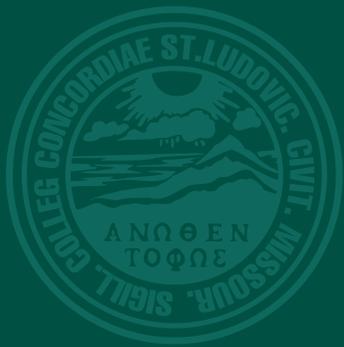


# CONCORDIA JOURNAL

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- Toward a Theology of the Scriptures:  
Looking Back to Look Forward
- Inspiration and Inerrancy—Some Preliminary  
Thoughts
- Seven Theses on Reformation Hermeneutics
- The New Testament Canon in the Lutheran  
Dogmaticians

# CONCORDIA JOURNAL

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# CONCORDIA JOURNAL

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# EDITORIALS

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The Medart is dead.

In case you're wondering, I gave up burgers and fries for Lent. And the Medart ("MEE-dart") was the signature burger of John's Town Hall, a locals' haunt a few blocks from Concordia Seminary in the Dorchester Apartments on Skinker Avenue. The week after Easter I walked to John's Town Hall with colleague Chris Born to break my Lenten fast only to find the place emptied out. Vamoose. Turns out, the "John" in John's Town Hall died. Something new will be there by fall.

And in case you're wondering, I will miss John's Town Hall because Chris and I and Professor Tony Cook would regularly walk there to talk theology over a Medart and a beer. Looking back, isn't that how it always is? Particular kinds of theology happen in particular kinds of places. Jerusalem. Antioch. Rome. Canterbury. Wittenberg. Geneva. Should you ever find yourself in New Haven, Connecticut, go to Archie Moore's at the corner of Willow and Anderson. Find a table in the back corner and order a burger. You are now sitting where legend has it the Niebuhr brothers used to hold forth on Christ and culture and the nature and destiny of man.

It is virtually impossible to divorce theology from the places where it happens, from where we gather around to watch it happen. Our sense of place informs (and forms) our sense of the divine.

We often call that place, literally and figuratively, a *sanctuary*. Which is why the same goes for the church, and all those places around the globe where the church practices theology, which isn't only at seminaries. Most often, those places are called congregations. And this issue of *Concordia Journal* will argue the same goes for the scriptures. Or at least the way the church theologizes about the scriptures.

The questions around which the church theologizes about the scriptures are perennial. But in light of recent events particularly within American Lutheranism, these questions have become increasingly urgent. And so, we have chosen to reprint four "classic" articles on the broad topic of the scriptures and the church, three in these pages and one on the new *ConcordiaTheology.org*. The range of the theologians is broad: Sasse, Franzmann, J. Preus, Piepkorn. The questions they raise are relevant and incisive. Their answers aren't easy.

And their conversation doesn't end here. Joel Okamoto's editorial serves as the introduction to the topic as a whole, as well as why we chose these four articles to "look back to look forward." This issue of *Concordia Journal* serves a more fundamental purpose of introducing the topic for Concordia Seminary's 2010 Theological Symposium, "Scripture and the Church: Formative or Formality?" (September 21–22), which is the literal *place* where the theologizing will continue. Your place at the table is most welcome. John's Town Hall may be gone, but Kaldi's is still here.

Jimmy's and Sasha's too. And if you didn't walk over to Kate's Pizzeria the last time you were on campus, now you have a reason.

Of course, also in this issue, President Dale Meyer raises the initial question of "Why Go to Church?" in the first place. Perhaps the answer to that postmodern question is even more urgent than the previous. And we continue our celebration of the Melancthon anniversary with an original and, as far as we can tell, previously unpublished poem by Philipp. I should also mention a special book review by Tremper Longman of Andrew Steinmann's *Proverbs Concordia Commentary*.

Finally, a word about the **new *ConcordiaTheology.org***. If you haven't been there already, it has been completely redesigned, and if I may say so, it has now become what it always wanted to be: a place where theology happens, in real time, within a community of civil, respectful, constructive dialogue. The new site includes, among other things, an energized faculty blog commenting on virtually everything under the sun (the "Quad"), a page that "aggregates" posts from other Seminary-related blogs (the "Commons"), and a "Library" of resources including multimedia, articles, podcasts, book reviews, homiletical helps, and the like. *ConcordiaTheology.org* is also now on Facebook (Concordia Theology) and Twitter (CSLTheology). Join us there—a great place to talk theology. But you're on your own for the burger and beer.

Of course, none of this would mean anything but for one fact. The Medart is dead. But Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Travis J. Scholl  
Managing Editor of Theological Publications

*Breaking news ... As we are going to press comes the news that the short film "Ragman" won for Best Faith-Based Film at the Cape Fear Film Festival in North Carolina. The film shares a special relationship to Concordia Seminary and congratulations especially go to director Dale Ward, Concordia Seminary's senior media producer.*

## Why Go to Church?

---

One Sunday last February Diane and I got into a short but stimulating conversation as we drove home from church. Our pastor had announced a community-wide evangelism effort and invited members to go door-to-door and pass out invitations to come to church. Diane asked, “Why would someone sit in church for an hour when that’s not how we live anymore? Short bursts of information; that’s how we live.” Then she held up her Blackberry and said, “People today think they have everything they need right here.” She went on to give examples. Today you don’t need a newspaper, old-style books, land-lines, or TV. Just about everything you need can be held in the palm of your hand. Actually go to church? Many of us were raised in an era when going to church was accepted in American society, even encouraged by Sunday blue laws. In some ways, church-going is like the hardcopy of the newspaper. When I asked her if we should get the *New York Times* on the Kindle, she said, “No, I like the feel of holding the paper.” Going to church feels right to many of us but it doesn’t make sense to more and more Americans.

That Sunday conversation came as I was wrapping up a course called “Preaching in the Postmodern World.” “Postmodern” is a favorite tag for the profound changes we’re experiencing in our culture and church. Unlike the days when we were raised, many Americans today are biblically illiterate and can take or leave going to church on Sunday. In fact, they feel free to take or leave the whole institutional church and, in case you haven’t noticed, more and more are leaving. Is postmodern America secular? No, we’re very spiritual but most of us are doing it on our own. So why would anyone take up that old habit of going to church? Keeping the question alive, I got one answer more than any other. “We go to church for flesh-and-blood contact with other Christians.” That’s a good reason, in some ways postmodern, but the devil is in the details. My respondents *spoke as insiders*, as people convinced that church attendance is an important habit for their lives. What about the person who hasn’t locked in on the habit, has little or no experience with going to church or whose experience has been negative? What about the person who thinks you can get almost everything you need from the internet or Wal-Mart, including spirituality? Immersed in an American culture that no longer favors church-going, why would you accept an invitation to church?

The answer depends in no small part on understanding today’s cultural context...and tomorrow’s as well. Postmodernism isn’t going away. The term is elastic, not easily defined, but the themes of postmodernism stand in clear contradiction to the guiding themes of “modernism,” the milieu in which many of us were raised. In modernism we could say, “Come to church and learn about God.” In postmodernism the response comes back, “Thanks, but there’s plenty of spiritual information on the internet and TV.” “But,” you continue with the modern mindset, “how do you know you can trust that?” The postmodern reply, “You have your views; I

have mine. Who's to say you're right and I'm wrong?" Modernism believed that in someplace you could find absolute truth.

In the 18th century thinkers became optimistic that by using the universal values of science, reason and logic, they could get rid of all the myths and holy ideas that kept humanity from progressing. They felt this would eventually free humanity from misery, religion, superstition, all irrational behavior, and unfounded belief. Humanity would thus progress to a state of freedom, happiness and progress.<sup>1</sup>

While our spiritual ancestors took exception to that exalted view of reason (and events of the twentieth century confirmed their criticism), they countered the claims of philosophy and science by doing a very modernist thing, saying that we had the absolute truth, thanks to God favoring us with his revelation. That modernist approach greatly influenced how many generations presented the faith. For example, prospects were invited to join The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod if they agreed with our doctrine. Again: our preaching has tended to be the presentation of propositional truths and seminarians were warned to be sparing with illustrations, if to use them at all. None of this is to claim that our doctrine and reasoning was wrong. Unlike much philosophy and science, we used reason to serve the revealed truth, the ministerial use of reason as opposed to their magisterial use. The point here is simply that modernism's underlying assumption of knowledge that is objective, absolute and demonstrable set the stage for how we presented the faith. When someone accepted the invitation to come to church, we were preaching and teaching an absolute truth—God's—that fit well with the visitor's modernist assumption that someplace, somewhere, maybe in this church, absolute truth can be found.

Today you and I remain convinced of the absolute truth of God's Word but many people we meet today are wary of truth claims. Two world wars, atom bombs and the threat of nuclear annihilation, the Holocaust and other genocides, the Titanic, Hindenburg, Challenger, product recalls...The twentieth century dethroned reason. "Where we previously had a center—whether in Christian religion or in the ideals of science and progress—suddenly we had nothing."<sup>2</sup> A mock version of the Lord's Prayer by Ernest Hemingway shows that "pessimism, irrationality, and disillusionment with the idea of absolute knowledge" led people to doubt the church's claims as well. "Our nada (Spanish for nothing) who art in nada, nada be thy name. Thy kingdom nada. Thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada."<sup>3</sup> Go to church to learn God's truth? "What is truth?" (Jn 18:38)

So, bye-bye institutional church! What in God's name can we do? Our best historic vigor has come from centering our personal, congregational and synodical existence on study of God's Word and the obedience of faith. "Thy word is truth"

(Jn 17:17). Now comes postmodernism, with its “disillusionment with the idea of absolute knowledge,” decapitating the intellectual side of spiritual life across the religious landscape. Our synodical future? Probably not too promising if we come across to spiritual shoppers as cerebral and cocksure about it. Teaching the class on postmodernism challenged many of my own assumptions about faith and ministry. Interesting thing, though, whenever I, a 60-something, lamented this new context, the 20-something students in my class pushed back and pointed to the great possibilities that postmodernism presents. They are positive about their future ministries and well they should be.

God gives us what we need. “You do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed” (1 Cor 1:7). God continues to grace our churches and seminaries with a rich and inviting theology centered on the one doctrine, the Good News of Jesus Christ. Like a diamond, this one evangelical doctrine has many facets, in our jargon, articles of the one doctrine of the Gospel. Every era invites us to find the right facet, the most applicable article that can be applied in its contextual setting. We did that in modernism and our doctrinal resource remains rich and ready for this new context. Let me point to just three facets through which we can invite postmoderns to peer into Gospel truth.

Consider how we use the law. Back when society was biblically literate and we all agreed there is absolute truth, visitors to our churches could understand what we meant when we said we are lost and condemned creatures. Nowadays people outside the church aren’t into that kind of talk and wonder how we reach such a definitive conclusion. Since postmodernism has dismissed absolute truth, today’s *lingua franca* is emotions, “fragmented desires, superficiality, and identity as something you shop for.”<sup>4</sup> Instead of lamenting that they’re not where we want them, ready for propositional theology, we can meet them where they’re at, living emotionally based lives. The template looks like this. Everyone we want to come to church is born with the law of God in our hearts. That’s also true for you and me. Most people don’t recognize the law as such because its testimony has been muffled and muted by sin (Rom 2:14; compare 10:14). In addition to the innate law, every postmodern is also born with original sin. These two, innate law and original sin, are always active within us. The innate law stirs up sin (Rom 7:7–9) and that stirring shows itself in emotions. Anger, guilt, feeling trapped, despair are all symptoms of the law working in our hearts (See Rom 4:15; 7:10; Gal 3:22; Jer 23:29 and others). *Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman is one of many books describing emotions. While many famous evangelical churches inadequately address “felt needs” by simply giving us x number of prescriptions to fix the feeling, the Lutheran understanding of the law meets the person where he or she is, interprets many emotions as symptoms of the basic wrong of sin (though some emotions reflect the working of the Gospel, like joy and hope) and patiently leads the person to the truth of our sinfulness. The application of the law is different in postmodern times than in modern, but the goal is the same.

The Law warns not only about our actions, but it speaks about our very nature itself and the corruption of all our powers.... The Law, indeed, sets before us life and blessing, but because no one observes and fulfills the Law, we neither can nor ought to seek life in it. Therefore the Law is properly the ministration of death, the knowledge of sin, working wrath.... The true use of the Law, namely that it “imprisons all under sin, that the promise of grace might be given,” Galatians 3:22.<sup>5</sup>

A shift has taken place. The essay began by talking about an evangelism effort to individuals outside the church, an outreach predicated upon modernist assumptions. The essay has now drifted into the corporate life of the church, to what we preach and teach in the congregation. If, then, our preaching and teaching starts applying pertinent articles of the doctrine to postmodern realities, aren't we still talking to the “choir”? Absolutely. Therefore the question remains, how can this go beyond the Sunday sanctuary to make an invitation to church worth considering? I suggest that our lay peoples' lives are the best bridge from the church to America's unchurched, individualized spirituality. Laypeople can tell *the* story and *their* stories with a credibility pastors and pamphlets don't have.

Personal stories of God's actions in life work because God's Word is efficacious (Is 55:10–11; Heb 4:12–13; Jn 6:63). Our second facet to open the Gospel to postmoderns is the Word in story. “Postmodern society is a society in which no one narrative—big or little—dominates. In postmodern societies many micronarratives are jammed together. And this carnival of narratives replaces the monolithic presence of one metanarrative.”<sup>6</sup> That is, neither science or philosophy or the church owns the one big story that commands the devotion of the general culture. Today it's a “carnival of narratives” and the church is one stand amidst all the rides, games and sideshows. Some are hucksters; others not. We see ourselves as genuine but the postmodern isn't going to take our word for it, especially a preacher's. That said, it doesn't mean postmoderns won't listen to our story. They will. In fact, because life is no longer assumed to be fundamentally rational, stories have great appeal to postmoderns.

We must be careful...not to continue to propagate that (Christian) witness in modernist ways: by attempting our own rationalist demonstrations of the truth of Christian faith and then imposing such on a pluralist culture (what is often described as a Constantinian agenda). What we need to do is get “everyone's presuppositions on the table and then narrate the *story* of Christian faith, allowing others to see the way in which it makes sense of our experience and world.”<sup>7</sup>

*Their* stories are about God's incarnational presence in their lives. “Tell them about Jesus” probably causes more guilt than witness. It's less daunting to talk spontane-

ously about the blessings of faith and church and God in their personal lives. By doing so, laypeople make a credible connection between the unchurched and the congregation.

It is inconceivable that the things that are of utmost importance to each individual should not be spoken by one to another.<sup>8</sup>

Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope. Give a kind and respectful answer and keep your conscience clear (1 Pt 3:15).

But wait a minute! Our intellectual training through the Missouri Synod educational system makes us wary of “story-telling.” A criticism I often hear from laypeople and retired pastors is that they hear too many stories in sermons but not enough Bible teaching. I am definitely not advocating stories for the sake of stories. Instead, we should tell the Christian story and our personal Christian stories in order to witness to our faith amidst today’s plurality of stories.

To be a ‘storyteller’ is no longer a euphemism for someone with a loose grip on truth. The storyteller is becoming again the person of wisdom who knows the ‘good telling stories’ that make and maintain community and meaning.<sup>9</sup>

“He taught them many things by parables.” (Mk 4:2)

“We cannot keep quiet about what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:20)

Story-telling begins to build a personal bridge between the church and the skeptical postmodern. As the personal relationship builds and perhaps leads to an invitation to come to church, we pray that the end result will be faith. Postmodernism is a real blessing to understanding the true nature of faith, bringing the nature of faith into sharper focus than modernism ever did. Modernism tempted us to believe we had possession of an absolute truth. We didn’t and we don’t. What we have is the Spirit wrought conviction of the truth that is centered in the revelation of God’s Son. “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb 11:1). “We live by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7). James K. A. Smith poses the challenge and the way forward in postmodernity.

Should we be trying to establish a common myth (“myth” meaning any story, true or fiction) for an entire nation—a Constantinian strategy—or should the church simply be a witness amid this plurality of competing myths?” By calling into question the idea of an autonomous, objective, neutral rationality, I have argued that postmodernity represents the retrieval of a fundamentally Augustinian epistemology that is attentive to the structural necessity of faith preceding reason, believing

in order to understand—trusting in order to understand—trusting in order to interpret.<sup>10</sup>

Whenever it happens, however it happens that a postmodern will accept the invitation to visit church, there should be evidence of a genuine, caring community of people who follow Jesus. The third major facet of our rich and ready theological heritage, after law and the efficacy of the Word, is the nature of the church. The church's understanding of itself should be as a unique community, the body of Christ, that is under the story of the suffering servant. Counter-cultural in modern America, that can suit postmodern America nicely!

Drawing from Kaja Silverman's 1983 work, *The Subject of Semiotics*, Glenn Ward says the American understanding of the individual had its origins in the Renaissance.

Starting with the Enlightenment, identity entered into crisis for the first time. Where in pre-modern communities you knew exactly what your place was in the clan, modern societies began to offer a wider range of social roles. There are therefore expanded possibilities for what you can be. It becomes possible to start choosing your identity, rather than simply being born into it. You start to worry about who you really are and what you should be doing with your life. There is still assumed to be a real, innate self underneath the public roles you place, but the struggle is in finding it and being true to it.

Postmodern theorists have binned any notion of the self as substantial, essential or timeless. In place of the earnest modernist search for the deep, authentic self, we have a recognition, and sometimes a celebration, of disintegration, fragmented desires, superficiality, and identity as something you shop for. The self is...without substance, but fashion statements, shopping and lifestyle choices have pushed authenticity out of the equation.<sup>11</sup>

This long evolution of understanding the individual has had a major impact upon the church. James Smith:

Within the matrix of a modern Christianity, the base 'ingredient' is the individual; the church, then, is simply a collection of individuals. Conceiving of Christian faith as a private affair between the individual and God—a matter of my asking Jesus to 'come into my heart'—modern evangelicalism finds it hard to articulate just how or why the church has any role to play other than providing a place to fellowship with other individuals who have a private relationship with God. Modern Christianity tends to think of the church either as

a place where individuals come to find answers to their questions or as one more stop where individuals can try to satisfy their consumerist desires. As such, Christianity becomes intellectualized rather than incarnate, commodified rather than the site of genuine community.<sup>12</sup>

That the church is more than a voluntary association of like minded individuals is welcome to us Lutherans who understand the means of grace as God's incarnational presence in the body of his Son. "You did not choose me. I chose you" (Jn 15:16). Our life with the congregation is qualitatively different from every other earthly association. By stressing the corporate nature of the church as body of Christ, we're teaching and preaching something counter-cultural to modernism but attractive to postmodern America. Social commentator Robert Bellah wrote,

We find ourselves not independently of other people and institutions but through them. We never get to the bottom of our selves on our own. We discover who we are face to face and side by side with others in work, love, and learning. All of our activity goes on in relationships, groups, associations, and communities ordered by institutional structures and interpreted by cultural patterns of meaning.... We are parts of a large whole that we can neither forget nor imagine in our own image without paying a high price.<sup>13</sup>

For us the body of Christ means we're incorporated in the suffering Servant. "Come to church and learn about the way of salvation." The postmodern answers, "But what have you done for the homeless lately?" Does our life together show that we are under the story of him who says, "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (Jn 6:37). Consider some critical quotations about the church.

Victoria: "Everyone in my church gave me advice about how to raise my son, but a lot of the time they seemed to be reminding me that I have no husband—and besides, most of them were not following their own advice. It made it hard to care what they said. They were not practicing what they preached."<sup>14</sup>

Leroy Barber: "In my current Atlanta neighborhood there is one (church) on every block. Then you consider that on the very same street corner reigns drug activity and prostitution. It is not out of the ordinary to watch drug deals on the church steps. The institution has made its own quiet and unspoken deal with the vendors who make their living there. People who most need the church are sitting outside, waiting to feel worthy enough to come. For the young who grew up on the streets, it's an age-old story: the drug kingpin knows their name, and the pastor does not. The teachers at school don't think they can

learn, but they conquer the ‘street classes’ just fine. The street culture always pursues and welcomes them, but the doors of the church are open only on Sunday. The church wants them neat and clean, but the streets take them as they are.”<sup>15</sup>

Postmodernism not only stymies our pat ways of inviting people to church but also challenges the voluntary understanding of Christ-following that influenced us in the context of modernism. “Nothing is more countercultural than a community serving the Suffering Servant in a world devoted to consumption and violence. But the church will have this countercultural, prophetic witness only when it jettisons its own modernity; in that respect postmodernism can be another catalyst for the church to *be* the church.”<sup>16</sup>

“Why go to church?” In Jesus’s parable (story!) the good Samaritan applied the healing balm to the wound where he found the wound to be. The wounds are in different places in different ages but from modernism to postmodernism the wounds are still the wounds of sin and separation from God. If we stop and bend down, not passing by on the other side, if we listen and observe, search our Scriptures and pray for discernment, we can find the wounds in postmoderns who want to be bound up by caring Samaritans and a caring God. I do pray good results to our congregation’s evangelism effort and to every effort throughout the church. And those efforts will yield results. After all, God is “able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Eph 3:20). Just don’t tell me what a friend I have in Jesus until I see what a friend I have in you.

Dale A. Meyer  
President

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Jim Powell, *Postmodernism for Beginners* (Danbury: For Beginners/Random House, 2007), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>4</sup> Glenn Ward, *Teach Yourself Postmodernism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 119–120.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici II* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 336.

<sup>6</sup> Powell, 32.

<sup>7</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 73–74.

<sup>8</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper, 1954), 105.

<sup>9</sup> Rick Durst, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners* (Lusanne Occasional Paper No. 54, 2004), 58.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, 70, 72.

<sup>11</sup> Ward, 119–120.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Bellah in Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 203.

