter temptation, the book seeks to inform and encourage them to understand, to believe, and to hold fast to the historic Lutheran teachings.

The title of each chapter bears the name of an important Lutheran doctrine; namely, one of its hallmarks. Some chapters also have hallmarks within the more prominent hallmark named in the chapter’s title. For instance, Luther’s contention that apart from Jesus Christ the Bible would be largely a meaningless book is a hallmark within the hallmark of solus Christus in chapter 1. And the frequent Lutheran assertion in the Formula of Concord, “We believe, teach, and confess” is a hallmark within the hallmark of the Book of Concord (see chapter 19).

Regarding this book’s use of the term hallmark, readers will notice that often it refers to both Lutheran theology and its adherents’ identity. Occasionally, in some contexts, the term refers only to one or the other. This book also discusses some key biblical concepts that today are in need of clarification. One example is the current use of the word faith in our culture. Chapter 3 documents that the word pistis (Greek for “faith”) is a Christian innovation because pistis had no religious meaning in the ancient Greek culture. The chapter further shows how our English-speaking culture has given the word faith meanings that are biblically foreign and thus widely misused when, for instance, non-Christian religions today are referred to as “people of faith,” re-
ferring to people who are affiliated with any kind of religious group. This practice contradicts Ephesians 4:5, where Paul told the Ephesian Christians there was only “one faith”—Christianity.

This book also notes that, over time, some Lutheran hallmarks have become less prominent and have essentially disappeared from Lutheran theology. Chapters 5 and 6, for example, discuss this phenomenon in connection with the longstanding concern Lutheran theologians had regarding the canonicity of some books in the New Testament. These chapters are intended to help today’s Lutherans gain a better understanding of the important historical, theological background of the New Testament’s canonicity, and also help them answer the question “What do we Lutherans believe?”

Also noted is that numerous hallmarks are often not known even to lifelong Lutherans, one example being these words spoken in the historic Lutheran liturgy: “I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities.” These words are not heard in other denominations; they are uniquely Lutheran. Additionally, most Lutherans are not aware that when Luther and his new bride, Katharina, received the former Augustinian Black Cloister building as a gift, it became the first family parsonage in Christendom, the likes of which soon became an admirable institution in most Protestant denominations. This book also notes why the Lutheran Church became known as “the singing church,” initially not a compliment.

If members of the Lutheran Church take the hallmarks of Lutheran identity to heart and internalize their abiding Christian value, they will not just be Lutherans out of mere social conformity but out of a God-pleasing conviction. This is the prayerful objective of the present book.

To further help Lutherans know and better understand the various hallmarks of their Lutheran theology and identity, this book offers questions at the end of each chapter for group discussion. They are questions suitable for Bible classes and other educational contexts.

*Soli Deo Gloria*
CHAPTER 1

Solus Christus (Christ Alone)

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” —Jesus Christ; John 14:6

Solus Christus (Christ alone), along with sola gratia (by grace alone), sola fide (by faith alone), and sola Scriptura (by Scripture alone), became one of the four slogans of the Reformation. To Luther and his followers, solus Christus was the first and most important Christian truth. It can thus be rightly called the number one hallmark of Lutheran theology. Yet, many Lutherans, similar to other Protestants, have often only seen (or heard of) sola gratia, sola fide, and sola Scriptura on posters, banners, and printed signs. The slogan solus Christus is almost always overlooked when these three are shown. This omission is not only common but also seems largely unrecognized. It is an unfortunate omission, for solus Christus should not only be cited with the other three slogans but also listed first, for without solus Christus the other three really have no theological value.

Sometimes people ask why solus Christus is not written as sola Christus, given the other three have the word sola preceding them. The reason for this difference lies in the Latin rule that requires an adjective to agree with the noun it describes. The Latin words gratia, fide, and Scriptura are feminine nouns, and thus each takes the feminine adjective, sola. On the other hand, Christus is a masculine noun, and so the adjective also has to be masculine—namely, solus.

