I. Luther’s "right way to study theology" is anchored in the three rules set forth in Psalm 119: *Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio*.

- For Luther "Everything centers around the practice of meditation, for prayer prepares for it and its results are confirmed in the experience of conflict. For Luther, meditation is the key to the study of theology. No one can become a..."
true theologian unless he learns theology through it” (Kleinig, "The Kindred Heart", 142).

II. *Oratio* (prayer) is grounded in the Word of the Lord.

- Prayer is the voice of faith. That is to say, that prayer grows out of the Word of the Lord.
- "The richness of the Word of God ought to determine our prayer, not the poverty of our heart" (Bonhoeffer, *Psalms*, 15).
- Prayer is "responding speech" (Peterson, 5).
- "Prayer escapes the danger of disorder and confusion only when it is enkindled by the words of Scripture. From the Word proceeds its inner justification, as well as its life-giving power and the clearness of its petitions. A prayer that does not stick to Scripture will soon become poor in ideas, poor in faith, poor in love and will finally die” (Koeberele, 176-177).

III. *Meditatio*

- *Meditatio* is the continual study of the Scriptures. In 1518, Luther wrote "You should not only meditate inwardly in your heart but also outwardly by repeating the words out aloud and rubbing at the written word (like a sweet-smelling herb), by reading and rereading it, carefully, attentively and reflectively, to gather what the Holy Spirit means by them" (quoted in Kleinig, "The Kindred Heart", 143; see AE 34:286).
- *Meditatio* is grounded in the *externum verbum*. See Smalcald Articles III:VIII "In these matters, which concern the external, spoken Word, we must hold firmly to the conviction that God gives no one his Spirit or grace except through or with the external Word which comes before. Thus we shall be protected from the enthusiasts—that is, from the spiritualists who boast that they possess the Spirit without and before the Word and who therefore judge, interpret, and twist the Scriptures or spoken Word according to their pleasure" (Tappert, 312).Luther: "Let him who wants to contemplate in the right way reflect on his Baptism; let him read his Bible, hear sermons, honor father and mother, and come to the aid of a brother in distress. But let him not shut himself up in a nook…and their entertain himself with his devotions and thus suppose that he is sitting in God’s bosom and has fellowship with God without Christ, without the Word, without the sacraments" (AE 3:275).
- Note Luther comment in his pamphlet of 1521, *A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels*: "When you open the book containing the gospels and read or hear how Christ comes here or there, or how someone is
brought to him, you should therein perceive the sermon or the gospel through which he is coming to you, or you are being brought to him. For the preaching of the gospel is nothing else than Christ coming to us, or we being brought to him. When you see how he works, however, and how he helps everyone to whom he comes or who is brought to him, then rest assured that faith is accomplishing this in you and that he is offering your soul exactly the same sort of help and favor through the gospel. If you pause here and let him do you good, that is, if you believe that he benefits and helps you, then you really have it. Then Christ is yours, presented to you as a gift" (quoted in Kleinig, "Meditation", 47). In a Christmas sermon of 1519, Luther makes the same point as he emphasizes a sacramental meditation on the Gospel: "We meditate properly on the Gospel when we do so sacramentally, for through faith the words produce in us what they portray" (quoted in Kleinig, "The Kindred Heart", 146).

- Luther likened meditation to a cow chewing its cud. In his commentary on Deuteronomy 14:1of 1525, he writes: "To chew the cud, however, is to take up the Word with delight and meditate with supreme diligence, so that (according to the proverb) one does not permit it to go into one ear and out the other, but holds it firmly in the heart, swallows it, and absorbs it into the intestines" (AE 9:136)
- See Luther’s advice in his "A Simple Way to Pray" (1535) where he suggests taking each of the commandments, each part of the Creed "in their fourfold aspect, namely, as a school text, song book, penitential book, and prayer book" (AE 43:209).

IV. Tentatio

- God uses tentatio (spiritual affliction, trial, and temptation) to drive a way from self and to His promises alone.
- Tentatio happens within the context of a person’s vocation. "Tentatio is testing, temptation, and trial which occurs when God and his word intersect with us and our world" (Pfeiffer, 113). Suffering happens precisely because a person is faithful to his calling. See Luther’s comments on "cross bearing" (see AE 51:195-208). "Peace with God brings conflict and adversity with the world, the flesh, and the devil" (Hein, 33).
- Pastors are not exempt from tentatio. In fact God uses it to draw us away from our own abilities to the gifts He gives in the Gospel and the Sacraments. See II Corinthians 4:1-12.
- Luther is thankful for his enemies: "For I myself…must be very thankful to my papists for pummeling, pressing, and terrifying me; that is, for making me a
fairly good theologian, for otherwise I would not have become one…" (Doberstein, 288).

- "As soon as a person meditates and is occupied with God’s Word; as soon as God’s Word begins to take root in and grow in him, the devil harries him with much conflict, bitter contradiction, and blatant opposition. But these assaults (Anfechtungen) prove to be spiritually counterproductive, for by driving him to the end of his tether, they teach him ‘to seek and love God’s Word’ as the source of all his strength and being. In such a situation of temptation, he experiences for himself the power and truth of God’s Word. Temptation turns the student of God’s Word into a real theologian, because it exercises and reinforces his faith in Christ. He experiences the power of God’s Word in his own weakness. Paradoxically, he sees the presence of God and his grace most fully displayed under its apparent negation in adversity and trouble. Because he bears the word of Christ in himself, he must also bear the cross for it. But, as he bears his own cross, he gets to know himself and Christ whose glory was revealed by his death on the cross. Meditation, then, ultimately elucidates temptation and is itself elucidated by it" (Kleinig, "The Kindred Heart", 147).

- Luther (Galatians 1535): "Therefore I admonish you, especially those of you who are to become instructors of consciences, as well as each of you individually, that you exercise yourselves continually by study, by reading, by meditation and by prayer, so that in temptation you will be able to instruct consciences, both your own and others, and take them from the law to grace, from active righteousness to passive righteousness, in short from Moses to Christ. In affliction and in the conflict of conscience it is the devil’s habit to frighten us with the law and to set against us the consciousness of sin, our wicked past, the wrath and judgment of God, hell, and eternal death, so that he may drive us into despair, subject us to himself, and pluck us from Christ" (AE 26:10).

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