<sup>14</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 41.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 63–64.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, 30.

## Philip Melanchthon's Poem to Martin Luther

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When Martin Luther first burst onto the world stage, his most eager followers were to be found among those circles of learned men, the humanists. These German intellectuals were already calling for a reform of Christianity through the cultivation of *pietas et bonae litterae*—piety and fine literature. By going—*ad fontes*—“back to the sources” of classical and Christian antiquity, they hoped for a renewal of the church’s faith and piety.<sup>1</sup> Luther’s own reform efforts at the University of Wittenberg, which sought to restore the study of the scriptures and the early church fathers over against the tired methods of the scholastics, seemed to echo the spiritual and educational goals of the German humanists, and he was quickly adopted as one of their own—indeed as the new standard bearer of their movement. And though Luther’s reforms stemmed from rather different concerns, the humanists embraced him as “our Martin” and praised him for his erudition.<sup>2</sup> As Bernd Moeller so pointedly put it: “No humanism, no Reformation.”<sup>3</sup>

In 1518 Luther’s fame was spreading rapidly. The *Ninety-five Theses Against Indulgences* was the initial thrust out of obscurity, but Luther continued to write and publish, to the great delight of the learned.<sup>4</sup> Especially from the spring through the summer of 1518, Luther’s pen was busy with both Latin polemical tracts and German devotional writings. Both would speak to the common concerns of the humanists. Yet perhaps the greatest admiration was reserved for the progress made at Wittenberg.<sup>5</sup> Between 1516 to 1518, Luther’s efforts to change the way theology was taught impacted the shape of the curriculum in the university, providing greater space for the study of the “sources” of Christian theology; namely the Bible and the Fathers.<sup>6</sup> To do this properly meant that one should be able to read and study the Scriptures in the original languages of Greek and Hebrew. In the autumn of 1518, Wittenberg created the first chair of Greek and to fill it the Elector called one of humanism’s brightest young stars: Philip Melanchthon.

Melanchthon arrived in Wittenberg on August 25, 1518. How much Melanchthon had read of Luther before his arrival is not clear, but like many of the humanists at this time, he would have found Luther’s work as an inspiration for his own. His inaugural speech, given only a few days after his arrival in August, was filled with the excitement and optimism of someone who has found his ideological home. In a few weeks, Melanchthon made his admiration of Luther public by writing a dedicatory poem—in Greek, fittingly.<sup>7</sup> In October, he published the text along with his opening address. The poem, reproduced below in a new translation by James Prothro, is not only a fine example of the high esteem in which Luther was held among the humanists at this time, but it also gives us a glimpse into the beginnings of an association of two colleagues and friends that would forever change the religious landscape of Europe.

Erik H. Herrmann

## A Greek Poem to Luther

Ad venerabilem Patrem Martinum Luther, vere pium theologum, Philipp[us]  
Mel[anchthon].

Ὡ ναζαραϊε Ἰσραήλος ζάθεε,  
ὀσιώτερ' ὦ εἰρηνοποιῶν θυμάτων,  
ἐκλεκτὲ ἀφθόρου ἀληθείας λάτρι,  
ὦ ψυχέων κοσμητορ ἄχραντ' εὐσεβῶν,  
ἄνερ πόθων, σοφίας θεόπνευστ' ἄγγελε  
δίκης τ' ἀμήτορος λόγου τε ἐνθέου  
ζωάρκεός τε μύστα ὄλβιε πνοῆς,  
ὀ τῆς εὐχρίστου εὐδομα βάλσαμα  
ἐκκλησίας δεύων χάριτος κηρύγματι  
καὶ τοῦ νεῶ τοῦ πανελεήμονος θεοῦ  
πιστός τε ἄγρυπνός τε ποιμὴν τὸν λύκων  
τὸν ἄραβ' ἀπωθῶν τὸν σοφιστὰν βασιλιάρ  
ἔκπληξον, ὦ χορηγ' ἀληθείας ποτέ  
τὰς βεκκεσελήνους τῶν γε λογομάχων φρένας  
τῇ θαυματουργῶ Μωσέως ῥάβδῳ βόλει,  
βλεπεδαίμονας μάγους, τὰ γλωτταλγήματα  
ἄρκευθίνους ἄνθραξι τοῦ λόγ' ἔκφλεγε,  
μάχευ ἀναρρόπως τε κἀλήκτως ἔπου  
τῷ πυρφόρῳ Ἰησοῦ ὑπερασπίζεο  
τοῦ εὐλογημένιοιο τῶν πιστῶν λάχους.

**A note on translation:** This poem is written in iambic trimeter, and is stilted in its style. In the notes below, we will pay attention to some translational issues as well as illustrate the vast well from which Melanchthon draws his vocabulary to fit his meter. In the poem, Melanchthon's own personality as a young, optimistic hopeful for religious and curricular reform, his very early appreciation for Luther's endeavors, as well as his own skill and appreciation for the Greek language are striking. He draws words and phrases from the Septuagint, the New Testament, as well as from Homer, Aristophanes, and the patristic corpus. The entire poem is in direct praise of Luther, with ten vocative phrases identifying the man and his endeavors, as well as six imperatives which ask him to continue in his battle against the scholastic theology of the day.

## A Greek Poem to Luther

(Wittenberg, September of 1518)<sup>8</sup>

Philipp Melanchthon, to the venerable Father Martin Luther, truly pious theologian.

Oh sacred priest<sup>9</sup> of Israel!  
You who are holier than peace-offerings,  
Chosen servant of imperishable truth,  
Oh immaculate commander<sup>10</sup> of pious souls,<sup>11</sup>  
Oh man of devotion,<sup>12</sup> oh God-breathed<sup>13</sup> angel of wisdom,  
Of eternal justice and of the divine Word;  
Blessed initiate<sup>14</sup> of that life-giving spirit,  
You who spread the sweet balsamic fragrance<sup>15</sup> of the true<sup>16</sup> Christian  
Church and the temple of the all-merciful God  
By the preaching of grace;  
You faithful and sleepless shepherd who  
Thrust out the thievish wolf<sup>17</sup>—drive out the sophist Belial!<sup>18</sup>  
Oh patron of truth, finally<sup>19</sup> dispel with the wonder-working  
Staff of Moses the idiotic<sup>20</sup> minds of those who do battle in long-winded  
Disputations<sup>21</sup>—those ghostly conjurers! Set fire to their unending banter<sup>22</sup>  
With the burning juniper coals<sup>23</sup> of the Word!  
Fight<sup>24</sup> the uphill battle, and follow ceaselessly the burning  
Standard of Jesus! Protect with your shield<sup>25</sup> the blessed lot of the faithful!

James B. Prothro

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See especially, Lewis W. Spitz, *The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> See Leif Grane, *Martinus Noster: Luther in the German Reform Movement, 1518–1521* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Bernd Moeller, “The German Humanists and the Beginnings of the Reformation,” in *Imperial Cities and the Reformation*, eds. and trans. H. C. Erik Midelfort and Mark U. Edwards, Jr. (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1982), 36.

<sup>4</sup> See Bernd Moeller, “Das Berühmtwerden Luthers,” in *Die dänische Reformation vor ihrem internationalen Hintergrund*, ed. Leif Grane and Kai Hørby, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 187–210.

<sup>5</sup> See Maria Grossmann, *Humanism in Wittenberg* (Nieukoop: D. De Graaf, 1975); Jens-Martin Kruse, *Universitätstheologie und Kirchenreform: Die Anfänge der Reformation in Wittenberg 1516–1522*, (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> See Luther's letter to his former teacher, Jodocus Trutfeter, WABr 1, 170, 33-6, no. 74: "... it is impossible to reform the church, unless canon law, the decretals, scholastic theology, philosophy, and logic as they are now regarded are eradicated and other studies are instituted."

<sup>7</sup> Melancthon refers to this public declaration in a letter to Christoph Scheurl, dated September 24, 1518, CR I, 48: "... et illud ipsum ego pluribus declararem, ni testem haberes honoratum Optimum ac doctissimum et omnio verae Christianaeque pietatis korufaion Martinum."

<sup>8</sup> Text based on *Melancthon's Werke*, Bd. VII, ed. Hans Volz (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1971), 46-48, Nr. 8.

<sup>9</sup> The adjective *ναζαριῶς* functions only as a gentilic adjective in the NT. In the LXX and later patristic literature, it is used of the Nazirite (i.e. the consecrated one who took the Nazirite vow, cf. Nu 6:1-21). The derivative nouns from the Heb. root נזר are 1) "consecrated man" (נזיר), cf. Nu 6:1, et al.); or 2) "sprig, shoot" (נצר cf. Is 11:1). Of these two, the former is used primarily in the patristic literature. To the point, Eusebius Caesariensis defines the word: "Nazirite, that is holy and untouched and separated from [other] men" (*Demonstratio Evangelica*, PG 22.549A). While "sprig" fits, Melancthon's repetitive panegyric style should incline us toward reading the adjective as "consecrated/ordained," i.e. a *monk or priest*. Combined with the more classical ζᾶθεος, we translate "Oh sacred priest."

<sup>10</sup> κοσμητῶρ is a poetic form for κοσμητής, used twice in the first book of Homer's *Iliad* to mean "marshaller of hosts," i.e. a *general* (*Il. I. 16, 375*). This word opens the holy-war image which Melancthon employs throughout the poem. He sees Luther as both priest and general, commanding and protecting pious consciences against scholasticism.

<sup>11</sup> Melancthon uses an Ionic form to fit his meter. For the variety of his forms, cf. n. 17 below.

<sup>12</sup> Lit: "a man of longings." While the classical use of this word is more akin to "desires," the patristic use of the word is commonly used in the context of personal piety and devotion, i.e. a *longing for God and his ways*, from which Melancthon draws this usage. Hans Volz (*Ibid.*, 46) suggests that it be read like Dan 9:23 (with ἐπιθυμιῶν), i.e. "a man who is well-liked," but this does not seem as fitting.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. 2 Tm 2:16.

<sup>14</sup> This vocative of μύστης, a word listed only in Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, means "initiate; one who is privy to [a secret]; disciple." The Church Fathers would appear to have employed it as a morphologically masculine counterpart to μύστις, which occurs in Wisdom 8:4. Again, Melancthon shows great familiarity with the patristic sources as well as the classical and biblical corpora.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. 2 Cor 2:14-17.

<sup>16</sup> The Greek may be Melancthon's own coinage.

<sup>17</sup> Lit: "the Arab wolf." Volz suggests that this be read as "*räuberisch*" (*Ibid.*, 47).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. 2 Cor 6:15. Volz notes that the orthographic change comes from Erasmus (*Ibid.*). "Sophist" begins Melancthon's invective against the scholastic theologians.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. LSJ *s.v.* πότε 3. 1b. However, coupled with *gev* and an imperative, one could almost translate this as "please" (though the force of γέ is best imitated with vocal inflection).

<sup>20</sup> Lit: "moon-calf." This usage is taken from Aristophanes' *Clouds*, 398, where Socrates berates Strepsiades and calls him an idiot, essentially. Still attacking the scholastics, Melancthon alludes to a comedy which lampoons sophistry throughout.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. 1 Tm 6:4; 2 Tm 2:14. Melancthon identifies the scholastics as the false teachers who are not approved by God against whom Paul warned Timothy.

<sup>22</sup> A derivative from γλωσσαλγέω, "to talk till the point of pain." Another derivative appears in the tragic corpus in Euripides' *Medea*, 525, where Jason is being endlessly "talked at" by Medea. Melancthon continues to pull words from classical literature to rail against the scholastic theologians.

<sup>23</sup> This alludes to Psalm 120:4, in which the Lord delivers the Psalmist from a "deceitful tongue" with "sharp arrows" and "glowing coals of the broom tree" (ESV). Melancthon identifies the Church as plagued by the "deceitful tongues" of the sophistic scholastic theologians, now being

delivered by Luther who dispels them with the Word of God. On a translational note, Melancthon's Greek does not follow the LXX, which reads ἄνθραξιν τοῖς ἔρημικοῖς (LXX Ps. 119:4), "with desert coals." What he has done, instead, is translated into Greek the Latin Psalms of Jerome's "Hebrew Psalter." This would have been readily available to Melancthon in Faber Stapulensis' *Quinqueplex Psalterium* (1509). That Latin text reads *carbonibus iuniperorum*, which renders the translation ἀρκευθίοις ἄνθραξι.

<sup>24</sup> The imperatival form is Ionic rather than Attic, here, as is the genitive εὐλογημένοι in the final line.

<sup>25</sup> The reference to shield, here, likely recalls the audience to Eph 6:16 and to both Luther's and Melancthon's emphasis on faith against their opponents.

## Toward a Theology of the Scriptures

### Looking Back to Look Forward

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Questions and disagreements about the scriptures have affected the Lutheran church from the beginning. The Reformation made *sola scriptura* an enduring slogan, and the slogan reflects one side of an ongoing division over authority in the church. The Enlightenment went further, putting question marks over the authority of the church's scriptures, doctrine, and hierarchy. These developments provoked another division among those who call themselves "Christians." In the twentieth century, questions about the New Testament canon and its formation arose. They anticipated the questions about the origins of the church and the concept of being "Christian" associated today with "gnostic gospels" and *The DaVinci Code*.

These show us how much the issues of the Bible's authority, interpretation, and canonicity may matter to the church's identity and reflection. Since the seventeenth century, Lutherans frequently have made the *inspiration* of the scriptures central to their response to these questions. Inspiration characterized the canonical books, gave them authority, and assured the inerrancy of the scriptures and therefore their trustworthiness. Of course, appeals to inspiration often did not settle disagreements, but this approach has endured among many, including those in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Missouri Synod learned painfully how closely identity and theological reflection are tied to issues concerning the scriptures. Understandably, the struggles of that period made it hard for a while to deal thoroughly with such issues. But if the scriptures really matter, then we will not help ourselves by ignoring fundamental questions about them. We may help ourselves, however, by remembering and thinking about how they had once been understood and addressed. The articles reprinted in this issue of *Concordia Journal* and online at *ConcordiaTheology.org* remind us of some of these questions and how Lutherans of the recent past dealt with them.

One set of these questions concerns the nature and implications of inspiration. Hermann Sasse asked about them in his 1960 article "Inspiration and Inerrancy—Some Preliminary Thoughts." As he would elsewhere, Sasse criticized psychological conceptions of inspiration. At best these accounts can only deal with the effects of inspiration, not with inspiration itself. More troubling, however, is that they often divorce inspiration from the person and work of the Holy Spirit. This division puts at risk not only the doctrine of the scriptures but also the doctrine drawn *from* the scriptures. On the other hand, argues Sasse, if we truly appreciate the scriptures as inspired by the Spirit of God, who testifies to Christ, then we will also appreciate them more fully as testifying to Christ and be freed from many

problems that have bothered and even embarrassed modern Christians about scriptural interpretation.

Another set of important questions concerns interpretation and theology. The title of Martin Franzmann's 1969 article, "Seven Theses on Reformation Hermeneutics," hints that he was working against the dominant trend of modern biblical exegesis. This trend viewed theory as the basis of practice and regarded biblical hermeneutics (i.e., a theory of biblical interpretation) as a particular instance of a more general hermeneutical account. As a result, biblical interpretation often became concerned more with general concepts such as "meaning" and "understanding" and less with specifically theological aims such as "faith" and "obedience." This trend also contributed to what Hans Frei called "the eclipse of biblical narrative," in which the basic "narrative" character of the scriptures was ignored in favor of historical or moral concerns. Franzmann, by contrast, argued for a "Reformation hermeneutics" that was both thoroughly theological and grounded in the biblical narrative. This hermeneutics made proper interpretation of the scriptures depend on a definite theological motif: "justification by grace through faith." Franzmann did not use the formula "justification by grace through faith" as a doctrinal proposition. He used it as shorthand for what he called "the radical Gospel." He summarized this Gospel as: "God, to whom man can find no way, has in Christ creatively opened up the way which man may and must go." But this is a summary of a story—the story of God and creation. His theses still stand as concrete suggestions for how Lutherans today might account for biblical interpretation in ways that are thoroughly theological, thoroughly biblical, and thoroughly confessional.

Still another important set of questions concerns the New Testament canon. How did the canon emerge? What criteria for canonicity are valid? How does the formation of the canon *not* imply that the church has authority over it? J.A.O. Preus's 1961 article, "The New Testament Canon in the Lutheran Dogmaticians," reminds us that Lutherans have faced such questions since the sixteenth century. His survey, which ranged from Luther and the early Reformation through the period of Lutheran orthodoxy, showed how and why views among Lutherans about canonicity and their use of the New Testament canon developed. This survey alone is helpful enough, but he did more for us by reflecting on how the attitude and approaches of Luther, Chemnitz, and the dogmaticians may help us with today's questions and concerns about the canon.

Yet another set of important questions concerns the use of the scriptures in theology. It is easy to say, "The Bible teaches..." or "The Bible proves..." But it is not always easy to explain how it teaches this or proves that. This is the case, as Arthur Carl Piepkorn observed, even in the case of the Lutheran Confessions. His 1972 article, "Do the Lutheran Symbolical Books Speak Where the Sacred Scriptures Are Silent?" (which appears at *ConcordiaTheology.org*), asks about how the symbols interpret and use the scriptures. He noted ways in which the Confessions

may appear to lack the support of the scriptures they rely on, such as the use of non-biblical categories (e.g., “substance”) and debatable citations (e.g., use of Mark 16:16 in the Catechisms). These confessional questions will continue as long as questions about the biblical basis for Lutheran doctrine remain, but, more than this, these kinds of theological issues will continue as long we use the scriptures.

These questions are not the only pressing ones concerning the Scriptures today, nor are the responses given here always satisfying. But they do help us to orient ourselves and give us much to reflect upon and to discuss.

Providing time and opportunity for this kind of reflection and discussion is the purpose of Concordia Seminary’s 2010 Theological Symposium. Entitled “Scripture in the Church: Formative or Formality?” it will focus especially on issues of interpretation and uses of the scriptures in theology. It cannot possible answer all of the important questions, or even address them, but the symposium will take up important questions about the scriptures and seek to answer them faithfully and helpfully. I hope that you will consider joining us for the conversation.

Joel P. Okamoto

# ARTICLES

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# Inspiration and Inerrancy—Some Preliminary Thoughts

Hermann Sasse

## I.

Future church historians will show how the three great movements that have shaped the inner life of Christendom in the twentieth century are interrelated: the Ecumenical, the Liturgical and what has been called the Bible Movement. What we observe today is the fact that the ecumenical as well as the liturgical endeavors of our age have led to a new search for the nature and authority of Holy Scripture as the Word of God. To ask for the reality of the Church means to ask for the objective reality of the Word of God by which it lives. Thus all Christendom seems to be returning to the great issues of the first decade of this century when Rome's fight against the Modernist *Movement* reached its climax in 1907, and when in 1909 with the appearance of "The Fundamentals" in America the great controversy between "Fundamentalism" and "Modernism" began in Western Protestantism. What would the modernists whom Pius X excommunicated have to say about the sweeping revolution in which Rome since Pius XII is accepting almost the entire results of the historical investigation of the Bible?<sup>1</sup> And what would the Protestant modernists of the same period who interpreted the Bible as a collection of historical documents of the greatest of all religions think of their successors who have begun to realize that the historical approach to the Bible is neither sufficient nor the only one? The theology of Karl Barth in Europe, "Neo-orthodoxy" in America and the new "Biblical Theology" in England are remarkable attempts to rediscover the divine side of the Bible which remains inaccessible to any merely historical research. Thus all churches of Christendom are confronted with the same great problems. If we mention some of them here our aim is not to present a solution, but to clarify questions which can find an answer only through the thorough and patient work of decades and in the co-operation of historians, exegetes and dogmatians of the various churches.

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*Hermann Sasse (1895–1976) taught at the University of Erlangen and at the seminary of what eventually became the Lutheran Church of Australia (the latter from 1949 until 1976). Special thanks to the editors of Reformed Theological Review (Australia) for permission to reprint this article from Reformed Theological Review, vol. 19, no. 2 (1960), pp. 33–48.*



## II.

*The Bible is the written Word of God.* For 1700 years this has been the conviction of all Christians. It is still today the dogma, the public doctrine, of all Catholic churches and of those Protestant churches which still today claim allegiance to their old confessions. Whatever difficulties this dogma may present to men of our time as long as we claim historic continuity with the Church of all ages, our task cannot be to abolish this dogma which is based on the doctrine of Jesus and the apostles. We have rather to interpret it in the light of—not modern theories and hypotheses but—facts established by scientific and historical research. It would be destroyed by any theory meant to limit the statement that the Bible is the Word of God. It is not enough to say that the Bible contains this Word and that some parts of the Scriptures are given by inspiration and others, perhaps a very little portion, not. This has been suggested not only by Protestant theologians but it is even, in principle, the solution suggested by such a great Catholic thinker as John Henry Newman in one of his last publications, an article on Inspiration in “The Nineteenth Century,” 1883. Deeply concerned with the situation of modern man between the claims of science and those of the church, and in view of the fact that the decrees of the Tridentine and the Vatican councils “lay down so emphatically the inspiration of Scripture in respect to ‘faith and morals,’” but “do not say a word directly as to its inspiration in matters of fact,” the Cardinal assumed that there are in Holy Scripture “*obiter dicta*,” certain incidental statements, e.g., in geographical or historical matters which do not “bear directly upon the revealed truth” and do not come “under the guarantee of inspiration.” This would contradict the dogma that the Bible as such, and not only parts of it, is the word of God. Nor is it possible to make the Bible only indirectly the word of God. That happens if one says the Bible can become to us the word of God. Certainly the Scriptures must become to us the word of God. i.e., we ought to accept it, by the grace of God, as his word which he speaks to us. But it remains God’s Word even if we do not accept it. The scripture which the eunuch of Ethiopia read was the objective word of God even before by the grace of God he was led to it understanding. And even if he had not found the help of Philip, he would have brought the word of God in writing to his homeland. Another attempt to understand Scripture is to regard it as the “record” of God’s revelation in the history of salvation. No one denies that it is such a record, and a most faithful at that. But it is impossible to separate the record from what is recorded. Just as the word of God preached today as the faithful exposition of the Scripture is word of God (“*Verbum Dei praedicatum est verbum Dei*,” as Luther puts it), so the word of God that came to Jeremiah remains the word of God when it is written in a book (Jer 36:1:ff., 28ff.). “For the word of God is living and powerful” (Heb 4:12 cp Jer 1:9f., 17:7, 23:29): this applies to the word of God in its various forms. If we call scripture the word of God, we do not deny that there are also other forms of the word. The Bible itself tells us that before there was a human ear

to hear or a human eye to read there was the “word of God” (Rv 19:13), the logos through whom all things are made (Jn 1:3 cp. 1 Cor 8:6), who was from eternity with God and was God and was made flesh in Jesus. As this eternal word is living and powerful, so the oral word of the prophets and apostles, the written word of scripture and the faithful preaching of this word of scripture through the Church are something living and powerful. They share the life and power of him who is the Word. Holy Scripture is never a dead letter.