Given that the next three chapters focus on sola gratia, sola fide, and sola Scriptura, respectively, some readers may wonder why this book does not have a chapter on Soli Deo Gloria (“To God Alone the
Glory”), given that this slogan was sometimes used during and after the Reformation years. In fact, Johann Sebastian Bach would write “S. D. G.” (Soli Deo Gloria) on his musical compositions to thank and honor God. He also penned additional abbreviations on his manuscripts; namely, “J. J.” (Jesu Juva, meaning “Help Me, Jesus”) or “I.N.J.” (In Nomine Jesu, meaning “In the Name of Jesus”). Soli Deo Gloria is a Christian expression of gratitude to God rather than a biblical doctrine. Thus, this book does not include Soli Deo Gloria as a Lutheran hallmark.

SOLUS CHRISTUS AND THE BIBLE

The doctrine of solus Christus has several facets. First, Lutheran theology, reflecting Luther’s description of the Bible, sees the Bible as the cradle of Christ.

Although non-Lutheran Protestants do not deny this understanding of the Bible, it is not a commonly found emphasis in their theological literature, especially when compared to Lutheran theology. Luther contended that the Bible was revealed by God in order to make Jesus Christ known and that without Christ the Bible would largely be an unclear book. Here is how Luther put it: “To him who has the Son Scripture is an open book; and the stronger his faith in Christ becomes, the more brightly will the light of Scripture shine for him.” Commenting on Romans 10:4, which states, “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes,” Luther said that in this passage St. Paul indicates “that all Scripture finds its meaning in Christ.”

Arguing that the Bible is the cradle of Christ was not a new teaching introduced by Luther. Christ Himself taught this doctrine. Walking with two men on the road to Emmaus the day He arose from the dead, Christ said, “Everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44). Similarly, the apostle John quotes Christ saying the Scriptures “bear witness about Me” (John 5:39). And Luke, in his Gospel, referring to the risen Christ’s conversation with the men on the way to Emmaus, says, “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He [Christ] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (24:27).

So strong was Luther’s conviction concerning the Bible being the cradle of Christ, he once said, “Whoever does not have or want to have this Man properly and truly who is called Jesus Christ, God’s Son, whom we Christians proclaim, must keep his hands off the Bible.” Another
time, in responding to Erasmus, the man with whom Luther disagreed much, he stated: “Take Christ out of the Scriptures, and what will you find left in them?” To Luther, the Bible was only valuable because it proclaimed Jesus Christ and His redemptive work. And thus since Luther’s time, *solus Christus* has been a distinctive Lutheran hallmark.

**Solus Christus and Knowing God**

The second aspect of *solus Christus* states that God can only be known through His Son, Jesus Christ. Luther maintained that “he who does not find or receive God in Christ will never find Him. He will not find God outside of Christ, even should he mount up above the heavens or descend below hell itself, or go beyond the limits of the world.” At the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, Luther said, “I do not know of any God except who was made flesh, nor do I want to have another.”

Although Luther can rightly be credited with accenting the concept of *solus Christus*, he was not entirely alone in holding this position. Erasmus said something similar to Luther when he once stated, “Nothing is to be sought in Scripture but Christ.” But it was Luther’s strong emphasis on *solus Christus* that received the most attention during the Reformation and later as well. A hundred years after Luther, Blaise Pascal echoed him, saying, “We know God only through Jesus Christ.” And more recently, Wolfhart Pannenberg stated, “As Christians we know God only as he has been revealed in and through Jesus.”

As with the teaching that Jesus Christ is the focus of the Bible, the teaching that God can only be known or found in His Son comes from Christ Himself. When His disciple Philip asked to be shown the Father, Jesus replied, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know Me, Philip?” Then He declared, “Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:9). To make sure Philip would not miss the point, Jesus further stated, “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me, or else believe on account of the works themselves” (14:11).

