

Title: Counsel and Conscience: Post-Reformation Lutheran Casuistry According to the Dedekenn-Gerhard *Thesaurus Consiliorum Et Decisionum* and Its Cases on Marriage and Divorce

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ABSTRACT

In much literature on early modern casuistry and conscience, Lutheran casuistry is denied a place, under-researched, or ignored. Yet in Lutheran Germany of the post-Reformation era (ca. 1580-1750), there was a genre of pastoral/ethical writings consisting in casuistry and in topically or thematically related theological counsels, aimed at instructing and comforting the consciences of Christians. An extensive example from this genre is Georg Dedekenn and Johann Ernst Gerhard, eds., *Thesaurus Consiliorum Et Decisionum*, 4 vols. (Jena: Zacharias Hertel, 1671). Lutheran casuistry, related to but also distinct from Roman Catholic and Reformed counterparts, arose especially as pastors looked within Holy Scripture, the medieval tradition, and the writings of Martin Luther and other Lutheran authorities for answers to ethical problems and doctrinal disputes. Dedekenn's *Thesaurus* was an anthology, addressing a wide range of dogmatic as well as practical matters. Dedekenn and the other editors of the *Thesaurus* did not view their counsels as necessarily obligating to a Christian's conscience. Instead, they viewed the counsels as wise advice, and they encouraged readers to avoid individualistic ethical choices and instead to engage in an "aristocratic" process of moral decision making in which one would consult the wise men of the past and present. The counsels included in the *Thesaurus* address inter-confessional disputes, intra-Lutheran disputes, sacraments, church government, pastoral ministry, social ethics, marriage, sexual ethics, and many other topics. By examining the cases and counsels on divorce and remarriage, one sees various arguments being made, and several sources of authority aside from Scripture being used, including medieval canon law and ancient Roman imperial law. Usually, a high degree of uniformity can be seen in answers given in the *Thesaurus*. Yet an irreconcilable diversity in these cases on marriage presents a picture of the condition of marital practice in seventeenth-century Germany, a condition which was of concern to the editors of the *Thesaurus* and their friends.