### III.

How can a book or a series of books, written by men, be word of God? The first theologians who were confronted with this question were the scribes of the synagogue who collected and interpreted the Old Testament. It has often been overlooked that they in answering this question distinguished between the Torah on the one hand and the prophets and the scriptures on the other. While the latter were regarded as given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the divine character of the Torah as the primary and principal word of God was explained in a different way. The Torah had been created by God thousands of years before the creation of the world.<sup>2</sup> It existed unlike other Pre-existing creatures (e.g., paradise, hell) not only in the mind of God, but in reality, a real book in heaven written with black fire on white fire. The content of this book was brought down to earth and given to Israel. God Himself has proclaimed the Ten Commandments to the people. With his own finger he has written them on the tables. The rest of the Torah he has given to Moses directly, without the mediation of the Spirit. Either he has taught Moses the words of the Pentateuch as a teacher teaches his disciple. Or he has dictated it, or written it, too, for Moses on the two tables. Angels are sometimes mentioned in this connection by the rabbis, but not in the sense of mediators as in Acts 7:53, Gal 3:19, Heb 2:2, and sometimes in apocryphal books. The rabbis have never forgotten that there was not a prophet like Moses whom Jahveh knew face to face (Dt 34:10). It was the Hellenistic synagogue which understood Moses as a prophet who spoke by inspiration of the Spirit. If Rabbinic theology thus distinguishes between the Torah and the rest of the Old Testament, this does not mean that the eight “prophets” (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve—without the later distinction between “prior” and “later” prophets) and the “scriptures” are not God’s word. In them God speaks through the mediation of the Holy Spirit. The term “spoken from the mouth of God” is applied not only to the words of the Torah (e.g., Sifre Dt 1:6), but also to the prophets (Is 61:6 Pesiq 126 a Billerbeck op. cit. 439–44. Comp. also Mt 4:4 and Dt 18:18).

The distinction between two ways that a book can be the word of God belongs to Rabbinic and not to Christian theology. It is an attempt to explain the divine character of the Torah by applying to it an Oriental idea of a heavenly book which we can trace in several religions up to the Islamic doctrine of the Koran.

The idea is not Biblical. It is, however, related to the Biblical doctrine of the pre-existent word. In Ecclesiasticus 24:31 the Torah is more or less identified with the Chokmah, the preexistent wisdom of God. Since the hypostatized Wisdom (Prv 8 comp. Ecclus 24) was understood by the Church as identical with the logos on account of the obvious parallel between Proverbs 8:22ff. and John 1:1ff., we may find behind the strange Jewish speculation on the pre-existent Torah an anticipation of the New Testament doctrine of the pre-existent, eternal word.

#### IV.

For Jesus, the apostles and the Primitive Church, the differentiation between the Torah and the rest of the Old Testament had lost its meaning. All holy scriptures of the canon, Law, prophets and scriptures (Lk 24:44), constitute now “the Scripture” (he graphe). Though the singular can mean an individual passage or a single book, “scripture” and “scriptures” can be used interchangeably for the entire Bible of the Old Testament (comp. Mt 22:29 with Jn 5:39, 10:35). Whatever differences concerning the understanding of the Scripture may exist between Jesus and the scribes, between the apostles and their Jewish adversaries, between Church and synagogue, on either side the scripture is accepted as the Word of God. There is a strange agreement as to the inspiration of the scriptures. The way that Jesus quotes Psalm 110 as words which David spoke “in the Spirit” (Mt 22:43), or that Peter (Acts 1:16) quotes a “scripture ... which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David” corresponds exactly to the way that the rabbis quote the Old Testament. The two passages of the New Testament which teach expressly inspiration, 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21, could have been written in the synagogue. Here the question arises: What is inspiration? What does the Church mean when it teaches, *The Bible is the word of God because it has been written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit?*

In order to find an answer we must first ask: What is this inspiration not? We must be aware of the fact that words like “inspire,” “inspiration” are used in modern English in a very general and indefinite sense. But even when used in a specific and pregnant sense they do not do justice to the facts which the Bible and the Church have in mind when they speak of the “theopneustos” scripture. Inspiration in this sense is the work of the Holy Spirit and consequently something which defies any psychological understanding. Psychology knows such phenomena as the “inspiration” which a poet or an artist experiences when suddenly insights, words, artistic visions are given to him. Nietzsche’s description of the “inspiration” in which his Zarathustra was given to him is perhaps the most illuminating testimony of such experience. No one would be tempted to regard this “revelation,” as Nietzsche, comparing his experience with those of former ages, calls it, as wrought by the Spirit of God. The same is true of the “inspiration” claimed by prophets, sibyls and religious writers in many religions of the ancient world. The prophets

whom Jeremiah and Ezekiel called false prophets claimed to be true prophets, to have been called by God and to be entrusted with his word. Psychology cannot discover the difference between true and false prophecy, between that which is truly word of God and that which is not, between true prophetic experiences and what Jeremiah called dreams, Therefore, it cannot know what inspiration in the sense of the Bible is, let alone explain it.

The psychological misunderstanding of the inspiration is very old. It begins in the Hellenistic synagogue. To Philon Moses is a prophet, filled with the Spirit of God, full of wisdom and virtue. One must read Philon's *Life of Moses* in order to understand the greatness of the Old Testament as a book of real history. Philon reads his own ideals into the stories of the Pentateuch. It was the "blameless deed" of a virtuous philosopher when Moses killed the Egyptian (*De Vita Mosis* I, 44). This great man becomes what the Greek calls a "theios aner" when he is in ecstasy and the divine Spirit speaks through him, the last of these ecstasies taking place immediately before his death when he prophesies his own death and burial (II, 291). In another context<sup>3</sup> we have shown how this psychological misunderstanding of the Biblical inspiration by Hellenistic Judaism has deeply influenced the early church and how even still Augustine tries to apply this idea of prophetic inspiration and of a divine book produced by such inspiration to the Bible. It is one of the great tragedies of the history of the church that the early fathers, and even still Augustine, instead of taking the doctrine de Sacra Scriptura from the Scriptures themselves approached the problem with a preconceived idea of a divine book which must bear all the marks of a book claiming divine origin, a most perfect book without what our human mind would call "error," without contradictions, a book whose divine origin can and must be recognized by any unprejudiced reader. For everybody can see the perfection of the Bible, e.g., if he observes how all prophecies of the Old Testament have been fulfilled in the New. "How is not he to be regarded as God whose prophets have not only given the congruous answer on subjects regarding which they were consulted at the special time, but who also, in the case of subjects respecting which they were not consulted, and which related to the universal race of man and all nations, have announced prophetically so long time before the event those very things of which we now read, and which indeed we now behold?" (*De consensu evang.* I, 19 quoted from Nicene and Postnicene Fathers VI, p. 88). This view of prophetic inspiration which puts the Biblical prophets into one category with the pagan prophets and sibyls is untenable. The inspiration of Isaiah is something quite different from the inspiration of the Sibyl of Cumae whom Augustine regarded as a true prophetess. If this is so, then the psychological, explanation of inspiration which Augustine gives and which he has left to future centuries up to our time must be abandoned. All these venerable pictures in which the relationship that exists between the divine and the human author is described and which go back to Augustine and Gregory the Great—head and

hands, author and secretaries, the *amanuenses* even as pens (*calami*), the process of inspiration as “*suggerere*” or “*dictare*” etc.—must be seen as what they are: attempts to understand psychologically what no psychology ever can grasp.

For if inspiration is a work of the Holy Spirit, it is like all works of the Spirit, beyond the sphere of what our reason can understand. A real conversion can be accompanied by deep emotions. These emotions may be studied by a psychologist, but not the conversion itself. The same emotions may be present in an imaginary conversion. The work of the Holy Spirit in human souls may be accompanied with such phenomena as we find them in the Primitive Church, prophecy, glossolaly, miraculous healing and the like. But the same phenomena may accompany experiences which are definitely not caused by the Holy Spirit. Who will explain how faith, hope and charity are created in a human soul? Who will explain the effects of the Word of God, of the sacraments of Christ in the depth of our souls? It is very dangerous, to say the least, to speak of the “experience of the Holy Spirit,” or of the guidance of the Spirit, as we so easily do. How often has the spirit who was experienced or whose guidance was acknowledged not the Holy Spirit, but another spirit? If we confess, “I believe in the Holy Spirit,” we admit that the Holy Spirit is an article of faith, and not an object of observation.

## V.

If we apply this truth to the problem of the Inspiration of Holy Scripture as one of the great works of the Holy Spirit, we may define inspiration as that action of God the Holy Spirit by which he causes chosen men to write his word in the form of human writings. It would not be sufficient to define this action as assistance, as it sometimes has been done. Many books have been written with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. We would claim that for Augustine’s “*Confessiones*” and other works of great Christian writers, or for the great creeds of the church or for many confessions of faith, such books and documents, however, remain human writings. The Roman Church which regards the final definitions of doctrine by the pope as infallible exposition of the doctrine entrusted to the Church would nevertheless not ascribe “inspiration” to whom she regards as vicar of Christ and to his decisions. The Vatican Council speaks of “divine assistance.” Inspiration is ascribed to the scriptures only, though the work of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of the “tradition” may practically come very close to his work in the inspiration of Scripture. The divine inspiration of the Scriptures must be distinguished from the way that in each case the will of the Holy Spirit was carried out. In some cases we hear that the writer received the direct command: Write! (e.g., Ex 17:14; Jer 30:2, 36:2; Rv I: 11), There may have been cases of real dictation, comparable to the phenomenon of “automatic writing” which has been described by psychologists of religion. Just as Biblical prophecy is not bound to any definite psychological experiences (visions, auditions, etc.), so there is no definite form of inspiration. Leviticus

has been written and composed in quite a different way from the way in which the Miserere came into existence. John 17 has not been written in the same frame of mind as the epistle of James. A variety of ways of inspiration must be assumed in view of the variety of writings, styles and literary genres found in the Bible. And yet the inspiration itself was in all cases the same. God the Holy Spirit caused his word to be written in form of human writings. In a “variety of operations” the Holy Spirit created the Bible in which the song of Lamech and the Lord’s Prayer, Song of Songs and the epistle to the Romans, the Gospel of St. John and the story of the conquest of Canaan belong together and nothing is superfluous, not even the cloak that Paul left with Carpus at Troas. The Bible is *one* in virtue of the inspiration. Without the belief that God the Holy Spirit has created it we could regard it only as a collection of writings of greater or lesser religious or historical value produced and gathered in the vicissitudes of history. For even the view that the unity of the Bible rests upon the decision of the church that defined the canon is untenable. According to the belief of the Church of all ages, even the Roman Church, the church has not produced, but received the scriptures. She has canonized the books, and only such books, which she firmly believed to have been written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

## VI.

If Holy Scripture can be understood properly only as the work of the Holy Spirit, then *the doctrine of Inspiration is an essential part of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit*. This is borne out by the Nicene Creed where both are connected in the words, “I believe in the Holy Spirit ... who spoke through the prophets.” What this means is shown by the “according to the scriptures” of the preceding sentence. This again must be read in the light of 1 Corinthians 15:3f.<sup>4</sup> If our observation is correct, how could anyone expect from the synagogue a real understanding of the inspiration of the Scriptures? How could anyone understand the Holy Spirit before Christ’s promise of the Paraclete was fulfilled at Pentecost? If we, moreover, remember that only after 300 years, at the synods of Alexandria 362 and Constantinople 381, the divinity of the Holy Spirit was recognized, we can hardly blame the fathers of the first centuries that they were not able to overcome the view of the pneuma as a divine power or divine influence enabling and causing men to speak divine words and to write divine scriptures. The full meaning of the fact that the name Parakletos is given in the New Testament to Christ as well as to the Pneuma Hagion, and that in John 15:26 and 16:7ff. the Spirit is referred to as a person was realized only by the Fathers of the Fourth century. Very rarely, however, they mention the Scriptures among the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> We must not forget that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has never been finished in the Ancient Church. Otherwise the great dissensus between East and West about the Filioque could not have happened. It is significant that the history of the liturgy also shows a strange neglect of

the Holy Spirit. "Who with the Father and Son together is worshipped and glorified," says the Nicene Creed, confirming the rule that every dogma appears first in the liturgy. The Holy Ghost is indeed mentioned in the conclusion of the prayers of the church. But the logical conclusion from the Trinitarian dogma that prayers can also be directed to the Third Person of the Trinity has never been drawn in the liturgy. The orations are directed to the Father and the Son, even at Pentecost and in the Roman Mass of the Holy Ghost. This shows the antiquity of the Christian liturgy which still today celebrates Pentecost as a feast of Christ as in the first centuries. The liturgy knows only the invocation of the Holy Spirit in the "*Veni sancte Spiritus...*" out of which the medieval hymns and those of the Reformation churches which are directed to the Holy Spirit have grown. If we must state that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is unfinished in the church, can we then be surprised that the same is true of the inspiration of Scripture? All churches of Christendom feel today this great gap in their doctrines.

## VII.

If Holy Scripture is the work of God, the Holy Spirit, its main task is that ascribed to the Paraclete by Christ: "he will teach you all things and will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26); "he will bear witness to me" (15:26); "he will guide you into all truth ... he will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (16:13f.). Christ is the real content of Holy Scripture. This was not only Luther's understanding of the Bible. It appears already in the Middle Ages, e.g., with Wicliff. Scripture, he points out, can be understood only by him who believes "that Christ is true God and true man because he is the messiah promised to the fathers." Scripture must be understood from those parts which clearly testify to this truth. Then "the entire Scripture and each part of it "teach" that Christ, God and man, is the redeemer of all mankind, the author of the whole salvation and he who gives the last reward."<sup>6</sup>

The Jews could not, and the synagogue today cannot, understand the Old Testament, because they have rejected Jesus as the Messiah. No one can understand the scriptures of the Old Testament, unless he knows Christ and understands what it means that "To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43). As in the great vision of Revelation 5 "the Lamb that was slain" alone is "worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof" (5:9), namely the heavenly book in which the events of the future are written, so the Old Testament is a book sealed with seven seals until the risen Lord opens it to men, until the risen Lord "opens their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures" by showing them how "all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the scriptures concerning me" (Lk 24:44f.). As a stained window is meaningless until it is seen against the light, so the Old Testament becomes clear to him only who sees the light of Christ shining through it.

This connection between the inspiration by the Holy Spirit and Christ as the content of the Scriptures corresponds to the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Apart from the passages on the Paraclete (Jn 14–16), Paul’s utterances have to be taken in account. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to confess Jesus as the Lord (1 Cor 12:3, comp. Mt10:19f.), as also the Holy Spirit enables us to call God our Father (Rom 8:15, see the words in the “*Veni Creator Spiritus*” which express this truth: “*Per te sciamus da Patrem, noscamus atque Filium*”). Christ and the Holy Spirit belong for Paul so closely together that in 2 Corinthians 3:17 he almost seems to identify them: “The Lord is the Spirit.” This is, however, as the immediately following words “The Spirit of the Lord” show, no real identification, but rather the expression of an inseparable connection as the later Church has it expressed in the “*Filioque*.” It could be formulated: “Where Christ is, there is the Holy Spirit. Where the Holy Spirit is, there is Christ.” As in the Gospel Jesus and the Holy Spirit belong together since the Incarnation, so in the entire Bible Christ and the Holy Spirit belong together from the first chapter of Genesis where we read that the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters when God created all things through His eternal Word (Gn 1 read in the light of Jn 1:1ff., 1 Cor 8:6, Heb 1:2), to the last chapter of Revelation where the Spirit and the Church say: “Come, Lord Jesus” (22:17:20). This understanding of Holy Scripture does not mean that we can find in any passage a christological meaning, or that we even should look for it. Only those passages of the Old Testament which are clearly interpreted in this way in the New Testament can be regarded as clear testimonies to Christ. But they are sufficient to convince us that Christ is the content proper of the entire Bible even there where we cannot perceive him with the limitations of our human mind.

### VIII.

This understanding of the inspired Bible as the scriptures in which God, the Holy Spirit, testifies to God, the Son, frees us from many a false understanding of inspiration. Men of the sixteenth and seventeenth century who thought of books and their authors in terms of Humanism were embarrassed by what seems to be the very bad Greek of some of the New Testament writings. A perfect book must be written in a perfect, flawless language. The apologists of all times since Origen’s “*Against Celsus*” have had to defend the Bible against those who found in it moral deficiencies, inaccuracies, contradictions and errors. The church fathers as well as the medieval and modern theologians were confronted with the fact that the story of creation cannot be understood in terms of natural science. The conviction is growing that the time has come when the church has to give up definitely the well-meant attempts to reconcile the first chapter of the Bible with “modern” science. Since theology moves very slowly, “modern” science proves in each case to be the science of yesterday. The church has defended the geocentric view of the world when it long since has become obsolete. It has accepted the heliocentric view when the centre had already moved to the centre of our galaxy and from there to other

galaxies. How detrimental to the Christian faith this has been is now generally recognized. The rapid development of modern physics has led to serious warnings on the part of, Roman theologians as well as such an outstanding leader of conservative Reformed theology as Professor Berkouwer against the repetition of the great mistakes made in the case of Galileo and on other occasions. It may be a heroic act of faith to accept the story of creation as a substitute for a scientific view of the origin of the universe, but to demand that from a Christian means to excommunicate all scientists who in firm belief in their God and Saviour do the work of their calling which is based on the dominion over all the earth given to man by his creator. How many souls have been lost through the failure of the Church to do justice to the facts established by solid research, by experiment and observation? We have shown on another occasion what we could learn in this respect from the fathers of the church.<sup>7</sup> This does not imply any denial of a dogma of the Church. Neither the creation of the world “out of nothing” is abandoned, nor the special creation of man and the fall of the first man as an historic event. What must be admitted by the church is that the Bible in speaking of such things uses a language different from ours. It speaks to men of very ancient times in a way which was even by the church fathers felt to be very old and simple. How could men of such times have understood a story of creation told in the terminology of Aristotle or Augustine, let alone of twentieth century science which probably will be obsolete in another century? This is what Chrysostom has called the “*synkatabasis*” (“*condescensio*”) of God. “Behold the condescension of the Divine Scripture, see what words it uses on account of our weakness,” he says commenting on Genesis 2:21 (Migne SG 53, col. 121, comp. col. 34f., 135; vol. 59, col. 97f.). In a similar way Jerome and other fathers have solved the problem. If we say that, we do not think that the way of thinking and speaking in those very early times was inferior to ours. It was different, but we would by no means dare to say that our scientific view of the world gives us a deeper insight into the nature of the world. They were very far from our rational thinking. They saw realities which we no longer see, just as primitive people today still observe things which we no longer perceive. What they said about such realities must not be regarded as myths, though it sometimes may remind us of the language of mythology, the reason being that pagan mythology is a deteriorated and paganised echo of such wisdom.

In addition to the “law of condescension” in the Bible we must take in account what we could call the “law of parallels” in Holy Scripture. As we find in the Hebrew language the *parallelismus membrorum* in poetic and prophetic texts, so we find the strange fact that almost every important event is told several times and always with variations. There are two stories of creation. There are all the other parallels in the Pentateuch, due to the different sources. We have two great histories of Israel, one written from the prophetic, the other from the priestly point of view. In the New Testament even four lines run parallel in the Gospels. What does it mean

that we have parables and other sayings of Jesus in the Gospels, even the Lord's Prayer and the eucharistic words in various forms. Two baptismal formulas also appear in the New Testament. This must have a meaning. How easy would it have been for the church to agree on one Gospel or to create an official harmony of the Gospels? Why have all attempts at such a harmony failed? The Church of Syria which used the Diatessaron became heretical and its return to orthodoxy coincided with the return to the four Gospels. The Gospel Harmonies created in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, or those to be found in some Catholic Bibles, have proved to be failures. The picture of Jesus which they give is always unrealistic and lifeless, so when, e.g., a twofold cleansing of the temple is assumed or even several healings of the same person. No one has been able to harmonize the apparent "contradiction," regarding the chronology of the Passion and of the events of Easter. But are these real contradictions? If we compare paintings of the crucifixion by four great painters, who would find "contradictions" and "errors" in them? Have not Grunewald and Durer seen more than a photograph could show? The strange idea of the sacred history which underlies the apologetic attempts to harmonize all differences goes back to an age which no longer was able to understand the biblical idea of history. Neither the Jewish rabbis nor the fathers of the church nor their pagan adversaries like Celsus and Porphyrius have been able to think in terms of history. This is to a large degree due to the fact that Greek philosophy had no understanding of history. What we have to learn again is to measure biblical history by its own standards. Instead of asking whether a certain narrative corresponds to our standards, we should ask: Why did the biblical writer tell events and record words just the way he did it? Luke, e.g., was a critical historian who evaluated his sources (1:1ff.). Why has he given, or inserted, in Acts 3, reports on the conversion of Paul which are not in full agreement? He must have been aware of this. Instead of finding fault with his method and accusing him of errors we should rather ask: What was his intention when he wrote these passages? Why did he not regard as intolerable contradictions what later centuries have called that? The great concern of the church in factual historical truth is deeply rooted in the Bible. How carefully are the events in the history of salvation dated (e.g., Is 6:1, Am 1:1, Lk 3:1, 1 Cor 15:1ff.) lest anyone might deny the facts. The words "under Pontius Pilate" belong to the Nicene Creed just as "according to the Scriptures." What, then, is factual historical truth for the holy writers? This is one of the great problems which Biblical theology has to investigate and to answer. It cannot be answered by the statement that "truth" in the Bible has a deeper and more comprehensive meaning than "veritas" with Aquinas (*Summa th. I qu. 16 "De Veritate"*). However, biblical truth cannot be without what we understand by propositional truth, because otherwise the revelation of the Bible would become myth. All creeds of the church from the first creedal statements of the New Testament present facts (see 1 Cor 15:1ff.). Without this factual, dogmatic character Christianity would become a mystery religion. How

and why the holy writers transmit to us one truth in several parallel records and what the variety means, this is one of the foremost problems of biblical hermeneutics. It is a most comprehensive question, for the fact also that the New Testament knows and uses two “Old Testaments,” the Hebrew and the Greek, comes under the “law of parallels.”