For centuries, countless people have searched for God but have not found or come to know Him. The ancient Greeks and Romans thought they knew God to be present in humanly crafted idols; others thought they found Him by worshiping the sun or the moon. Today, many think they have found God in the teachings of Buddha or in the Hindu deities of Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu; others think they have found Him in the teachings of Islam’s Qur’an. But Jesus says God can only be known by
people believing in the Son of God. “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him” (John 14:7).

To Luther, as Hermann Sasse has noted, “God who is hidden (Deus absconditus) outside of Christ [is] revealed (Deus revelatus) in Christ only.”10 In short, God can only be known through solus Christus. Thus, the Islamic concept of god as Allah, the three gods of Hinduism (Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu), or “The True Name” in the religion of Sikhism are false. For Christ stated, “Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9), or in the words of St. Paul, “For in Him [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Colossians 2:9).

Today’s multiculturalists or religious pluralists do not want to hear that God cannot be found apart from Jesus Christ. They think it is bigoted to teach and believe such a doctrine. But that is precisely what Christ taught and preached, and that was also what the early Christians firmly believed and proclaimed. It was this message that not only made them highly unpopular but also often resulted in their being tortured, imprisoned, and sometimes even executed for refusing to participate in Rome’s religiously syncretistic, polytheistic activities. Had the early Christians agreed to participate in pagan Rome’s inclusive religious practices, Christianity would surely have disappeared in a relatively short period of time. This conclusion Lutherans need to ponder when asked to participate in today’s many religiously syncretistic activities that often take place on civic holidays or other events that publicly ignore solus Christus.

**SOLUS CHRISTUS: THE ONLY WAY TO ETERNAL LIFE**

The third component of solus Christus in Lutheran theology maintains that no one can obtain eternal life without faith in Jesus Christ’s work of salvation. This doctrine stems from what Jesus Himself taught: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). Christ not only said that He was the only way to eternal life but He also taught that “Whoever believes in Him [Christ] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (3:18). Similarly, Christ Himself underscored solus Christus when He told the Pharisees, “Unless you believe that I am He you will die in your sins” (8:24).
The teaching of *solus Christus* was boldly proclaimed by the apostle Peter to the temple’s council in Jerusalem when he declared salvation could only be obtained in Jesus Christ. “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). In regard to this biblical reference, Luther said, “it is impossible that there should be more saviors, ways, or means to be saved than through the one righteousness which our Savior Jesus Christ is and has bestowed upon us, and has offered to God for us as our one mercy seat.”

Despite Jesus having clearly taught there is no salvation outside of faith in Him, many Christians, including some modern Lutherans, do not accept this biblical teaching. In 1972, a nationwide study of Lutherans in the United States (noted earlier in the Introduction) revealed that 72 percent of Lutherans in America believed that “although there are many religions in the world, most of them lead to the same God.” And when in 1997 a similar question was asked once again, 67 percent of Lutherans in America said most religious beliefs led to the same God. This means approximately seven out of ten American Lutherans presently do not appear to believe in *solus Christus* when it comes to human beings obtaining eternal life. Clearly, the ideology of multiculturalism and related forces are having powerfully negative effects on large numbers of today’s American Lutherans.

**SOLUS CHRISTUS and CHRISTIAN PRAYERS**

The fourth component of *solus Christus* means that Christians are to pray in Christ’s name. Jesus said, “Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do” (John 14:13). Countless Christians have heeded these words from the Church’s earliest days by beginning or ending their prayers in the name of Jesus Christ.

Today, however, it is not uncommon to hear some Christians pray Christless prayers by omitting the name of Jesus Christ, often when they pray in a civic setting, where apparently they do not want to give offense to those who are not Christians. These prayers usually begin with the words “Dear God.” Then, after the petitions and thanks have been expressed, the person praying concludes by saying, “We pray these things in Your name.”