## IX.

Whatever the answer to these questions may be, one thing Christian theology can never admit, namely, the presence of “errors” in the sense of false statements in Holy Scripture. The holy writers may have used, as they actually have, sources, traditions, methods of a pre-scientific historiography, literary forms of the ancient Orient which we do no longer possess. Their language may be figurative, their narratives sometimes bordering on legend and poetry or even using such forms of expression. Yet all this has been written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In a way that is and always will remain inscrutable to human reason these truly human writings are God’s Word. The inspiration of Holy Scripture has often been understood as an analogon to the incarnation. It seems that this view is becoming more and more the common possession of Christendom, especially since it has been introduced into Roman Catholic theology and approved by the encyclical of 1943. To the dilemma formulated by Paul Claudel, “either the Bible is a human work ... or else Scripture is a divine work,” Steinmann (op. cit. p. 14) has rightly replied: “One might as well say: Either Jesus Christ is man or he is God.” We cannot go into this theological problem here. The time may come when the christological decision of Chalcedon will become the pattern of a solution of the doctrine of Holy Scripture and its inspiration. Between the Monophysitism of fundamentalists who failed to understand the human nature of the Bible and the Nestorianism of modern Protestant and Anglican theology which sees the two natures, but fails to find the unity of scripture as a book at the same time fully human and fully divine, we have to go the narrow path between these two errors, But we must never forget that the Chalcedonense has been authoritatively explained in the doctrine of the “*enhypostasia*.” The human nature has its “hypostasis” in the divine. So Holy Scripture is first of all and essentially God’s Word. The human word in the Bible has no independent meaning. What would the books of Samuel and even the epistle to the Romans mean outside the Bible? God has given us these writings as his word. What is Holy Scripture without its content, Christ? “*Tolle Christum e scripturis, quid amplius invenies?*” as Luther wrote against Erasmus “Take Christ out of the Scriptures, what remains?” As we humbly bow before the mystery of the incarnation of the Eternal Word so we accept in great humility the mystery of Holy Scripture as the written word of God in which the Father through the Holy Ghost testifies to Christ: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.”

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The greatness of this revolution may be seen from some volumes of the series “Faith and Fact Books. Catholic Faith in the Scientific Age” (translated from French, London, Burns and Oates): “Biblical Criticism” by Jean Steinmann. “The Religion of Israel” by Albert Gelin, “The Origin of Man” by Nicolas Corte (pseudonym). 1959. The new approach to the Bible was made possible through the encyclicals “Divino afflante Spiritu” (1943) and “Humani Generis” (1950).

<sup>2</sup> For the references see Strack-Billerbeck, Vol. IV. p. 435ff.

<sup>3</sup> “Sacra Scriptura. Observations on Augustine’s doctrine of Inspiration” in this Review, Vol. XIV, No. 3, Oct., 1955, pp. 65–80.

<sup>4</sup> This basic creed of the Church would be understood better if its Biblical Pauline background were taken more in account. It has grown out of the binitarian formula of 1 Cor 8:6, the Pauline, Christian version of the basic confession of the O.T., the “Schema” of Dt 6:4. Still the creed of 325 is binitarian like the Great Gloria of the Western liturgy. Pauline is the “one God ... and one Lord Jesus Christ through whom all things are,” as also the “one baptism” (Eph 4:5) and the connection of the Spirit with the Lord (2 Cor 3:17).

<sup>5</sup> Gregory of Nyssa and Didymos seem to be the only theologians who do that, but they do not elaborate on this thought.

<sup>6</sup> “Conclusio autem finalis totius scripturae et cuiuslibet partis suae est, quod Christus, deus et homo, est humani generis ... redemptor. totius salutis autor et ultimus praemiator,” De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae III cap. 31 (ed. Buddensieg vol. III, p. 242, 18ff.).

<sup>7</sup> “Hexaemeron: Theology and Science with the Church Fathers,” this Review Vol. XVII, No.3, October, 1958.

## Seven Theses on Reformation Hermeneutics

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Martin H. Franzmann

**THESIS I** *Qui non intelligit res non potest ex verbis sensum elicere* (Luther).<sup>1</sup>

Interpretation is a “circular” process (from *verba* to *res* to *verba*), and in this process the *res* is of crucial importance, since the question addressed to the text helps determine the answer to be gotten from the text.

Luther’s dictum on *res* and *verba* is a crisp summary of a widely recognized hermeneutical principle: Unless you know what a man is talking about, you will not make sense of his words. A man coming late into a conversation will ask, “What are you people talking about?” even though he knows the meaning (or a meaning at least) of every single word he hears; not knowing the *res* under discussion, he is at a loss concerning the *verba*. The lawyer, the printer, and the theologian all use the word “justify”; but unless one knows in advance a little something about the lawyer’s profession, the printer’s craft, or the theologian’s field, one will be at a loss concerning the intended sense of “justify” in the lawyer’s, printer’s, or theologian’s speech.

What holds of conversation and the spoken word, holds with especial force of the printed word, of texts, where the give-and-take of conversation is impossible and the eloquent context of known, physically present person, of inflection, and of gesture is absent. To interpret adequately any portion of a text, a man must therefore have formed some conception of the text as a whole: this conception of the whole guides him in the interpretation of the individual words and units and is in turn subject to correction, enrichment, and deepening by his study of the individual units. The process by which a genuine understanding of a text is gained is, therefore, “circular”; from *verba* to *res* to *verba*, in continual and lively interaction.<sup>2</sup> In the case of ancient texts, chronologically and culturally remote from the interpreter’s own world and written in an ancient and alien tongue, the need of such an interpretive *res* is greater and its value proportionately higher.

In the case of Biblical interpretation, the situation is more complicated still. We have to do with the interpretation of a collection of 66 ancient writings, span-

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ning a dozen centuries, composed in three languages, and exhibiting a rich variety in both form and substance. And this collection demands to be heard and understood as a unity. This demand is raised not only by the church, which asserts that unity in its liturgy, proclamation, and dogma. It is raised also by the history of the texts, the formation of the canon which is mysteriously and persistently and actively *there*, however much historical rationalization may seek to strip the mystery and the power from it. More important even than these two factors is the fact that this demand is raised within the collection itself, implicitly within the Old Testament and very explicitly in the New Testament, whose use of the Old Testament (quotation, allusion, reminiscence, terminological indebtedness) forces the interpreter to consider the New Testament utterances within a larger context and in the light of one dominant divine purpose. And the New Testament likewise insists that the Old Testament must be read and understood in the light of the New Testament if it is to be profitably understood at all. The interpreter is literally driven into the hermeneutical circular process, compelled to search for the *res* that holds all the parts together and permits each part to be heard and appropriated in its intended sense as part of the whole.

There must, then, be an understood *res* if there is to be a genuinely “understanding encounter with the text,” as Frör has put it.<sup>3</sup> And a merely formal *res* will not serve to disclose that unity which the Church’s use of the texts, the history of the texts, and the assertion of the texts themselves claim for the collection. A formal designation like “Religious Documents of the Ancient Near East” is useless; and worse than useless, since its bland and reserved “objectivity” tends to shunt aside *the* question that must be asked of these documents. Even more specifically religious and committed statements of the *res*, such as “Word of God” or “Record of Revelation” (indispensable as they are in their place) will not of themselves open the door of the Bible, since they do not say enough. The fact that God talks and discloses is important enough, but it does not raise and does not help answer *the* great question: “*How* does he talk to me and *what* does he disclose to me?”

The men of the Lutheran Reformation, on whose hermeneutical and exegetical production we live and thrive to this day, made great formal hermeneutical-exegetical decisions and assertions (*Sola Scriptura*, *sensus literalis*, *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*, etc.), but they were not the first to make them and were not alone in making them; the great gift that was given them, the wisdom from on high that was vouchsafed them, was the ability to make a hermeneutical breakthrough which is intrinsically bound up with the theological breakthrough, to see the *res* of the Bible with charismatic clarity and to see it in its relation to the Biblical *verba*.<sup>4</sup> This helps account for the fact that there is no explicit, distinct article *On Scripture* in the Lutheran Confessions, at least before the Formula of Concord. What the reformers

had to say on Scripture could best be said obliquely, in the way in which they actually dealt with Scripture in given cases in their “Christocentric handling” of texts, their “total soteriological attitude,” as Werner Elert has put it.<sup>5</sup>

**THESIS II** The *res* of the Lutheran Confessions is justification by grace through faith. (Apology IV, 2-4, German)

The significance of the statement made in the German version of Apology IV, 2–4, must therefore be assessed in the context of the Lutheran Confessions’ actual “handling” of Scripture. In that context it appears as a crystallization of Reformation *res-verba* hermeneutics:

This dispute has to do with the highest and chief article of all Christian doctrine [Justification], so that much indeed depends on this article, which also serves preeminently to give a clear, correct understanding of the whole Sacred Scripture and alone points the way to the unutterable treasure and the true knowledge of Christ, and also alone opens the door to the whole Bible, without which article no poor conscience can have a constant, certain consolation or know the riches of the grace of Christ.

The theological health and wholeness of this hermeneutics is apparent in the way in which this passage unites hermeneutical-exegetical concerns with the whole soteriological, Christological, and pastoral (“poor conscience”) concern of the Church.<sup>6</sup>

**THESIS III** “Justification by grace through faith” is Confessional shorthand for “radical gospel”<sup>7</sup>: *God, to whom man can find no way, has in Christ creatively opened up the way which man may and must go.*

This thesis hardly needs to be documented at length. Herbert Bouman has in a recent article pointed up in detail “the almost bewildering variety” of synonyms for “justification” which the Lutheran Confessions employ to declare the gospel.<sup>8</sup> And surely it is not without significance that Luther’s explanation of the Second Article of the Creed, for all its succinct richness, contains no forensic imagery whatsoever: this is the Luther who could call the fourth evangelist (whose gospel does not contain any of the technical terms of justification and speaks of “righteousness” in a theologically pregnant sense just once) a “master in justification.”

To avoid any narrowing down to strictly forensic imagery and to forestall the charge of Lutheran-bias selectivity, it may be well to state the radical gospel of the Confessions in the broadest possible way: *God, to whom man can find no way, has in Christ (the hidden center of the Old Testament and the manifested center of the New) creatively*

opened up the way which man may and must go.<sup>9</sup> And we may claim Confessional warrant for even so broad a formulation: “As Paul says (Rom 5:2), ‘Through Christ we have obtained access to God by faith.’ We stress this statement because it is so clear. It summarizes our case very well. (*Totius enim causae nostrae statum clarissime ostendit.*)”<sup>10</sup>

**THESIS IV** This gospel is radical in three respects: (1) In its recognition of the condemning law and wrath of God and the guilt and lostness of man; (2) in its recognition of the sole working of God in man’s salvation; (3) in its recognition of the transformation of man’s existence produced by the saving act of God.

One need read no farther than the Second Article of the Augsburg Confession to realize how seriously the Confessions take the first element in this formulation of the radical gospel: Man as he is in Adam is *sine metu Dei, sine fiducia erga Deum, and cum concupiscentia*—this is the gate of triple brass that bars his way to God: he does not fear, he cannot trust the God who made him, and so must needs play God himself and get what he wants when he wants it, without God, against God. He is the “lost and *condemned* creature.” The necessary correlative to this element of the proclamation is faith as unconditional surrender to God, the faith of Abraham as Paul pictures it in Romans 4:19, the faith of the publican in the parable, the faith of Peter when he said, “Depart from me, O Lord.”

All three of the Reformation *solas* underscore, each in its way, the second element in this formulation of the radical gospel: the possibility and the fact of the gospel, the effectual communication of the gospel, the salutary reception of the gospel—these are all possibilities which begin where all human possibilities end, possibilities of the Creator God, “who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist” (Rom 4:17). The necessary correlative to this is faith as “the worship which receives God’s offered blessing.” (Ap. IV, 49)

We must seriously ask ourselves whether we Lutherans have always heard and obeyed the voice of our Confessions as we ought in their proclamation of the third element of the radical gospel. If we have not, the fault is our own. The voice of the Confessions is loud and clear. Edmund Schlink’s summary is also loud and clear:

Justification, renewal, and good works are [in the Confessions] bracketed in the same way as faith, renewal, and good works. If it is true that the believing sinner receives forgiveness and that faith does not sin, then, similarly, justification is effected not only without works by grace alone, but it is also taught that justification cannot be without renewal and good works...

But if justification is not without renewal, it is also not without the good works of new obedience. In ever-new formulations, justification and new obedience are joined together.

Justification cannot be separated from new obedience, if we really take the statement regarding justifying faith seriously: “When through faith the Holy Spirit is given, the heart is moved to do good works” (A. C. XX, 29). The justifying word of forgiveness and the new obedience are joined together especially in the relation of cause and effect: ‘... love certainly follows faith, because those who believe receive the Holy Spirit; therefore they begin to become friendly to the law and to obey it’ (Ap. XII, 82). This ‘follows’ which connects justification and new obedience is not merely a possible, but a necessary result. Faith, forgiveness, the reception of the Spirit are “*certainly*” followed by love, by pleasure in the law, and by the new obedience. “Certain,” “necessary,” “should,” “must,” (*certe, necesse est, debet, oportet*) are the concepts which make this connection inseparable.<sup>11</sup>

The necessary correlative to this is faith as lively response, faith as “a living, busy, active, mighty thing” as it appears in Luther’s classic (and highly “Jacobean”) definition of it in his Preface to the Epistle to the Romans, quoted in the Formula of Concord (SD IV, 10–12).

**THESIS V** The validity of this confessional *res* as a heuristic-hermeneutical principle can be documented from Scripture itself: it is the *cantus firmus* to which all the prodigal variety of the Scriptural voices stand in contrapuntal relationship.

This “radical gospel” is, of course, a monumental simplification of the varied and complex witness of the Scriptures. The men of the Reformation were convinced that it is just that, a simplification of the message of the Scriptures, a true and valid concentration of their essential message. If it is that, the very statement of it is a great act of interpretation, since all interpretation is simplification, as Jowett has said. If it is not that, but an abridgement or a distortion or even merely an over-simplification (with something essential left out), then the hermeneutics of the Lutheran Confessions is sectarian hermeneutics—or, since Lutheranism has always rejected the idea of being a sect among sects, there is no such thing as a Lutheran hermeneutics.

There is only one way of deciding between these alternatives: only in going the way which the Reformers went, from the whole of the Scriptures to the radical-gospel summary and then back again to the whole, can we determine whether “radical gospel” is something imposed on the Scriptures from without or whether

the men of the Reformation were really letting Scripture interpret Scripture when they employed this principle. The following not-too-systematic sampling is intended merely to indicate how such an exploration of the Scriptures, with the aid of the Reformation compass, might proceed.<sup>12</sup>

To begin at the beginning of the canon: In the first 11 chapters of Genesis there is a terrifying record of how the sinful will of man repeatedly blocks man's way to God: the *sicut-Deus* will of Adam; the brutally individualistic will of Cain ("Am I my brother's keeper?"); the heroic will of Lamech, who will take vengeance out of the hand of God Almighty and execute it for himself more rigorously than he; the will of the generation of Noah, men with *every* imagination of the thoughts of their hearts *only* evil *continually*—"by rights" the history of man should have ended with Genesis 3; "by rights" there is no room in the record for the Covenant of the Bow which creates a climate of compassionate forbearance in which the history of man may continue after the judgment of the Flood. And the unanimous name-seeking, tower-building hybris of mankind of Genesis 11—"by rights" the history of mankind ends here. Genesis 12 is the absolute miracle of the grace of God creating a way where there is no way that man can find—or even wills to find. The era of the triple curse (the curse upon the ground, on Cain, on Canaan) opens up, illogically, into the era of blessing: "I will *bless* you, and make your name great, so that you will be a *blessing*. I will *bless* those who *bless* you ... and in you all the families of the earth will be *blessed*" (Gen 12:2–3).

The history that runs from Deuteronomy through 2 Kings is a somber one; it is a history in which the God of relentless judgment upon the sins of his people leads the history of his people to so radical an upshot (the fall of Israel, the fall of Judah, the end of Jerusalem, the end of the temple, Judah's king living on the tolerance of the king of

Babylon) that one scholar sees in it merely the message of "definitive and conclusive" judgment.<sup>13</sup> The sum of Israel's history apparently equals zero. And yet a closer, more attentive look discloses that the message of this history is gospel after all; this God of judgment is—*mirabile dictu*—a God to whom his rebel and apostate people may call and must call; there is still possible, as in the days of the Judges, a cry to God as "a reaching for the vigilant compassion of the Lord who has pity for the people of his choice."<sup>14</sup>

Repentance (the work of the Lord himself, who will "circumcise the hearts" of his children, Deuteronomy 30:6) can still open up a new epoch in a history that is, by rights, finished.

In Hosea we can behold the whole miracle of the radical gospel within the scope of two verses:

And the Lord said, "Call his name, 'Not my people,' for you are not my people and I am not your God." Yet the number of the people of

Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “sons of the living God” (Hos 1:9–10).

“In a situation which no longer offers any presuppositions for the continuation of salvation-history [these verses] set a people, brokenhearted and hopeless, before the future of the people of God as promised to Abraham.”<sup>15</sup>

The voice that is heard in the story of the foundling girl in Ezekiel 16 is not an isolated one in the Old Testament; but it is a particularly poignant one. The beginnings of Jerusalem are pictured in the image of the foundling girl child, left lying in a ditch and weltering in her blood; no one regarded her or took pity on her except the Lord, who said: “Live, and grow up like a plant in the field” (16:6–7). Eichrodt permits himself a serious play on words, after the manner of the prophets, in commenting on this passage: “The city of God, and with it the people of God, owes its bare existence to an act of grace, one that has no basis in any excellence or activity of the recipient of that grace.”<sup>16</sup> The little girl grows up and becomes the bride of the LORD: “I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine” (16:8). The bride turns harlot: “You trusted in your beauty and played the harlot . . . and lavished your harlotries on any passer-by” (16:15). The harlot is judged: “I will deal with you as you have done, who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant” (16:59); and by rights the story ends there. But the story does not end there, and the terrible story is gospel after all. The bride-turned-harlot may forget, but the LORD does not forget: “Yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. . . . I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, *when I forgive you all that you have done*” (16:60, 62–63).

Habakkuk is confronted with a history which threatens the very existence of the people of God, a history whose fearfully judgmental workings confront the prophet with an agonizing enigma. In a fever of anxiety he mounts his tower and “looks forth” for an answer from his God. And lo! this God of inescapable judgment is still the God in whom faith can hold firm, in spite of all enigmas (2:4), the God whose past action for his people is the surest pledge for the future:

Thou wentest forth for the salvation of Thy people, for the salvation  
of Thy anointed (3:13).

The firstfruits of the redemptive action of this God is seen in the faith of the prophet himself, who sees all the palpable blessings and sustaining comforts of God’s reign swept away—the produce of fig tree, vine, and olive, the gifts of field, fold, and stall, all gone—and can sing:

Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will joy in the God of my salvation.  
GOD, the Lord, is my strength;  
He makes my feet like hinds' feet,  
He makes me tread upon my high places (3:18–19).

No sampling of the Old Testament, even a sketchy one such as the above has been, may in fairness ignore the question posed by the Wisdom literature. Is there a positive and organic tie between this portion of the Old Testament proclamation and the radical gospel? Is the Lutheran *res* broad enough to cover this “pedestrian,” “prudential,” “derivative” segment, or fringe, of the Old Testament message? We do well to recall that, according to the witness of Proverbs, “the wise man is as little wise in and of himself as the righteous man is righteous in and of himself.”<sup>17</sup> Wisdom is “a tree of life,” planted by no human hand (Prv 3:18). It has its beginning and basis in the fear of the Lord (Prv 1:7; 9:10), in that unconditional surrender to God so grippingly documented in the history of Abraham, when he stood ready to sacrifice the son on whom the promise hung (Gn 22). Wisdom expresses itself, therefore, in trust in the Lord (Prv 3:5; 14:26–27; 16:3; 18:10); and the wise men of Israel do not evade the corollary that they must consequently distrust themselves (Prv 3:5b). One of the wise men whose voice is heard in Proverbs, Agur, begins his discourse with the startling statement: “Surely I am too stupid to be a man” (Prv 30:2). And this “vital art of the mastery of life” is capable of “liquidating itself” when it comes to the boundary of God’s wholly incalculable governance of history:

No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel  
Can avail against the LORD  
The horse is made ready for the day of battle,  
but the victory belongs to the LORD (Prv 21:30).

And yet, this knowledge that wisdom is limited by the sovereign sway of God does not issue in a melancholy resignation or in a tragic sense of the futility of existence; rather, man is to “hear the words of the wise” and apply his mind to knowledge, in order that his “*trust* may be in the LORD” (Prv 22:17, 19).<sup>18</sup>

In the plural melody of the Old Testament, wisdom stands in a contrapuntal relationship to the *cantus firmus* of the radical gospel.

In the New Testament the men of the Reformation heard the radical gospel most clearly in Paul; it is no accident that the first passage cited in the Augsburg Confession (or the Smalcald Articles) is a passage from Paul. But they were not proclaiming a peculiarly “Pauline” gospel; they claimed the whole New Testament, all of the Scriptures, as witnesses to this gospel, as is clear both from their actual citations and from their debonair and sweeping assertions that they have all Scriptures on their side and really have no need to cite particular passages.

And they have good cause for their high confidence; from John the Baptist to John the Prophet of Patmos the radical gospel is the one persistent and unifying theme of the New Testament. When the Baptist proclaims a radical, exceptionless, and imminent wrath of God on man as man, a wrath from which no sons of Abraham, no priestly aristocracy, and no meticulous pietists are exempted, and then points to the way which God has opened up by a baptism of repentance and for repentance, for the remission of sins, when he points to the Mightier One who burns chaff, to be sure, but also gathers winnowed grain into God's barns and baptizes men with the creative Spirit—that is radical gospel; his demand that men bear fruit that befits repentance is no mere strenuous moralism but a proclamation of a new possibility created by the redemptive will and work of God.

When the Fourth Gospel proclaims that God loved the *world*, loved mankind in an organized solidarity of opposition to himself, mankind under the domination of the liar and killer (the complete antithesis to “grace and truth”), the prince of this world; when God is proclaimed as the God who sent the light of the world to shine on men who lived in darkness and *loved* that darkness, and so opens up a future in which men may become sons of light and may walk in the Light—that is radical gospel.

When the witnesses in Acts proclaim, to all sorts and conditions of men, in Jewry and to the ends of the earth, that one “name under heaven given among men by which we *must* be saved,” when the Lord's messengers turn men “from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins”—that is radical gospel.

When James exposes man as producing from his native concupiscence that which leads through sin to death (with the inevitability of conception, gestation, and birth)—and then confronts man with the good giver God who brings forth, of his own will, a new man to be the beginning and pledge of a renewed creation; when James confronts man with the God who chooses the beggar and makes him rich and an heir of his kingdom; when he confronts man, doomed by his own demonic wisdom, with a wisdom from on high that has on it the marks of the Christ and produces a harvest of righteousness—that is radical gospel.

When the Prophet on Patmos weeps because no one is found in all the universe to answer the strong angel's challenge, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?”; when he sees himself, mankind, and all the world without a future and without hope, doomed in the presence of their creator and judge; when it is given him to behold the Lion of Judah and the Root of David, who “has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals,” and to hear the jubilant acclaim of all the company of heaven and of every creature in heaven, earth, and sea—then the radical gospel is being proclaimed.

Exegesis has long occupied itself with pointing up the “varieties of New Testament religion” and, rather pedantically, positing inconcinnities and contradic-

tions within the New Testament. The reversal of that process is long overdue; and the Lutheran Confessions can help us find and really hear the *cantus firmus* in its wondrous and challenging plural melody.

**THESIS VI** The validity of this Confessional *res* becomes manifest when it is contrasted with other *res* (not in themselves wrong but insufficiently contoured and coloured).

Other *res* have been proposed and praised as “opening the door to the entire Bible” and as the key to its interpretation. The sovereignty of God is one such. This is a valid biblical emphasis; the God proclaimed in the Bible *is* sovereign both in judgment and grace—man cannot evade his judgment, and man dare not trifle with his grace. And it is a Lutheran accent; Luther liked the phrase, “The high majesty of God has spoken it.” The First Article of the Augsburg Confession speaks of God’s *immensa potestas*. And the

Confessions’ teaching on original sin, for example, is a marvelous prostration before the sovereign judicature of God. But to say that God *is* something does not set the interpreter free for the whole message of the Bible, for the Bible says more; it says that he is acting. The “is” statement invites systematic rationalization; if this is how he is, how might he act? The radical-gospel statement begins—and ends—with the hard nonmalleable *fact* of how he *has* acted and is acting. One cannot go on from here to a *gemina praedestinatio*, and one can bow before mysteries.

Another popular *res*, “the God who acts,” has the advantage of removing the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from the category of the God of the philosophers, and embodies a genuinely Biblical emphasis. But in saying, “He is up to something,” it does not yet express the color and contour of the God of the Bible, concerning whom the Lutheran *res* tells me explicitly, and truly: “He is seeking you.”

“Self-disclosure of God,” much used in discussions of revelation, has the advantage of stressing the personal character of God’s dealings with man; but the concrete nature of those dealings remains unexpressed. One might question also the validity of the idea of “self-disclosure” as a designation for the revelation which actually takes place in the Bible; that revelation, as Gloege has pointed out, is less mystically-immediate and more “refracted” than the term “self” would lead one to expect.<sup>19</sup> The Lutheran *res* will not permit the interpreter to lose himself in a contemplation of God’s “self”; it drives him inexorably to the Biblical data concerning the God who has spoken, acted, and become incarnate, the God who shall judge mankind and transfigure his fallen world.

What of “verbally inspired, infallible Word”? This is biblical and Lutheran and not to be surrendered. But it does not say enough: it does not in itself say the essential thing. It says: “The Word of God is an arrow with a perfect tip and a shaft

without flaw, check, or blemish, feathered and balanced as no other arrow is; there is no arrow like it under the sun.” The Lutheran *res* says: “This perfect arrow is aimed at you; it will kill you, in order that you may live.” The Lutheran *res* will not permit the church to become a Society for the Preservation of the Perfect Arrow.

The Lutheran *res* subsumes all that is good and true in the other *res* that have been proposed; and it puts them in a right relation to the central *res*—and so puts them to work *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.

**THESIS VII** This *res* does justice to both the theological and the craftsmanly aspects of interpretation. It leaves the interpreter open to both the overwhelming *divinum* and the tough *humanum* of Scripture. The connection between the *res* and the *verba* is an organic connection.

The way of God attested by Scripture, as interpreted in the light of the Confessional *res*, is *sui generis*. It stands in sharp contrast to all humanly devised ways of bringing man back to his God.

The sanctification of conduct by the strengthening of the will; the sanctification of the emotions by a strenuous training of the soul; the sanctification of thought by a deepening of the understanding: moralism, mysticism, speculation, these are the three ladders on which men continually seek to climb up to God, with a persistent purpose that it seems nothing can check; a storming of Heaven that is just as pathetic in its unceasing efforts as in its final futility.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore the Scripture is *sui generis*; and its uniqueness as radical gospel becomes more and more apparent as it is seen in its cultural and historical setting, with all the “parallels” that this setting presents. Since it is uniquely the product of God’s Holy Spirit at work in history, man needs the Spirit in order to interpret it—and the Spirit is “available” for its interpretation, at work in it, so that Scripture interprets itself. Under the afflatus of the Spirit the interpreter sees ever more clearly, with eyes of the heart enlightened, that these writings are indeed the “fountains of Israel,” from which God’s people may drink and live, that the prophetic and apostolic writings are to be “received and embraced,” that the interpreter is in no position to judge them but is judged by them, as every teacher and all teaching must be: “Scriptura legitur cum credendi necessitate: aliorum scripta leguntur cum iudicandi libertate.”<sup>21</sup> (Selnecker)

This Confessional *res* leaves the interpreter open to the overwhelming *divinum* of Scripture; if he reads Scripture as quintessentially radical gospel, he moves in the presence of God always. But this does not, or at least need not, lead to a double-track exegesis, one theological and another historico-grammatical. Just when

the interpreter is open to the radical gospel, he is open to the tough *humanum* of Scripture; for the way of God to which the Scripture as radical gospel witnesses is the way of the servant, historical, verbal, incarnational. The Lord God moves in history, on the ground, amid the collisions of nations. He deals with Pharaoh and Tiglath-Pilezer and Pontius Pilate and Domitian. And the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets; he announces, interprets, and recalls his mighty acts with penetrating loquacity. His ultimate, eschatological Word is the Word made flesh, a whole yea to the created world and its history. If we take the radical gospel seriously, we must take language and history seriously.

“Radical gospel” is no holy shortcut in exegesis. It will not automatically answer all the historical questions posed by the texts. Nor will it settle *hoti’s* business. But it does provide the highest incentive for doing the historical work faithfully (and reverently!) and for doing the grammatical work meticulously (“meticulously” has the root *metus*, fear, in it, be it noted). The very nature of the radical gospel impels the interpreter to work with all resources that God has put at his disposal. When he parses out these words, he knows: *Tua res agitur*.

The radical-gospel orientation gives the interpreter light to work by; he can see both the part and the whole and their relationship to each other. He will be like the stonemason who, being asked what he was up to, answered not, “I am dressing a stone,” and not, “I am helping build a cathedral,” but, “I am glorifying God.”

And the radical-gospel orientation will give him freedom, freedom to hear the individual text in its individuality, to hear just this voice in its closer or more remote contrapuntal relationship to the *cantus firmus* which ever rings in his ears; freedom to examine with composure, to evaluate, to utilize critically whatever techniques or materials are discovered or rediscovered in the course of the Bible’s progress through history.

In a word, the radical-gospel orientation leaves the interpreter open to the usefulness, the *profitableness* which Paul marks as the distinguishing quality of the inspired word. And this is the most important point of all; for if interpretation does not lead to and serve proclamation, it is a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal—and the percussion section in the ecclesiastical orchestra is already disproportionately large.

This orientation promises to let us get at the life of the text; we shall no longer be preaching edifying anecdotes larded with morals, and we shall be able to see beyond our snub little historical noses in dealing with prophecy and fulfillment. It promises that we shall get at the heart of God’s people; our hearts will burn within us, and fire has a way of catching and spreading. With a renewed religious appreciation of the Word, we shall be enabled to get at the conscience of the world: “By the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor 4:2).

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “Unless one understands the things under discussion, one cannot make sense of the words.” Hereafter res will be used for “subject matter,” *verba* for “words.”

<sup>2</sup> See Kurt Frör, *Biblische Hermeneutik* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1961), pp. 55–56.

<sup>3</sup> Frör, p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> See G. Ebeling, “Hermeneutik,” RGG, 3d ed., Vol. III, col. 251: “The beginnings of Luther’s hermeneutics are most intimately connected with the genesis of his theology. The change in total theological understanding, on the one hand, and in the theory of understanding, on the other, here intermesh in a highly complicated fashion.” “One can grasp the epoch-making character of the effect of the Reformation in the history of hermeneutics only when one envisages not merely the technical questions of method but the whole sweep of the problem of understanding. . . .” (Translation my own.)

<sup>5</sup> *Morphologie des Luthertums* (Munich: C. H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1931) I, 167.

<sup>6</sup> The hermeneutical concern itself is more explicitly stated in Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, V, 1: “The distinction between Law and Gospel is an especially brilliant light which serves the purpose that the Word of God may be rightly divided and the writings of the holy prophets and apostles may be explained and understood correctly.”

<sup>7</sup> “Radical” is, of course, used in the sense of fundamental, basic, going to the root.

<sup>8</sup> “Some Thoughts on the Theological Presuppositions for a Lutheran Approach to the Scriptures” in *Aspects of Biblical Hermeneutics*, CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY Occasional Papers No. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), pp. 10–14.

<sup>9</sup> To avoid any possible misunderstanding, it may be noted that “may” signifies “is permitted and enabled by God” and “must” indicates that there is no second way.

<sup>10</sup> Apology IV, 314.

<sup>11</sup> *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, tr. P. F. Koehnke and H. J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), pp. 106–7.

<sup>12</sup> The third “radical” in the “radical gospel” complex—the transformation of man’s existence—has not been explicitly documented in the following, since it is so obvious in the prophetic call to repentance and the prophetic interpretation of history.

<sup>13</sup> M. Noth, as quoted in H. W. Wolff, “Das Kerygma des Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerks,” *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1964), p. 309.

<sup>14</sup> Wolff, p. 314; see also p. 315: “It is not total apostasy that makes judgment definitive but contempt for the call to repentance.”

<sup>15</sup> H. Frey, *Das Buch des Werbens Gottes um Seine Kirche* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1964), pp. 25–26.

<sup>16</sup> *Der Prophet Hesekiel*, ATD 22/1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), p. 122.

<sup>17</sup> O. Weber, *Bibelkunde des Alten Testaments*, 9th ed. (Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1961), p. 330. Translation my own.

<sup>18</sup> See von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, I (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1962) pp. 453–454, and Prov. 16:9; 19:21; 21:2; 20:24.

<sup>19</sup> G. Gloege, “Offenbarung,” in RGG, 3d ed., Vol. IV, col. 1611.

<sup>20</sup> Adolf Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness*, tr. J. C. Mattes (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1938), p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> “When we read Scripture, we must believe; when we read the writings of others, we are free to pass judgment upon them.”

## The New Testament Canon in the Lutheran Dogmaticians

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J. A. O. Preus, II

Our purpose is to study the teachings of the Lutheran dogmaticians in the period of orthodoxy in regard to the canon of the New Testament, specifically their criteria of canonicity. In order to see the dogmaticians in their historical setting, we shall first seek an overview of the teachings of Renaissance Catholicism, Luther, and Reformed regarding canon. Second, we shall consider the early dogmaticians of Lutheranism who wrote on the background of the Council of Trent. Third, we shall consider the later Lutheran dogmaticians to set the direction in which the subject finally developed.

### I. The Background

In 397 A. D. the Third Council of Carthage bore witness to the canon of the New Testament as we know it today. Augustine was present, and acquiesced, although we know from his writings (e.g. *De Doctrina Christiana* II. 12) that he made a distinction between antilegomena and homolegomena. The Council was held during the period of Jerome's greatest activity, and his use and general recommendation of the 27 New Testament books insured their acceptance and recognition throughout the Western Church from this time on. Jerome, however, also, it must be noted, had his doubts about the antilegomena. With the exception of the inclusion and later exclusion of the spurious Epistle to the Laodiceans in certain Western Bibles during the Middle Ages, the matter of New Testament Canon was settled from Carthage III until the Renaissance.

The Renaissance began within Roman Catholicism. Spain had an early flowering of humanism until it was cut off by the Inquisition which was introduced during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. During this period of intellectual activity in Spain, Cardinal Ximenes began in 1502 and completed in 1522 his famous Complutensian Polyglot Bible, in which he distinguishes between the canonical and apocryphal books in the Old Testament, noting that the latter were not in Hebrew and hence lacked an essential element of canonicity. Erasmus, who published the first edition of his Greek New Testament in 1516, dedicated to Pope Leo

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*J. A. O. Preus, II (1920–1994) was president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois (1962–1969) and president of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (1969–1981). Special thanks to the editors of Concordia Theological Quarterly, successor to The Springfielder, for permission to reprint this article from The Springfielder, vol. 25, no. 1 (1961), pp. 8–33.*



X, also raises the issue of the authorship of Hebrews, James, Jude, 2 and 3 John, and Revelation, and quotes Jerome as his authority. Erasmus was censured by the Sorbonne in 1526 in a statement which said, "Though formerly some have doubted about the authors of particular books, yet after the church has received them for universal use under the names of certain authors and has approved them with this definition, it is not right for a Christian to doubt the fact or call it into question."<sup>1</sup> But Erasmus's influence spread in both Roman and Protestant circles. Among the Romanists who shared these opinions was Cardinal Cajetan, the opponent of Luther at Augsburg in 1518. Cajetan in his *Commentary on All the Authentic Historical Books of the Old Testament*, published in 1532 and dedicated to Pope Clement VII, asserts "The whole Latin Church owes very much to St. Jerome ... on account of his separation of the canonical from the uncanonical books."<sup>2</sup> He also says in regard to Hebrews, citing Jerome again as his authority, "As the author of this epistle is doubtful in the opinion of Jerome, the epistle is also rendered doubtful, since unless it is Paul's it is not clear that it is canonical."<sup>3</sup> Cajetan died uncensured, but Catharinus, a participant in the Council of Trent, later bitterly attacked him.

Thus, when Luther in 1522 published his German New Testament with its much-quoted strictures on Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation, he was re-echoing some rather common, though new, thinking of the period. In other words, if Trent had not condemned Luther, his views perhaps would have gone largely unnoticed. Luther rejected these books partly on the basis of historical precedent and partly on the basis of his own rather subjective criterion of canonicity, namely, their seeming lack of witness to Christ. Luther never left the "gate of heaven" he had found when in Romans 1:17 he discovered the meaning of the righteousness of God and that Christ was not a hateful judge but a loving Savior. This great experience changed his entire attitude toward the Bible. It made him love the scripture; he found Christ on every page, but it gave him a certain subjectivity which opened him to a criticism which his followers were often at pains to excuse. It is noteworthy, however, that Luther accepted the position of the ancient church regarding the authenticity and authority of the homologoumena. He attacked some of the antilegomena, but apparently on slightly different grounds than the early church and his Roman contemporaries did. It is significant that his criterion of witness to Christ became a standard, though not sole criterion, among his followers, especially with regard to the Old Testament, even among those who did not share his strong views on the antilegomena.

In 1520 Andreas Karlstadt, at the time associated with Luther in Wittenberg, published a work entitled "On the Canonical Scriptures." In it he classified the books of the Bible into three categories: 1) the Pentateuch and the four gospels, "the clearest luminaries of the whole divine truth;" 2) the Old Testament prophets and the acknowledged epistles of the New Testament, namely, thirteen of Paul, one of Peter, one of John; and 3) the Old Testament hagiographa and the seven New

Testament antilegomena. He recognizes that the church collected and ratified the books, but grants men no power to give the scripture its authority. He regards all of these books as above all others, “beyond all suspicion of error.”<sup>4</sup>

The Reformed were less interested in the question of Canon than were the Lutherans. Zwingli seems to have said very little except that he did not regard Revelation as “a book of the Bible.”<sup>5</sup> Oecolampadius accepted the 27 books, but said, “we do not compare the Apocalypse, the Epistles of James, of Jude, and 2 Peter and 2 and 3 John with the rest.”<sup>6</sup> Calvin appears to have had virtually the same opinion, recognizing a difference but accepting all 27 books. Beza in 1564 in dedicating his edition of the Greek New Testament still recognizes the distinction between homologoumena and antilegomena, but he minimizes it.

Thus we can summarize the thinking of the early Reformation period on Canon as being a return to the more flexible position of the early church before Carthage III. The Renaissance with its restudy of antiquity, the increase of interest in Greek manuscripts, the influx of eastern thought, and the spirit of rebellion against the immediate past and the shackles of popery, all combined to produce in the Renaissance man, Luther, Calvin, and their early disciples, as well as those humanists who stayed with Rome, an attitude of independence and self-assertion which showed itself in their attitude toward Canon, as well as toward many other things.

Then came Trent. On April 8, 1546, less than two months after Luther died, “the sacred and holy ecumenical and general Synod of Trent” pronounced the anathema on any and all who rejected the 39 canonical books of the Old Testament, the Apocrypha of the Old Testament, and the 27 books of the New Testament Canon. It also anathematized those who rejected the Latin Vulgate as the true and proper translation.

This decree was Rome’s answer to Luther. In their desire to condemn Luther and everything he said, the Roman prelates also condemned their own men, not only Erasmus, Cajetan, and Ximenes, but, as Chemnitz points out, also Eusebius, Origen, and Jerome. This, however, seemed not to bother Trent. It is noteworthy that the subject of canon in Catholicism has been virtually a dead issue ever since this time.