There is an unrecognized oddity about this kind of prayer, for God’s name was not mentioned. The word *God* is merely used as a generic term for a divine being. Thus, Christians want to name Jesus Christ...
in their prayers. But some may ask, “What about the Lord’s Prayer, which does not include Jesus’ name?” True, but it is His prayer, and so when Christians pray that prayer, they are honoring Him, even though Christ’s name is not specifically mentioned.

Using the name Jesus Christ in our prayers is important for at least three reasons. First, such prayers follow Christ’s command (John 14:13). Second, praying in the name of Christ gives a Christian witness and confession to all present. Third, it tells those hearing the prayer(s), contrary to what is believed by many in today’s pervasive climate of multiculturalism and political correctness, Christians do not pray as non-Christians pray. Christians pray in the name of Jesus Christ; that is, solus Christus.

Given the biblical and Lutheran accent on praying in the name of Jesus Christ, it behooves Lutheran parents to teach their children to pray in His name. Similarly, Lutheran Sunday Schools, parochial schools, and sermons need to teach this important way to pray. If Lutherans are not specifically taught to pray in the name of Jesus Christ, given today’s pervasive accent on political correctness, they may unwittingly pray Christless prayers, such as is often heard on radio and television and on civic holidays, such as Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Veterans’ Day, and Thanksgiving Day.

Often Christians end their prayers with the words “We ask this in Jesus’ name.” This is fine, but it is even better also to include the name of “Christ.” To say “Christ” along with the name “Jesus” accents His messianic role. When praying in the latter way, we Lutherans are following the example of St. Paul, who most frequently used the name Jesus Christ or Christ Jesus in his epistles. Similarly, Luther commonly used both names when he prayed. When he used only one name, he usually used the name Christ. Although Paul and Luther are noble examples to imitate, a Lutheran should never feel guilty if he or she prays only in the name of Jesus.
The manner in which the Church, for centuries, prayed its collects in its historic liturgy are also great examples to follow. These brief prayers have typically concluded their petitions to God with the words “through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord.” These final words in most collects underscore the deity of Christ in opposition to the Arian heresy of the fourth century that did not consider Jesus as God, but rather as a special being created by God.

We also find Martin Luther consistently praying in the name of Jesus Christ. He rarely separated the name Christ from the name Jesus in his prayers. For instance, his well-known Morning and Evening Prayers in his Small Catechism begin: “I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son . . .” Praying in this manner is additional evidence of Luther’s strong belief in solus Christus. It is a noble example for Lutherans to imitate. And it is also important to note that the first thesis of Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses (1517), which sparked the Reformation, begins, “Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ . . .”

Solus Christus in Christian prayers further means Christians are not to pray to departed saints, a practice common in the Roman Catholic Church and also in the Eastern Orthodox churches. The Augsburg Confession (1530) of Lutheran theology states, “But the Scriptures do not teach that we are to call on the saints or to ask the saints for help. Scripture sets before us the one Christ as the Mediator, Atoning Sacrifice, High Priest, and Intercessor. He is to be prayed to” (AC XXI 2–3). In not praying to saints, Lutheran theology cites St. Paul, who told Timothy, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

Solus Christus as Human and Divine

According to A Study of Generations, Lutheran laypeople strongly emphasized Jesus’ divinity but underemphasized His human nature. The study correctly pointed out that believing in the divinity of Christ does not indicate what a person believes about the humanity of Jesus. Given that the majority of Lutherans underemphasize Jesus’ human nature, the study also stated that “Lutherans as a group are Nestorians; that is, they reflect the ancient heresy of separating the two natures of Christ.” Thus, they either do not know, remember, or believe what the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451 declared: “We confess one and the same Jesus Christ, the Son and Lord only begotten, in two natures without mixture, without change, without division, without separation.”
**Solus Christus and the Roman Catholic Church**

While most Protestant denominations do not deny or reject *solus Christus* as a basic Christian doctrine, they do not all explicitly teach that it is necessary to believe in Jesus Christ in order to obtain eternal salvation. Whether someone can obtain eternal life without faith in Christ is a question often left unanswered. Outside the Protestant realm, however, the Roman Catholic Church has specifically asked whether there is salvation outside of Jesus Christ and has answered in the affirmative.