## II. The Early Period of Lutheran Orthodoxy

The Council of Trent produced not only a series of decrees, but it also created a group of devotees and opponents who spent the next several years evaluating the Council and its work. The chief opponent among the Lutherans was Martin Chemnitz, 1522–1592, who in the years 1565 to 1573 produced what Schmid calls “the ablest defense of Protestantism ever published,”<sup>7</sup> the *Examen Concilii Tridentini*. In his first *Locus*, on scripture,<sup>8</sup> Chemnitz attacks the decree of April 8, 1546, for making the Vulgate virtually the normative Bible, and particularly for arrogating

to the church the right to establish the canon and grant authority to scripture. Chemnitz shows that the Bible is sufficient and inspired, without the traditions of the church and papal pronouncements. He shows the relationship between the two Testaments and points out that the entire scripture testifies to Christ, thus following Luther. He then considers the books of the New Testament individually, as to their authors and origin, indicating that he considers it of great importance that the authors are known as men who were personal witnesses of the matters they relate. This brings him to the matter of canon, which he introduces with three questions: 1) "What does the term 'canonical' mean," and "how does the name confirm what we have said regarding the authority, perfection and sufficiency of scripture?" 2) "By whom and how has the canon of scripture been established, or from whence does scripture have its authority?" and 3) "Which are the canonical and which the apocryphal books?" In answer to the first question Chemnitz shows the derivation of the term and its use in the fathers. In reply to the second he takes vehement exception to the Tridentine opinion that scripture derives its authority from the church. "The papists say that scripture has that authority from the church, which Pighius interprets to mean that in some degree the authority of the church is superior to that of scripture, since indeed the authority of the church has imparted canonical authority to certain scriptures, and especially to those which do not have it of themselves or from their authors. Others say that the authority of the church is so far above scripture that the church could reject gospels by apostles, such as those written by Matthias, James, Bartholomew, Thomas, Philip, Peter, and Andrew; and again could impart canonical authority to those which were written by Mark and Luke, who were not apostles, but who Lindanus says had formerly been apostates, such as those who defected from Christ in the 6th chapter of John. There are those who do not fear to blaspheme the divinely inspired holy scripture and say that if the church should withdraw its authority from scripture, it would not have more value of itself than the fables of Aesop ... Therefore, scripture has its pre-eminent authority principally from this that it is divinely inspired, 2 Timothy 3, that is, that it came not by the will of men, but holy men of God spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, 2 Peter 1. In order that this whole necessary matter may be absolutely certain in the face of all deceptions, God chose certain definite men for writing and ornamented them with many miracles and divine testimonies, so that there would be no doubt that those things which they wrote were divinely inspired ... And as the ancient church in the time of Moses, Joshua and the prophets, so also the primitive church in the time of the apostles, could testify of a certainty as to which scriptures were divinely inspired. For she had known the authors whom God had commended to the church by special testimonies, for she had known which were those which had been written by them, and from those things which she had received by tradition orally from the apostles she could judge that those things which had been written were the same doctrine which the apostles

handed down orally. Thus John 21. The witness of the apostles and the witness of the church were joined ... Therefore, the scripture has canonical authority principally from the Holy Spirit by whose impulse and inspiration it was produced, Secondly, from the writers to whom God himself showed definite and special testimonies of the truth. Afterward, it has authority from the primitive church, as from a witness in whose time those things were written and approved.”<sup>9</sup>

Chemnitz goes on to indicate that the canon of the Old Testament can be determined by the usage of the Old Testament in the New Testament. The establishment of the New Testament Canon he describes as follows, “John saw the writings of the three evangelists and approved them. Paul signed his epistles with his special signature; Peter saw them and commended them to the church. John added to his own writings the testimony both of himself and of the church. For nothing other than apostolic authority is required that in the New Testament it be proved that a certain writing is canonical or divinely inspired.”<sup>10</sup> He quotes from Jerome the story of the deacon who was deposed for having forged the story of Paul and Thecla. The presence of the non-apostolically written Mark and Luke he explains by quoting Augustine who says, “Authority was granted to certain men who followed the first apostles not only to preach, but also to write.” Again he quotes Augustine, “They wrote in the period when they had opportunity of being approved by the apostles themselves who were still alive.” Chemnitz continues by citing Eusebius’s three ranks of writings: “... the first of these are those which are neither fraudulent nor doubtful, which have uncontradicted testimony and are legitimate, universal, and sure according to the confession of all the churches. He makes a second order of those writings about which there had been doubt as to whether they had actually been written and published by those apostles whose names and title they bear, writings which have been spoken against by the conflicting witness of the primitive church, but which have been used and read by many churchmen, as not unuseful. And as those of the first rank have been called canonical and catholic, so those of the second rank are called hagiographa, ecclesiastical, and by Jerome, apocryphal. And yet so accurate a distinction has been made with such salutary care, that the canon might be sure and the rule of faith or doctrine certain in the church, so that they, as Cyprian says, might know from what fountains of the word of God they must fill their cups. Regarding the apocryphal or ecclesiastical books of the second rank, Jerome says, ‘The church reads these for the edification of the people, but not to confirm the authority of church doctrines.’ Again, ‘Their authority is regarded as less suitable for settling matters which come into controversy.’”<sup>11</sup>

Chemnitz sums up his argument as follows, “Now the question is: 1) whether the church which succeeded that primitive and most ancient church or the church of the present can make authentic those writings which in this way have been rejected and disapproved, and manifestly it cannot. 2) Whether the church

can reject and disapprove those writings which have sure and certain testimony as to their authorship from the witness of the first church. And I do not think anyone would say this. 3) Thus the third question is whether those writings concerning which the ancient church was in doubt because of the objections of some, yea because the testimonies of the primitive church do not agree about them, whether, I say, the present church can make those writings canonical, universal and equal to those of the first rank? The papists not only argue that they can do this, but in fact have taken this authority, completely disregarding the necessary distinction of the primitive and ancient church between canonical books and apocryphal or ecclesiastical books. But it is absolutely plain from what has been said that the church in no way has that authority, for by the same reasoning it could either reject canonical books or canonize adulterated ones. For this whole matter, as we have said, depends upon sure testimonies of the church which existed in the time of the apostles, and when it had been accepted, the immediately succeeding church preserved it by means of definite historical evidence which was worthy of credence. Therefore, when definite documentation of the primitive and ancient church cannot be supplied from the witness of the ancients who lived shortly after the time of the apostles, that those books about which there was controversy were without contradictions and doubt and were accepted as legitimate and certain and commended to the church, no human decree can alter the fact . . . Pighius replies that the church has the authority that it can impart canonical authority to certain books which do not have it of themselves or from their authors. They could thus even impart that authority to Aesop's fables or the stories of Lucian. Not that I would want those controverted books to be compared with Aesop's fables (for with Cyprian and Jerome I attribute to them the honorable position which they always had in the ancient church) but for the sake of the logic of the matter, I want to show that in a dispute over the books of scripture, the church does not have the power to make true books out of false ones, or false out of true, out of uncertain and dubious books certain, canonical and legitimate ones, without any documentation which is required for such a thing."<sup>12</sup>

Chemnitz continues by giving the reasons why the antilegomena were doubted; namely, lack of evidence from the apostolic church that the books had been approved by the apostles and recommended to the church, and questions as to the identity of the authors. "Therefore," he says, "the entire dispute depends upon this question, whether it is certain and undoubted that those books over which there is this controversy are divinely inspired scripture, either published or approved by prophets and apostles who had the divine authority."<sup>13</sup>

Chemnitz is the most voluminous of the early Lutherans in regard to the canon. We should note that he is writing against the background of the Council of Trent. He points up a difference which would never be settled between the Lutherans and the Catholics, namely, the source of the authority of scripture. He

answers, as do all the dogmatists after him that scripture derives its authority not from the church but from itself. Thus Chemnitz once and for all settles the matter among the Lutherans as to the position of the fathers and the Councils regarding the canon. The church can bear witness to the canon; but the canon has its own authority and impresses itself upon the church. The church can ratify: it cannot legislate. Chemnitz is very careful. He avoids the extravagant language of Luther. He goes as far as he feels he can in endorsing the antilegomena. He sees no straw epistles. He avoids Luther's use of only one criterion for canonicity, nor does he take refuge in the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*, something he never mentions. His main emphasis is on the witness of the early church. We might summarize Chemnitz's criteria as being the inspiration of the book, apostolic authorship or apostolic commendation, and the witness of the early church. He retains enough of the spirit of Luther, Erasmus, and others so that he does not hesitate to reject the antilegomena as authoritative for doctrine; yet he represents a more cautious and judicious attitude than his predecessors, which makes it possible for Gerhard to quote him without one word of disapproval, while saying a great deal more than Chemnitz does. Incidentally, Chemnitz, both in his *Loci Theologici*, his *Examen*, as well as in the Formula of Concord of which he was a major author, does not hesitate to quote the antilegomena, even to establish a doctrinal point.

While we have devoted a great deal of space to Chemnitz because he has written so much on this point, we should not neglect to point out that his views were essentially followed by other men of his period. Aegidius Hunnius, 1550–1603, a signer of the Formula, says in Thesis 119 of his *Tractatus de Sacrosancta Maiestate, Autoritate, Fide ac Certitudine Sacrae Scripturae*, published in 1591, “The Epistle to the Hebrews, 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, the Epistles of James and Jude and the Apocalypse, are outside the canon and are judged apocryphal.” In Thesis 120 he continues, “The New Testament apocryphal writings were worth more in the opinion of the primitive church and were more approved than the apocrypha of the Old Testament.” And in Thesis 121, “Indeed many fathers who placed certain books of the Old Testament outside the canon prohibit no New Testament book from the canon but state that all are canonical. The Council of Laodicea did the same.” In Thesis 122 he says, “We will not contend [*pugnabimus*] with anyone concerning the authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews, or 2 and 3 John, of 2 Peter, and of the Apocalypse.” And finally he concludes in Thesis 126, “It must not be concealed, however, that there was also concerning these books, as Bellarmine himself confesses, doubt in the early church, for this reason that they do not supply sufficient documentation of approval to show that they came with certainty from the authors whose names they bear.”<sup>14</sup> Note the more conciliatory attitude here than even in Chemnitz.

Andreas Osiander the Younger, 1562–1617, is quoted by Gerhard, “There are certain books which are spoken against because there does not exist sufficient

testimony of the early church concerning their authors such as the Epistles of James, Jude, etc. These are called the hagiographa. They are also called ecclesiastical. They do not have in themselves value for establishing doctrine.”<sup>15</sup>

Jacob Heerbrand, 1521–1600, in his *Compendium*,<sup>16</sup> published in 1573, substantially agrees with Chemnitz.

Another contemporary who has much the same position is Matthias Haffenreffer, 1561–1619, who distinguishes between homologoumena and antilegomena. He says, “These apocryphal books, although they do not have canonical authority in judging of doctrine, yet because they make for instruction and edification, contain many things and can be read privately and publicly recited in the church with usefulness and profit. And if we compare the apocryphal books among themselves, both those in the New as well as in the Old Testament, we find that they have great authority, especially the Epistle to the Hebrews, because of its excellent commentary on the Old Testament, and the Apocalypse, because of its illustrious and full statements concerning the reign of Christ, and other matters, including the certainty of the outcome of His reign. These books excel the others in eminence.”<sup>17</sup> Note that he distinguishes among the antilegomena as to value. Here is further development.

However, not all of Chemnitz’s contemporaries said exactly what he did. The “Magdeburg Centuries” of 1562 says, “There were some writings spread through the church during this century in the name of apostles or their disciples, of which some for a while were not generally received because of the doubt of certain individuals, but afterwards they were received into the number of catholic writings, but certain others were rejected as apocryphal.”<sup>18</sup>

And Leonard Hutter, 1563–1616, states, “It clearly can and ought to be determined that there is a difference between the apocryphal books of the Old Testament and those of the New, such indeed that the apocrypha of the New Testament possess much greater authority than the Old Testament ones, even indeed an authority which is valid for settling church doctrine, so that more correctly we can, yea we ought to call them authentic rather than apocryphal.”<sup>19</sup> Note now the authority to settle doctrine.

Conrad Dietrich, 1575–1639, in his famous *Institutiones Catecheticae* of 1613 says of the New Testament apocryphal books, “How does it happen that these are apocryphal? From this that in the primitive church they were not accepted by all as truly apostolic, but some churches were doubtful for a while regarding them and some plainly rejected them. But are they of the same value as the apocryphal books of the Old Testament? By *no means*, because the apocryphal books of the Old Testament were entirely uncertain and contained many things diametrically opposed to the canonical scriptures and thus have no authority in establishing, doctrines of the faith. But the apocrypha of the New Testament were not so doubtful, nor do any of them directly oppose the canonical scripture. And thus they also have authority in controversies regarding the faith. For although regarding them there

had been doubt by some in the church, they were received by others, however, because of the doctrine of inspiration. There was doubt as to the author, but not as to the doctrine which was received as apostolic. However, the Romanists err because they say the apocrypha have absolutely equal authority with the canonical books both of the Old and New Testament in proving doctrines of the faith.”<sup>20</sup>

And Balthasar Mentzer, 1565–1627, in the 1606 edition of his *Disputationes Theologicae* says, “But the ecclesiastical books of the New Testament . . . have almost obtained in our churches the same authority as the canonical scriptures. Concerning this matter we do not think there should be strife [*digladiandum*] with anyone. Those of the Old Testament are inferior.”<sup>21</sup> He then goes on to chide Trent and the Romanist Pistorius for removing all distinction between canonical and non-canonical books.

### III. The Later Period of Lutheran Orthodoxy

As time passed the position of Hutter, Dietrich, and Mentzer became the prevailing one among the Lutheran dogmaticians. John Gerhard, 1582–1637, is often credited with producing this change, because in his *Loci Theologici* of 1622 he dwells on this subject more fully; but he was not the first, as we have noted above. Gerhard is apparently unaware or unwilling to admit any change in thinking on the subject among the Lutherans, for he quotes all his predecessors with approval, both Chemnitz and his followers as well as men such as Mentzer who say something different. As one possible motive for this minimizing of differences Gerhard gives a hint in his introduction to the section on New Testament Canon, “Up to this point we have discussed the canonical and apocryphal books of the Old Testament in general and individually, and it remains for us to consider the New Testament books where the first question of all is, whether among the books in the New Testament such a difference must be maintained that some are called canonical and others apocryphal. It seems at first glance that in this matter there are certain discrepancies among those who have seceded from the Roman Church, which the Papists object to among us. But with the help of a distinction this matter can be reconciled, as we will shortly see.”<sup>22</sup> He then proceeds to quote several statements from Chemnitz, Hunnius, Osiander, and Haffenreffer, all insisting upon a strict distinction between the homologoumena and the antilegomena. This he follows with a long quotation from Mentzer, “We accept the so-called New Testament ecclesiastical or apocryphal books in such a way that we permit them to be regarded as in the list of the canonical, and as far as it is possible to approve them we regard them as having equal authority with the rest. Nor have we added the expression ‘almost’ for any other reason than that in the primitive church some at times spoke against these books, since it could not be positively stated by whom they were written and published. Thus in this matter it could be easy for us to come to agreement with the moderate papists.”<sup>23</sup>

Gerhard continues by quoting John Schroeder, who in a writing of 1605 adds a significant element to the discussion, “There have been noted certain books of the New Testament called apocryphal, but almost for no other reason than that there was doubt concerning them—not whether they were written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, but whether they were published by the apostles by whom they had been signed. But because there was no doubt concerning the more important of their authors, namely, the Holy Ghost (but only concerning their writers or ministering authors), and because despite this doubtful authority of these books certain outstanding ancients of the church had raised them to a high level, they have obtained equal authority with the canonical books in the opinion of many people. Indeed, in order, that a certain book be regarded as canonical, it is not necessarily required that there be agreement concerning the secondary author or writer. It is sufficient if there be agreement concerning the primary author or the dictator, who is the Holy Ghost; for the books of Judges, Ruth, and Esther are canonical, the authors of which, however, are unknown.”<sup>24</sup> Schroeder introduces the distinction between the primary and secondary authors, a concept which continues among the later orthodox teachers. Chemnitz and the older dogmaticians were oblivious of this distinction; though Dietrich had suggested that apostolic doctrine and inspiration assure the canonicity of books of uncertain authorship.

Gerhard concludes his study with three statements of his own: “First, there is a great difference which must be established among the books which are contained in the biblical codex of the New Testament, for it is not right to deny that in the primitive church at one time certain of them were spoken against by certain men, as will appear from our consideration of the individual books. Second, these books which were spoken against by some are called, in a rather improper way, apocryphal, which we prove by a threefold line of argument. 1) Not so much concerning their canonical authority as concerning the secondary authors of them was there doubt in the primitive church—but now these books, whose authors are unknown, are not properly called apocryphal. Otherwise it would follow that certain truly canonical books, such as the books of Judges, Ruth, Job, etc. are apocryphal, since their authors are unknown. 2) Because it was not doubted by all churches or learned men, but only by certain ones, concerning the authors of these books, there are two evident differences between the Old Testament apocrypha and these books which some call New Testament apocrypha. Concerning the former there was doubt as to their authority, concerning the latter there was doubt in the churches as to their authors. 3) Fathers who do not recognize the Old Testament apocrypha do not exclude any book from the New Testament Canon. Note the Council of Laodicea, canon 59; also Eusebius, Erasmus, Jerome. Third, for the sake of teaching, one must distinguish between canonical New Testament books of the first and second rank. Canonical books of the first rank are those of which neither the author nor the authority was ever doubted in the church, but by the

common consent of all they have been regarded as canonical and as divine always. Such books are the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, etc. Canonical books of the second rank are those concerning whose author there was doubt by some at some time in the church. Such are Hebrews, James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and the Apocalypse.”<sup>25</sup>

Gerhard continues with a very lengthy isagogical study of each of the 27 New Testament books, first the homologoumena and then the antilegomena. With regard to the latter, he asserts after a long discussion that Paul wrote Hebrews, thus giving it full apostolic authority. With regard to James he seeks to explain away Luther’s strictures against the book, even mentioning that after 1526 no edition of Luther’s Bible calls it a “straw epistle;” a contention with which Reu disagrees.<sup>26</sup> But Gerhard concludes that James is apostolic and thus canonical. On 2 Peter is he very definite, quoting Luther to the same effect. His attitude is the same with regard to the other antilegomena. All are canonical and of apostolic authorship.

Gerhard marks a definite change in thinking among Lutherans on this subject. While some men before Gerhard, such as Hutter and Schroeder, had taken much the same position he did, because of Gerhard’s great prestige as well as his full treatment of the matter, after his time the dogmaticians, while still paying lip-service to Chemnitz, for all practical purposes abolished the distinction between homologoumena and antilegomena. This is the state of affairs which continues to the present day. It is quite close to the position of the Romanists and the Reformed. Only at rare intervals, as in the case of Dr. Walther and Pastor Roebbelin, has the distinction been revived as a living theological factor.<sup>27</sup> Of course, in saying the Lutherans have approached the Roman and Reformed position, we mean only that all three communions accept 27 books. The Lutherans have never made the canon a matter of conciliar or confessional decision.

To complete the picture up to the end of the age of orthodoxy, we can cite a few more witnesses. John Andrew Quenstedt, 1617–1688, nephew of John Gerhard and father-in-law of Abraham Calov, voices virtually the same opinion as Gerhard, “We call those books of the New Testament protocanonical, or of the first rank, concerning whose authority and secondary authors there never was any doubt in the church; and those deuterocanonical, or of the second rank, concerning whose secondary authors (not their authority, however) there were at times doubts entertained by some. There was doubt, I say, and discussion concerning these books, yet not among all, merely among a few; not at all times, only occasionally. And these doubts did not have reference so much to their divine authority or primary author, the Holy Spirit, as to their secondary authors.”<sup>28</sup> Quenstedt even says that knowledge of the secondary author is unimportant, “For even if Philip or Bartholomew had written that gospel which is read under the name of Matthew, it does not affect saving faith.”<sup>29</sup> Note, however, that he does not go outside the ranks of the apostles in suggesting other authors. He held, as did all the dogmaticians, to apostolic

authorship as a criterion of canonicity. Yet to know for certain the exact author of a book was not necessary. He adds, "For the authors of many canonical books are unknown, such as, the author of the book of Joshua, of Ruth, Kings, Chronicles; however, it is well established concerning their inspiration and canonical authority."<sup>30</sup>

John William Baier, 1647–1695, is somewhat stronger even than Quenstedt. He says of the antilegomena, "It cannot indeed be denied that some of the ancients did so doubt in regard to these writers as to refuse to them the authority that belongs to inspired books."<sup>31</sup> Again, "They are not ignored when we are asked for the rule of faith, but they have authority in such case by common consent at the present day among Christians, especially those of our confession."<sup>32</sup> He says in general of the antilegomena that "of their authors and thus of their divine origin there was once doubt on the part of some, but today no controversy remains."<sup>33</sup> Note in all of these later men the absence of all reference to Luther and Chemnitz.

Abraham Calov, 1612–1688, writing in 1684, sets forth his criteria of canonicity: "1) with reference to the *principium* it is required that a canonical book be inspired by the Holy Spirit; 2) with reference to the instrumental cause, that it be written by a prophet or an apostle; 3) with reference to the material, that it contain divine mysteries and not fables; 4) with reference to its internal form, that it be God-breathed; 5) with reference to its external form, that it be in Hebrew in the Old Testament and in Greek in the New; 6) with reference to its limits, that it possess the testimony of the church, either the Jewish or early Christian. Moreover you will note that these requisities are to be taken collectively."<sup>34</sup> Calov represents a very interesting position. He enumerates every criterion of canonicity with the possible exception of Luther's emphasis on Christological content; although he does require divine mysteries, which to a Lutheran imply the teaching of the gospel. And Calov significantly says that all of these criteria must be taken collectively. This is important.

David Hollaz, 1648–1713, is usually regarded as the last great representative of orthodoxy. Pietism had begun to make its appearance, and among other things the study of the canon went into decline in this period. In fact, one might say that it had declined even by the time of Hollaz. He removes the distinction entirely between the two classes of books, saying, "Since at the present time all evangelical teachers assign divine authority to these deuterocanonical books, there seems to be no occasion any longer for that distinction."<sup>35</sup>

Michael Walther, 1593–1662, even before Hollaz, after reading Chemnitz, Hunnius, Osiander, Gerhard, and others, sums up by saying, "If we compare what they wrote ... it will appear that there is some difference of opinion."<sup>36</sup> He then goes on to quote Gerhard almost verbatim. It seemed to cause him very little excitement.

As two final witnesses we shall depart from the dogmatists and quote the New Testament scholar Buddeus and the historian Seckendorf.