The official Roman Catholic statement on this matter is found in the papal declaration of *Lumen Gentium* (1964), cited in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994). It states, “Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation.” This Roman Catholic teaching was already strongly underscored by Pope Pius IX, who held the papal office from 1846 to 1878. He decreed,

> It is known to Us [sic] and to you that those who labor in invincible ignorance concerning our most holy religion and who, assiduously observing the natural law and its precepts which has inscribed in the hearts of all, and being ready to obey God, live an honest and upright life can, through the working of divine light and grace, attain eternal Life.

This statement contradicts the words of Jesus in John 14:6, which clearly state, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” It also contradicts another statement of His, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (3:36). As noted above, the doctrine of *solus Christus* in regard to salvation is also stated unequivocally by St. Peter in Acts 4:12: “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” These passages unmistakably declare eternal life can only be obtained through faith in Jesus Christ.

Despite these clear biblical references, the Roman Catholic Church, in effect, denies *solus Christus* in regard to people obtaining eternal life. Thus, according to Rome’s *Lumen Gentium* and its catechism of 1994, it really makes no difference whether individuals are Muslims, Hindus,
Sikhs, Buddhists, or astral worshipers; they all will obtain eternal life even though they do not have faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, the Lutheran hallmark of *solus Christus* is not accepted in Roman Catholic theology.

**Conclusion**

Luther, in his strong accent on *solus Christus*, said anything that diminishes Christ is heresy. Unfortunately, there are a number of ways Christ is often diminished. He is diminished when people think they can obtain eternal life without Him; when people think all religions honor and pray to the same God; when individuals believe they are saved by good works, or by good works combined with faith in Christ; when they intentionally pray Christless or deistic prayers; or when they see Christ primarily as a great teacher but not as God.

As Lutherans, we hold to the hallmark of *solus Christus* because the Holy Spirit has convinced us that there is no salvation outside of Him, just as the Holy Spirit convinced Peter to say, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). By believing in *solus Christus*, we also take seriously Jesus’ words, “Whoever believes in Him [Jesus] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (3:18).

Finally, as faithful followers of Christ, we Lutherans want to (1) remember that Christ is the light in which the Bible must be read and understood; (2) make a consistent, conscious effort always to pray in the name of Jesus Christ; (3) remember there is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ; and (4) recall Luther’s words from his hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” where he says, “Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is, Of Sabaoth Lord, And there’s none other God” (*LSB* 656:2). *Solus Christus* is indeed a hallmark of Lutheran theology and identity.
1. Why do sola gratia, sola fide, and sola Scriptura have no real spiritual or theological value without solus Christus?

2. How did Luther view the Bible in relation to Jesus Christ?

3. Research shows many Christians do not believe that Jesus Christ is the only way human beings can obtain eternal life. Why do you think this erroneous belief is so common among many people today, including some Lutherans?

4. What biblical passages can you cite to show that there is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ?

5. Why is it so easy in our Western culture today to say prayers that fail to mention the name of Jesus Christ?

6. Why should Christians always pray and make their petitions known to God by specifically praying in the name of Jesus Christ?

7. Cite some biblical passages that teach Christians to pray in the name of Jesus Christ.

8. Does God receive prayers that deliberately are not spoken in the name of Jesus Christ? Why or why not?

9. Why do you think, even in Lutheran contexts, we often hear or see sola gratia, sola fide, and sola Scriptura, but not solus Christus?

10. When did the Roman Catholic Church officially state that non-Christians could obtain eternal life without faith in Jesus Christ?

11. How can parents teach their children—or how can Christians teach the next generations—to be more conscious of the biblical fact that there is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ?

12. Why does the Bible theologically have no value apart from solus Christus?