John Francis Buddeus, 1667–1729, a glimmering light of orthodoxy in a pietistic world, writes in 1727, “in regard to the epistle which is attributed to James there was dispute as to the authority and author, and it is well known what the thinking and opinion of our own blessed Luther was regarding it. For being aroused by the heat of the controversy against the Catholics he plainly denied that this epistle had come from an apostle; he even called it a straw epistle in the preface of the first edition of his German Bible, and on this account he gave occasion to his adversaries to hurl various calumnies against him, from which among others Henry Maius has vindicated him and also Richard Simon. . . . But that this letter was written by James the Apostle has been placed beyond all doubt today.”<sup>37</sup>

And Veit Ludwig Seckendorf, 1629–1692, writing in the last year of his life, says, “Now, as Roman Catholics today have no doubts concerning the Epistle to the Hebrews . . . even so evil should not be thought of us, since we have given up the doubts of Luther concerning the Epistle of James”<sup>38</sup>

Within the Reformed Church the same process was in progress, but it went further. Westcott gives a very fine summary of this in his work on the New Testament Canon. He points out that in Zwingli’s time no notice was taken of the limits of the canon. In the first Helvetic Confession of 1536, the Geneva Catechism of 1545, published by Calvin, and the later Helvetic Confession of 1566 reference is made merely to the canonical scriptures as “the Word of God, given by the Holy Spirit, and set forth by the Prophets and Apostles.” The Belgic Confession of 1561–1563 lists the 66 books, as the norm of faith. So does the Westminster Confession of 1643 and the Swiss Declaration of 1675. Much the same occurred among the English Protestants.<sup>39</sup> By 1700 throughout the Protestant church there was general agreement that the New Testament contains 27 canonical books of virtually equal authority and inspiration. This opinion has not been materially altered since.

In the history of the Missouri Synod, or of American Lutheranism for that matter, there seems to have been only one eruption of this question publicly. A certain Pastor Roebbelin of the Missouri Synod in the 1850s had doubts regarding the canonicity of Revelation. He was accused of false doctrine by another pastor of the Missouri Synod; but Dr. Walther in an article in *Lehre und Wehre* in 1856 defended Roebbelin’s orthodoxy at the same time as he emphasized his own belief in the canonicity of Revelation. Walther quoted Luther, Chemnitz, and others of the early dogmatists in support of Roebbelin.<sup>40</sup> The matter seemed to end with this one statement.

To explain why the thinking of the orthodox Lutherans gradually changed regarding the value of the antilegomena is not easy to discover from their writings. But some reasons do appear. First, there would seem to be the intrinsic value of the books themselves. Even Luther and Chemnitz use Hebrews, Revelation, and 2 Peter constantly. Second, the history of the church ever since 397 favored the inclusion of these books in the canon. Such a tradition is hard to break. Third, the

quotations from Gerhard, Mentzer, Seckendorf, and Buddeus all indicate that the attacks of the Romanists against Luther's position on James in particular and the early Lutheran position on the antilegomena in general were unpleasant and embarrassing to the Lutherans. Buddeus is at pains to point out that Richard Simon, a Catholic, had tried to vindicate Luther on James.

#### IV. Observations

A few remarks on the criteria of canonicity are in place. A study of the foregoing material reveals that basically there are four criteria which appear in the thinking of the dogmatists: 1) content, 2) apostolic authorship or supervision, 3) the use of the book in the early history of the church, and 4) inspiration. The dogmatists all use these criteria, so that actually there is not such a great difference among them as would first appear. Luther emphasized content more than the other criteria and more than the dogmatists did, yet he recognized apostolic authorship and he witness of the early church as factors. He certainly emphasized inspiration, and despite his strictures he used the antilegomena. We quote a few sentences from Luther's Christmas sermon on Hebrews 1:1-12, "This is a strong, forcible, noble epistle ... The presumption that it was not written by Paul is somewhat plausible, because the style is unusually ornamental for him. Some are of the opinion it was written by Luke, others by Apollos ... Certain it is, no epistle enforces the scriptures with greater power than does this. Hence it is evident the author was an eminent apostolic individual, whoever he was ... scarce any portion of the Bible more strongly enforces the deity of Christ ..."<sup>41</sup>

Chemnitz perhaps more strongly than any other emphasized apostolic authorship, yet he adds inspiration as one of the prime criteria of canonicity. The quotations we have cited abundantly point to his insistence on the unbroken tradition of use and acceptance in the church. His urging that the antilegomena must be tested by the standards of the homologoumena shows the importance of doctrinal content in his thinking. He, like Luther, though rejecting the antilegomena, seems to make ample use of these works not only for purposes of edification, but also for doctrinal proof. In refuting papistic claims made on the basis of James 5 for extreme unction, and on the basis of Hebrews for purgatory, Chemnitz does not evade the argument by advancing the fact that these books are antilegomena and hence not suitable for proving doctrine. Rather he explains and interprets the passages under consideration to show that even on the basis of antilegomena books the Romanists have no grounds for their ideas.<sup>42</sup> In contending against the Roman mass Chemnitz goes even further, quoting Hebrews 5, 7, 9, and 10 as his only scripture proof, seemingly putting Hebrews on the same level with the homologoumena; for he uses the epistle to prove a point which is not nearly so clearly or easily proved elsewhere in scripture.<sup>43</sup> Chemnitz also uses 2 Peter on different occasions. Thus all four criteria are present in Chemnitz. This applies also to the other early dogmatists.

The later dogmaticians emphasized the criterion of inspiration more than some of the other criteria and more than did the early dogmaticians. Yet it was by no means their only emphasis. Philippi faults the later men for emphasizing the authorship of the Holy Spirit, even of the antilegomena, so strongly that the distinction between the two classes of books made in the early church and revived by Luther and Chemnitz was largely forgotten.<sup>44</sup> While his charge is partly valid, in their defense it must be stated that they did not entirely drop the distinction, nor in emphasizing inspiration did they forget to insist on apostolic authorship and Christocentric content as additional criteria. Further, Luther, Chemnitz, and even the early church fathers were never consistent themselves in the matter, as we have seen.

Thus, we may summarize by saying that the difference among the dogmaticians was not one of exclusiveness but of emphasis. They were all basically agreed as to what made a book canonical and as to which books were scripture. It is significant that despite the difference in emphasis and approach, none of the dogmaticians ever takes issue with any of his fellow Lutherans on this point. We do not believe this was due either to indifference, or to fear of what the Romanists and Reformed might say, or to the reverence in which Luther and Chemnitz were held. The early Lutherans did not scruple to attack Melancthon, Flacius, Osiander, and quite a number of other notables within their communion, despite the fact that it brought criticism from their rivals. It appears that the consensus among them was that while some emphasized one aspect and some another, yet all spoke the truth. Chemnitz lays little stress on Luther's criterion of Christo-centricity, yet he never rejects it; Gerhard quotes Chemnitz' strong statements on apostolicity, yet points out that the antilegomena are also apostolic and worthy of at least a secondary position in the canon. Calov, who seldom has been accused of mediating or compromising, accepts all the criteria of canonicity held by his predecessors: content, inspiration, apostolic authorship, and the witness and use in the early church, and says that they must all be considered together. Gerhard, while satisfied to accept as canonical a book, whose author is unknown or uncertain, makes strenuous efforts to show that such books were written by apostles. No one can cite the dogmaticians in proof of a position that it is a matter of indifference as to who I wrote the books of the Bible, or that such writings are not apostolic.

Further, all the dogmaticians seem to agree that authorship is not an article of faith. Chemnitz, who would come closest to this position, never says that it is. Gerhard, says, "Although it is an article of faith that all inspired scripture . . . which contains within itself revelations immediately inspired by God, is divine and canonical; however, it is not an article of faith, but an historical assertion, when the church bears witness concerning a particular book, that this or that book is the work of this or that author, e.g., that the gospel of Matthew is Matthew's, the Epistle to the Hebrews is Paul's."<sup>45</sup> The Lutherans, holding that all doctrine must be drawn from God's Word, could not make the canon an article of faith, since no

such list is found in scripture. The Catholics, teaching that the church can establish doctrine, held that a decree, such as Trent's, made the canon an article of faith. The canon is the source of doctrines, but it is not itself an article of faith. The church in testifying to the canon only recognizes God's Word; it does not establish it. Hunnius, who holds the same position that Chemnitz does on the importance of apostolic authorship, says, "That the Epistle to the Romans is of Paul, we have from the testimony of the primitive church, but that it is sacred, canonical and the rule of faith, this we have and receive not from the witness of the church but from internal criteria."<sup>46</sup> Quenstedt voices the same idea, "Faith, which considers the testimony of the primitive church which witnesses that these books have been written by apostles and evangelists, is a human and historic faith; but faith, which believes that this or that book is divine and canonical, or comes from the Holy Ghost, is divine faith, and this does not rest on the testimony of the church, but on the internal criteria of Holy Scripture and primarily on the testimony of the Holy Spirit."<sup>47</sup> In the same section Quenstedt emphasizes that content is important in determining canonicity.

It appears, therefore, that the position of the Lutheran dogmaticians, while differing in emphasis, indicates a likeness of thought. All agreed that the canon was made up of books which were inspired, written by apostles, known and witnessed in the early church, and containing divine and evangelical teaching. It is important to note, too, that no dogmatician is satisfied to build his case on only one of these criteria. As Calov says, they must be taken collectively. No single one of these criteria is sufficient by itself to establish the canonicity of a book. Inspiration can not be posited of a book, regardless of its excellent contents, unless it is known from the witness of the early church that the book came from an apostle or one working under an apostle. Apostolic authorship cannot guarantee the acceptance of a book, as in the case of the Epistle to the Laodiceans, unless there is the additional evidence that the book had strong testimony from the early church, and contained divine doctrine. Disputes about authorship disturbed the acceptance of Hebrews, even though its contents were generally well received; while disputes over content disturbed the acceptance of Revelation, even though its Johannine authorship previously had not been debated. The writings of the apostolic fathers were often rejected because of uncertain use, lack of apostolic authorship, and especially questionable content. Books which went under the name of apostles, such as many of the Apocrypha, were rejected on the basis of content, sometimes because of lack of witness from the early church or because of lack of wide acceptance in the early church. Thus it appears that the dogmaticians held a principle which is equally valid today, that these criteria must be taken collectively, and that canonicity cannot be proven solely on the basis of one of them. While it is axiomatic that only an inspired book is canonical and only a canonical book inspired, the history of the church has always demonstrated that it requires the presence of other criteria, such as the witness of the early church and the content of the books to establish the

canonicity of a given book. No book can be regarded as inspired unless it is also regarded as canonical.

A critical reader of this material will rapidly discover that most of what has been said regarding the teachings of Luther and the dogmaticians can be refuted on the basis of cold logic. Even Calov's insistence on a collective use of the criteria can be refuted on the logical premise that several partially provable theses do not make one invincible argument. Each of these criteria has been and probably will continue to be attacked on one point or another. The criterion of inspiration falls before the stony unbelief of modern criticism and the demand for scientific proof. That scripture is inspired cannot be proven scientifically; it is an article of faith, as our dogmaticians said it was. The criterion of apostolicity has also fallen before the shafts of liberal critics who in some cases have denied the apostolic authorship of nearly every book in the New Testament. It is certain that among the ranks of the endless and variegated isagogical theories the authorship of every single New Testament book has been denied. The witness of the early church is certainly subject today to a great deal of scrutiny which is highly subjective and equally negative. The criterion of the use of a book in the church is also open to the criticism that certain apocryphal books have been used and dropped, others added for a time, and even different canons adopted in different ages and different churches. The internal evidence of the books themselves is helpful, as long as we deal with people who approach the Bible as God's Word. There should at least be no problem as to the apostolic authorship of those books which are signed, as is the case with Paul's epistles, and even some of the antilegomena. But unless we use a process of analogy, namely, that what applies to a signed book also applies to an unsigned one, we are forced in the case of unsigned books to fall back upon the second of the criteria, namely, the witness of the early church, which for very good reasons (reasons which while not on the level of scripture itself, yet are much more cogent than the subjectivism of much of modern scholarship) assigned the books to particular writers. Yet when all is said and done, it appears that we are faced with a problem which perhaps, like most theological problems, defies a mathematical answer. The Lutheran dogmaticians liked to give answers which were as close to mathematically correct as they could make them; but a study of their writings on canon reveal that they faced the same problem we do today. Except in their well-founded objections to Rome's arrogation of authority to establish the canon, they were surprisingly undogmatic in regard to the canon. So was Luther. When one considers their absolutism in matters which were clearly stated in scripture, and then compares their mildness and latitude with regard to canon, we can only conclude that they felt themselves on ground which was not entirely doctrinal, but rather historical. And it was an incomplete and uncertain history.

Are we then in a state of darkness and confusion which makes us as theologians so unsure of our moorings that we are not quite sure whether God might also have revealed himself to the pious of antiquity or to the contemplative among the

Hindus and the virtuous among the Moslems? Much of modern theology today has arrived at this point, largely because men have given up scripture as the authoritative and inerrant word of God. Again our dogmaticians supply us with an answer. Scripture is *autopistos*. It is its own authority, needing neither the decrees of councils and popes, nor the scientifically documented witness of history, nor even the absolute proof regarding specific apostolic authorship to establish its authority and value. The same scriptures which convinced the early Christians that they were truly God-breathed books convince us of the same, if we approach them with the attitude which Christ requires of all those who will worship him and be his disciples. Perhaps the Lord in his wisdom has dealt with the canon in the same way as he did with the text. There is confusion, uncertainty, and a host of unanswered questions; yet the scripture continues to accomplish its mighty acts among men. There is a peculiar combination of faith and history involved in the study of the canon. We can be scientific and scholarly up to a point, but at that point faith must take over. Where faith is lacking, not only the canon falls, but so does the Bible and ultimately the Christ to whom the scripture testifies. Strict logic and adherence to probable historical data will go part of the way only. That is the reason that much modern scientific theology has failed. Liberalism has denied inspiration, rejected apostolic authorship, attacked the content, debunked the witness of the early church, and now finds itself with an historic term 'canon' which it uses to describe a group of books for which it ultimately has no use. That was not the attitude of Luther or the dogmaticians. We hope it will never be ours.

In conclusion, we wish to make a few remarks about the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*, since this question is often injected into the discussion. Further, it is closely related to what we have just said about scripture as *autopistos*. The *testimonium internum* has been defined as "His supernatural work, by which through our reading and hearing of God's Word, He moves and enlightens our hearts to faith in His Word and promises."<sup>48</sup> According to Schmid, it is very doubtful that the dogmaticians apply this concept to the matter of authorship of Biblical books. He says, "Most of the theologians speak of the testimony of the Holy Spirit only when they are discussing the grounds upon which the authority of scripture rests ... for when it is asserted that each individual attains to divine assurance of the authority of scripture only through the testimony of the Holy Spirit, this is still somewhat different from the assertion that the canonicity of each separate book must be proved in the case of each individual by the testimony of the Holy Spirit. And Chemnitz, further, does not mention, in this connection, this testimony of the Holy Spirit; but, in order to prove the canonicity of the separate books, points only to the testimony of the earliest church, which could appeal to the endorsement of the Apostles. And, finally, in all the investigations by the dogmaticians in regard to the canonicity of a single book, there is never any allusion to the testimony of the Holy Spirit ... but they are all conducted upon the basis of historical evidence."<sup>49</sup>

The *testimonium internum* convinces us of the authority of scripture, that the scripture is *autopistos*. This point the dogmaticians raise in opposition to Rome's contention that scripture derives authority from the church. But, since the church does not give its authority to scripture, it is equally certain that it does not compile or determine the canon. A book is not canonical because of a church decree, but of itself, by virtue of its divine origin and inspiration. Gerhard says, "We believe the canonical scriptures because they are the canonical scriptures, that is, because they were brought about by God and written by the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We do not believe them because the church testifies concerning them ... The canonical books are the source of our faith from which the church itself and its authority must be proved. A *principium* is believed on account of itself, not because of something else. A *principium* can be demonstrated *a posteriori*, but it cannot be proved by means of something older. In such a case it would not be a *principium*."<sup>50</sup> Thus, while a book can convince us by the *testimonium internum* it is God's word, and thus inspired and canonical, the Spirit, in the case of an unsigned or anonymous book, does not tell us of its authorship, which the dogmaticians establish solely on isagogical and historical principles.

Many of our problems and difficulties today regarding authorship and isagogical matters were unknown in the time of the dogmaticians, primarily because the entire church held strongly to the doctrine of verbal inspiration; but it seems likely that the dogmaticians would apply the principle of the *testimonium internum* to books which bear their author's signature, since then the author's name would be a part of the divinely inspired text. For example, it seems that the question of the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles would not be regarded merely as an historical one, but a matter of faith. Chemnitz makes a great deal of Paul's signing his second letter to the Thessalonians, and Gerhard, in attempting to establish the canonicity of Revelation and 2 Peter, always emphasizes the mention of the author's name in the text as evidence.

Perhaps our dogmaticians supply us with the best clue as to what our attitude should be with regard to our present discussions on the canon. Against the background of Trent they declare that neither history nor the church make a book canonical; yet neither history nor the thinking of the church can be disregarded. The dogmaticians teach us two things: 1) the canon viewed as a list of books by a definitely known group of authors is not an article of faith; 2) we need have more of the dogmaticians' reverence for scripture as the God-breathed, authoritative word, which we recognize on the basis of its authorship, human and divine, its content, and the history of its use through the ages of the church.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Westcott, B. F., *General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament*, London, 3rd ed., 1870, p. 439–42.
- <sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 443.
- <sup>3</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 452–3.
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 455.
- <sup>6</sup> Epistola, Bk. 1, p. 3, edition of 1548.
- <sup>7</sup> Schmid, H., *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, tr. from 4th ed. by Hay and Jacobs, Philadelphia, 1899, p. 666.
- <sup>8</sup> Chemnitz, Martin, *Examen Concilii Tridentini*, sec. ed. 1578 Francofurtensem ... adjecit Ed. Preuss, Berlin, 1861, p. 6.
- <sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, 53–4.
- <sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 54.
- <sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 55.
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 55–56.
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 58.
- <sup>14</sup> Hunnius, Aegidius, *Tractatus de Sacrosancta Maiestate, Autoritate, Fide ac Certitudine Sacrae Scripturae*, 1591, quoted from Gerhard's *Loci Theologici ... editionibus 1657 et 1776 ...* ed. Fr. Frank, Lipsiae, Tom. 1, p. 103.
- <sup>15</sup> Gerhard *ibid.*; quoted from Osiander's *Papa non Papa; Responsa ad Analysin Gregorii de Valentia de Ecclesia cum Defensione Huius Responsi*.
- <sup>16</sup> Heerbrand, Jacob, *Compendium Theologiae Methodi Quaestionibus Tractatum*, Tübingen, 1573; translated into German under title *Kurzes Handbuch des Christlichen Glaubens und Sittenlebrë*, St. Louis, 1877 p. 185–7.
- <sup>17</sup> Gerhard *ibid.*; quoted from Haffner's *Loci Theologici*.
- <sup>18</sup> Gerhard *ibid.* p. 102; quoted from *Magdeburg Centuries* I, Bk. 2, col. 4, col. 54.
- <sup>19</sup> Hutter, Leonard, *Loci Communes Theologici*, Wittenbergae, 1619, p. 18.
- <sup>20</sup> Dietrich, Conrad, *Institutiones Catecheticae*, Lipsiae, 1722, p. I 5.
- <sup>21</sup> Mentzer, Balthasar, *Disputationes Theologicae & Scholasticae XIV De Praecipuis quibusdam Controversiis Christianae Doctrinae Capitibus*, Marburgi, 1606, p. 11.
- <sup>22</sup> Gerhard *ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 103.
- <sup>24</sup> *ibid.*; quoted from Schroeder's *Tractatus Theologicum de Principio Theologiae & Iudice Supremo Controversiarum Theologiarum*.
- <sup>25</sup> Gerhard, *ibid.*, 104.
- <sup>26</sup> Reu, M., *Luther and the Scriptures*, Columbus, 1944, p. 42ff.
- <sup>27</sup> Walther, C. F. W., "Ist Derjenige für einen Ketzer oder gefährlichen Irrlehrer zu erklären, welcher nicht alle in dem Konvolut des Neuen Testaments beginglichen Bücher für kanonisch hält und erklärt?" in *Lehre und Wehre* 2(1856) 203–15.
- <sup>28</sup> Quenstedt, J. A., *Theologia Didactico-polemica sive Systema Theologicum*, Lipsiae, 1702, 1.235.
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 1.96.
- <sup>30</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> Baier, J. W., *Compendium Theologiae Positivae* cur. Walthcr, St. Louis, 1879, 2 vols., vol. 1, p. 150.
- <sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, 153.
- <sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 150.
- <sup>34</sup> Calov, A., *Apodixis Articularum Fidei*, Lunebergi, 1684, p. 29.
- <sup>35</sup> Hollaz, D., *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum*, Holmiae et Lipsiae, 1741, p. 131.
- <sup>36</sup> Walther, M., *Officina Biblica*, Wittenbergae, 1703, p. 196.
- <sup>37</sup> Buddeus, J. F., *Isagoge Historico-theologica*, Lipsiae, 1730, 2 vols., vol. 2, p. 1291, cf. also pp.

1296 and 1309–10.

<sup>38</sup> Seckendorf, V. L., *Ausführliche Historie des Lutherthums und de Heilsamen Reformation*, Leipzig, 1714, col. 2–9–20.

<sup>39</sup> Westcott, *ibid.* 459ff.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. footnote 27.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Luther's *Epistle Sermons*, ed. Lenker, J. N., vol. 1, p. 166ff.

<sup>42</sup> Chemnitz *ibid.*, 469–471.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 392–393.

<sup>44</sup> Philippi, F. A., *Kirchliche Glaubenslehre*, Stuttgart, 1854, vol. 1, p. 108.

<sup>45</sup> Baier *ibid.*, 144.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, 142.

<sup>47</sup> Quenstedt *ibid.*, 89.

<sup>48</sup> Preus, R., *The Inspiration of Scripture*, Edinburgh, 1955, p. 108–109.

<sup>49</sup> Schmid, *ibid.*, 87.

<sup>50</sup> Preus, *ibid.*, 104–105.



# GRAMMARIAN'S CORNER

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In the previous “Corner” on Participles (Fall, 2009) we spoke to the matter of time and participles and we said that the key was “focus,” specifically, in the case of a *present participle*, *focus upon the connection between the action of the participle and the doer of that action*, and in the case of an *aorist participle*, *focus upon the activity conveyed by the participle itself, not its connection to the doer of the activity*. We then turned our attention chiefly to the present participle and discovered that the focus upon connection allowed us to develop an overall understanding of the time relationship between it and the main or leading verb of a sentence. In this Grammarian’s Corner we turn, to the aorist participle.

An aorist participle carries with it a focus upon action (as do all aorist forms), specifically, the action conveyed by the verbal form of the participle, which action is subordinate but related to the action of a main/leading verb. What the relationship between the verbal activity conveyed by the subordinate aorist participle and the activity of the main/leading verb actually is, however, is no small problem. This can be seen in examples three and four from the previous installment:

### Aorist Participles

3. Acts 1:8: ἀλλὰ λήψεσθε δύναμιν ἐπελθόντος τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς (But you will receive power, after [?] the Holy Spirit comes/has come upon you ... )

4. Acts 25:13: ... Ἀγρίππας ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ Βερνίκη κατήντησαν εἰς Καισάρειαν ἀσπασάμενοι τὸν Φῆστον. (... Agrippa the King and Bernice arrived at Caesarea, after [?] they had greeted Festus.)

Note the hypothetical translations I have placed with each of these texts. In #3, does temporal force, and action *preceding* the action of the main/leading verb really give the best sense? In that case, the reception of power would happen *after* the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples! #4 is an even more curious example, if temporal force and action preceding the action of the main/leading verb are to be applied. Did the king and queen arrive in Caesarea *after* they had issued greetings to Festus? That is unlikely. In #3, the “force” of the participle is probably *identical* to the action of the main/leading verb (“*by* the Holy Spirit coming upon you), while the “force” of #4 seems to be simply an additional activity (“arrived ... [and] *greeted*”). But what does that do to the relationship *in time* between each participle and its main/leading verb, which is our specific concern in this column? The answer is both simple and complex, viz., the **time** relationship between the subordinate action focused upon by an aorist participle and the action of the main/leading verb **can only be determined from context**; it cannot be determined by the fact that the participle is in the so-called “aorist tense.” In effect, a sentence con-

taining an aorist participle seems to “say”: “There is a subordinate act in some relationship to the action of the main/leading verb, and in some relationship in terms of time. You must determine what that relationship is, based upon the context.” Thus, in #3 above, the time of the participle is *coterminous* with the action of the main/leading verb (because the actions are identical). In #4 the time of the participle is *subsequent* to that of the main/leading verb, because it conveys an additional activity to that of the main/leading verb. Put another way: the aorist participle says: “Here is an(other) activity—I am bringing that into focus—related to the main/leading verb but subordinate to it. You figure out how it is related, also with regard to time.”

Why, then, does it seem that the “cheap, quick, and dirty” explanation of an aorist participle’s time relationship to the main/leading verb, i.e., that it conveys action **preceding** the main/leading verb, so often holds? Probably simply from the logic of the cases. Take the following verse from Matthew 2 as a typical example:

Matthew 2:11: καὶ ἐλθόντες εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν εἶδον τὸ παιδίον μετὰ Μαρίας τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ πεσόντες προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ καὶ ἀνοίξαντες τοὺς θησαυροὺς αὐτῶν προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ δῶρα, χρυσὸν καὶ λίβανον καὶ σμύρναν.

Literally, the sentence says that there is an activity of coming which is associated with and subordinate to seeing, then an activity of falling down associated with and subordinate to worshipping, followed by an activity of opening associated with and subordinated to bringing to/presenting. Logically, then, the Magi enter before they see, prostrate themselves before they worship, and open treasure boxes before they present gifts—which gives rise to the “cheap, quick, and dirty” understanding that is so common.

But there are the other examples, such as the two from Acts above, that are not “cheap, quick, and dirty,” which is why a discussion ensues. In fact, as can be seen in these examples, problems generally arise when aorist participles **follow** the main/leading verbs in the physical syntax of the sentence. But it is those examples that do “probe” the rule, and it is for this reason that a more satisfactory understanding—such as we are suggesting—must be developed.

We close with several more aorist participles whose actions are very likely not prior to the actions of their leading verbs in time. Enjoy.

1 Thessalonians 1:6: Καὶ ὑμεῖς μιμηταὶ ἡμῶν ἐγενήθητε καὶ τοῦ κυρίου, δεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ μετὰ χαρᾶς πνεύματος ἁγίου.

Acts 16:23: πολλές τε ἐπιθέντες αὐτοῖς πληγὰς ἔβαλον εἰς φυλακὴν παραγγείλαντες τῷ δεσμοφύλακι ἀσφαλῶς τῆρειν αὐτούς.

Acts 23:30: μηνυθείσης δέ μοι ἐπιβουλῆς εἰς τὸν ἄνδρα ... ἔπεμψα πρὸς σὲ παραγγείλας καὶ τοῖς κατηγοροῖς λέγειν τὰ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐπὶ σοῦ.

James W. Voelz

# HOMILETICAL HELPS

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### Easter 6 • Acts 16:6–15 • May 9, 2010

*Submitted below is a full manuscript of a sermon delivered in the chapel service at Concordia Seminary on April 30, 2010, three days after the spring assignment service (“Call Day”). The reader has permission to utilize any useful aspects of this manuscript in crafting his own sermon based on this text. This manuscript reflects the conditions at Concordia Seminary following Call Day, and so the reader will need to make adaptations to his setting of ministry.*

Here we are three days after *the* day—not the Day of Yahweh, but close—Call Day! On that day the assignments of calls to our seminary candidates were announced. Graduating seminarians discovered where they will begin their pastoral and deaconal ministries—in urban settings and rural settings, out on the open plains and in the mountain foothills, at small congregations and in megachurches. The variety of places of ministry and types of congregations to which they are sent is dazzling!

However, I expect that there are some who received calls on Tuesday who do not wish to go where they have been assigned. They are disappointed with their assignments. Not only have their expectations been missed, but their dreams have been dashed. Perhaps they even question that this is where God wants them to be, that this call reflects *God’s* call. They say, “This certainly isn’t the place that I want to go to! Could it really be the place where *God* wants me to be?”

In the account recorded in our text for today, Paul could have been asking the same question: “Is this where God wants me to be?” He certainly ended up at a place that he originally wasn’t planning to be. Paul and his companions, Silas and Timothy, are traveling in what is now Turkey. Their intention, according to Acts (15:36, 16:1), is to go to the churches which Paul had planted in a previous journey, check on them, strengthen them, and share with them the decision of the Jerusalem council. Paul revisits the churches in Derbe and Lystra which he had planted (16:1), but then God redirects his plans. Acts 16:6–7 read: “And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.” We don’t know how the Spirit restrained them—whether it was through a vision or prophetic voice, or simply by circumstantial barriers. The point is that where God sent them is *not* where they expected to go; what God called them to do was *not* what they had planned. Apparently they had expected to go to Asia and Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit said no. What they wanted was overridden by what God wanted. And so the Spirit sent them to a place which they had never expected to go—to Macedonia, to a whole new continent, to Europe!

We also often have our plans of what we think should happen to us. We have our designs on where we should go and where we should live. That includes our first assignment in ministry. One of my roles here at the seminary is to assist with the placement process. I interview candidates and their wives about where they would like to be placed and what areas of ministry they would like to specialize in. Usually the couples that I interview are quite specific about their preferred location and type of ministry. It's okay to have preferences and to communicate them. A problem arises, however, when people expect to have all their preferences met!

This is because, although we have plans about where we will go to carry out ministry, life frequently does not go as we plan. Someone has observed: "Life is what happens while making other plans." God's plan and his designs upon our lives are often not what we want or hope for. Another sage has said: "Man proposes, but God disposes." What we propose to be our path in life may not be what God disposes to happen.

So what do we do when God takes us along another pathway upon which we had not planned to travel? Often we become resentful and bitter. We think: "How could this have happened? How could my hopes be so shattered?" We even become angry with and resentful of God. We resent that he hasn't given us our heart's desire, especially since we've given ourselves to do his ministry. Doesn't the dedication of our lives to his service earn us some right to have our preferences met? Shouldn't God comply with my design for my life? We begrudge God when he fails to give us the assignment we had hoped for.

But God is not our celestial social secretary, arranging the circumstances of our lives as we direct him. We can't just dictate to him our future and expect him to comply. To do so is nothing less than idolatry! To do so is nothing less than exalting ourselves over the true God! To do so is to insist upon God: "Not thy will, but mine be done!" Such presumption by us deserves only judgment from God.

"Man proposes, but God disposes." God disposes his will upon us even when it conflicts with our will. But the good news is that God's will, as Luther affirms, is "good and gracious" (Explanation to the Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer). God disposes upon us his goodness. God disposes upon us his grace! That grace comes, first of all, as forgiveness to those who repent of their sinful idolatry. That grace comes to us because of the one who in the garden prayed, "Thy will, O God, not mine, be done." That grace comes to us because of the Servant of the Lord who submitted to the will of the Lord to crush him. Indeed, he was crushed by the weight of the judgment upon our rebellious idolatry. He went to the place where we should go—to hell itself. Talk about an unpreferred assignment! But there Christ also declared his victory over sin, a victory which he now shares with us in this Eastertide and forevermore!

Yet God disposes his grace upon us in another way. That is by blessing us wherever he sends us, even if it is to where we don't wish to go. That's what happened to Paul and his companions as described in Acts 16. God closed doors in Asia and opened a door into Europe. Paul crossed the Hellespont and went to Philippi in Macedonia. There the Holy Spirit used Paul as a messenger to bring the Gospel to people who had never heard it before. First Lydia was converted, then her household, then a jailer in Philippi. And then, over centuries, much of the continent of Europe was converted! And from Europe the Gospel mission spread throughout the world. It all happened because Paul went not to where he wanted to go, but to where God sent him. As Campbell Morgan observes: "That invasion of Europe was not in the mind of Paul, but it was evidently in the mind of the Spirit." [Quoted in John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of Acts*, 1990, p. 258].

God disposes his grace to bless us where he sends us, and also to use us to bring his blessing to others. Throughout the history of missions, God has been redirecting the paths of his people, sending them where they had not planned to go, and using them greatly in these unintended places. For example, Carey sought to go to Polynesia to bring the Gospel message, but God redirected his path to India. Livingstone intended to do mission work in China, but God redirected him to Africa. Judson planned to carry out ministry in India, but God brought him to Burma instead [from Stott, p. 261]. In each of these cases, God used these men to carry out his will in powerful ways, bringing the life-giving Gospel to myriads of people. But this happened in places and among people these men initially did not expect to visit or intend to live among.

And so it is with you today. You may have hoped to be placed in North Dallas, but God has sent you to North Dakota instead. This is where God wants you to be! You expected to be placed near your wife's family, but instead you have been assigned to serve God's family hundreds of miles away. This is where God is sending you! You planned to minister in a prosperous suburban context, but your call is to an economically challenged urban area. This is God's will for you! Nevertheless, remember that it is God's good and gracious will for you. For wherever he is sending you his grace will sustain you. And wherever he sends you, his grace will be delivered through you. You will be the conduit of his grace to them.

"Man proposes, but God disposes." He has disposed for you not only to answer his call but also to receive and dispense his grace. Go with joy to where he sends you to be.

David Peter

### With One Accord

As the Eleven returned from the Ascension of Jesus, Luke tells us that they were of “one accord” (v. 14). The union was found within the context of praying together with others who were followers of Jesus. In this interim period between the Ascension and Pentecost, Peter addresses the larger group of Jesus’s followers. The purpose of his address is to encourage the selection of a replacement for Judas Iscariot, who had ceased to be of “one accord” with Jesus through his act of betrayal and subsequent death. The fracture in the unity among the disciples created a vacancy among the Twelve, which Peter argued should be filled. Peter’s argument drew upon Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8 to support the assertion that Judas should be replaced, so that the Eleven were once again the Twelve.

Replacing Judas emphasized the importance of the unity among the believers and followers of Jesus, but even more so among the Eleven. As Peter lays out the argument for replacing Judas he also identifies the qualifications necessary of a worthy candidate. A qualified candidate to fill the vacancy would have to be someone who was present along with the disciples for all of the events of Jesus’s public ministry from the time of his baptism until the Ascension. In particular this candidate would need to have been a witness, along with the Eleven, of the Resurrection. Unity in belief with the Apostles was not sufficient; the candidate had to have been in every way connected to Jesus’ public ministry as the Eleven had been, if the candidate was to be added to their number. Two candidates were put forward: Joseph called Barsabbas and Matthias (v. 23).

The text provides little information about either candidate, beyond the fact that they met the criteria established. Clearly, they were of “one accord” with the larger group of Jesus’s followers, and more specifically they had been ongoing witnesses of Jesus’s public ministry and his resurrection. No particular distinguishing characteristics are discussed and thus the text suggests that either candidate would have been a suitable replacement for the Betrayer. Gathered together in unity, the group called upon the Lord to demonstrate which candidate should be selected, through the process of casting a lot. The selection process resulted in the lot falling to Matthias, and he became united with the Eleven as the Twelfth Apostle.

The selection process utilized to replace Judas, the candidate selected, and the restoration of the Apostolic Twelve serve to underscore the unity of the followers of Jesus gathered in “one accord.” The text provides the opportunity to become burdened with the details of the process, a discussion of whether it was proper for Peter and the others to take the task of replacing Judas upon themselves, or even of why the lot fell to Matthias and not Joseph. These details, while interesting for study and not entirely unimportant, should not be the primary focus of the proclamation of the text; rather, the unity among the followers of Jesus in the earliest

days of the formation of the Church should be the theme and focus. Even before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the members of the early church were united in Christ and the proclamation of his resurrection, of which they were witnesses. The cost of separating oneself from this bond of unity is referenced in the discussion of Judas in verse 25.

The unity of the Apostles, in particular, and that of all of the followers of Jesus referenced in the text, provides the opportunity to focus upon the unity of the Church gathered in prayer and worship around the Word and the Sacraments. The unity experienced by those in the text described of being of “one accord” is the same unity that is shared by those who together confess their sins, receive Christ’s Holy Absolution and his gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. The Apostolic Twelve have passed down their first hand account of Jesus’s public ministry and his resurrection, and in faith we have received the blessings of being united with Christ in “one accord” with the Apostles and all the faithful.

### **Suggested Outline**

- I. The Early Church—“Of One Accord”
- II. Self -Exclusion from Unity—Sinful Separation.
- III. Unity Restored—United with Christ.

Paul Philp

## **Pentecost Sunday • Genesis 11:1–9 • May 23, 2010**

### **Textual Notes**

Genesis 1:1 through Genesis 11:1–9 has been referred to as “primeval history.”

According to the Hebrew, Genesis 11:1–9 forms a textual unit.

The text refers to the time after the Flood when “the whole world had one language and the same words” (ESV).

After the Flood, God (Elohiym) had instructed Noah and his sons (Gn 9:1), “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”

The people in the text have been referred to as “earthlings,” “humankind,” “descendants of Adam,” and “Adamites.”

The divine name YHWH appears five times in this passage: 11:5, 11:6, 11:8, 11:9 (2x). Moses understands that YHWH was the covenant God already in the days prior to Abram/Abraham. YHWH was in control of the destinies of mankind.

The Hebrew verb *banab* (build) (v. 5) is in the perfect tense and should ordinarily be translated “had built” (ESV) or “built.” This gives rise to the suggestion that the reason YHWH “came down” was that in the eyes of YHWH the effort of

the “earthlings” was minuscule and emphasized the “smallness” of the project.

“Word plays” in the Hebrew text include: “brick bricks;” Babylon, “city of god(s),” becomes “Babel,” “city of confusion.”

Verses 1–4 of our text indicate the “earthlings” actions and motive

Verse 5 introduces YHWH as the dominant factor.

Verses 6–9 indicate YHWH’s reaction and action.

The text provides the biblical basis for understanding how all the world’s languages and the divisions of people came to be.

Humankind’s attempts to establish one universal language continue to fail.

The Holy Spirit established the one universal language—the language of faith—based on God’s forgiveness and love as evidenced through Jesus Christ (his incarnation, perfect substitutionary life, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and anticipated return in glory).

### **Liturgical Context**

In its context in the Lessons for Series C, Pentecost Sunday, Genesis 11:1–9 provides the backdrop for the account of the first Christian Pentecost reported in Acts 2:1–21. YHWH is in control of the situation. The “earthlings”/“humankind”/the descendants of Adam and Noah are described as acting contrary to the express will of YHWH. YHWH confuses the language/speech of the people. The people are scattered.

Acts 2:1–21 reports the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which results in people of various ethnic backgrounds understanding in their own language the preaching of the Apostles.

### **Suggested Outline**

**Earthlings Propose** They decide to make use of current technology.

**Earthlings Act** They “brick bricks” and select “bitumen”/“tar” for mortar.

**Earthlings Propose** They decide to use the building materials.

**Earthlings Act** They build a city and a tower.

**Motive** They do not want to be scattered.

**YHWH Observes** YHWH comes down.

**YHWH Acts** YHWH confuses their ability to understand one another.

**Purpose** To return them to his original plan.

## **The Persons of the Trinity Propose**

The Father determined to save people from their sins through his Son.

Jesus Christ determined to send the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit desires to save people through the Means of Grace—the Word of God and the Sacraments.

### **Purpose**

To return people to God's original plan at the time of Creation.

## **The Holy Spirit Acts**

### **Result**

The Word of God proclaimed by the followers of Jesus Christ becomes the one universal language of faith (Law/Gospel) that enables people to call on the name of the Lord in anticipation of “the Lord's great and glorious day.”

Arthur F. Graudin

## **Holy Trinity • Proverbs 8:1–4, 22–31 • May 30, 2010**

This Sunday provides an opportunity to highlight one of the most significant events within the history of the church. By the fourth century, the church had found itself with a conflict between its monotheistic principle (the oneness of God) and its Christocentric principle (the deity of the Son). Many argued that the oneness of God could not be compromised and so proposals like adoptionism and modalism either subordinated the Son or denied his distinct personhood. The Nicene Creed instead insisted that the Christocentric principle (deity of the Son) could not be compromised. And so the “oneness” of God had to be defined so as to include the Son and later the Spirit.

Proverbs 8 is famous because it lay at the heart of the controversy over the deity of Christ that culminated in the Nicene Creed. Nearly everyone in the early church understood this passage to be about Christ. Arius argued that the Son did not exist at one time. Instead, he came into existence at the beginning of creation. The Father made him as his first creature. This enabled Arius to affirm (against the Sabellians) that the Son truly suffered on the cross since everyone agreed that God cannot suffer. Creatures, however, can suffer. Arius also argued since the Son was the first and most powerful of all God's creatures the Son could save us. But in the end, he was still a creature.

## To Confess the Trinity is to Confess Christ

### Introduction

Many people see everything in either spiritual or material terms. Those things that are spiritual tend to be regarded as superior to those things that are material. But that is not how the Bible views life. The Old Testament sees everything through the two lenses of creator and creature. There is the creator and there are creatures. This divide between the creator and the creature lay at the heart of the debate in the fourth century. Was the Son of God our creator or was he a creature like us? And how does that impact our salvation?

- I. What makes Jesus God?
  - A. People often think that what makes God God is that he is the opposite of us. In other words, we are finite so God is finite. We are limited in power and knowledge and so God must be unlimited in power and knowledge. You get the idea. But that is not the primary way in which the Bible describes God. God is the one who created everything that exists. If one did not create everything that exists, then that one is not God. It's that simple.
  - B. The early church identified this text about Wisdom as speaking about the Son of God. And for good reason. Paul does it in 1 Corinthians 1:18–31 and Colossians 2:2–C. Verses 22–26, which speak of Wisdom as existing before the creation of the world, find expression in John 1:1–2 and Revelation 22:13. Verses 27–31, which speak of Wisdom's role in creation find clear reference to Christ in John 1:3–5; Colossians 1:15–20.
- II. What's at Stake?
  - A. In Jesus Christ do we come face to face with God and his salvation or not? If Jesus were anything other than God, for example, a creature as Arius proposed, then we cannot say in truth that God himself saves us. He is not limited by creation or constrained by anything within creation. The Son of God became a human being in order to die for us “and our salvation.”
  - B. The Nicene Creed confessed the deity of the Son by saying that “being begotten” does not mean create. It denotes a certain kind of relationship to the Father. By confessing that he is God in the same way as the Father is God, the church confessed salvation in Christ. Thus the church confessed the Trinity in order to confess who Jesus is and why he matters.

## Conclusion.

Christianity redefined monotheism in a way that included the Son and the Spirit. For this reason, the other two great monotheistic religions of the world (Judaism and Islam) do not regard Christians as monotheists. Christianity could not do otherwise. At stake was the identity and significance of Christ.

Charles Arand

## Proper 5 • 1 Kings 17:17–24 • June 6, 2010

A question I want to ask you: *Does it matter to you if this story is true or not?* I don't mean the question as a test of your orthodoxy. It is not a, *Do you believe the Bible is true or a bunch of fables?* type question. I don't mean it as the kind of question you can answer right or wrong and go your way ... *unchanged*.

When I ask, *Does it matter to you?* It is a *Does it matter to you what the doctor tells you after she looks at the x-rays* type question? *Does it matter to you what the woman you love will answer you?* type question. It is a *Is my son or daughter going to be okay?* kind of *matter* ... A churning stomach *matter!* A sweaty palms *matter!* Does the truth of the story *matter* in that way to you?

For most of you, probably not. (And some of you may be thinking—smugly—“what do you mean by ‘true’? ‘True’ in what way?”) But that's only because you aren't holding a dead child in your arms like this widow from Zarapheth. In the story, truth came down from its lofty abstractions and fell into the widow's arms. Truth bore into her heart as killing guilt—condemning her as an accomplice in his death.

Now, that might not matter to you. (It's just a story, right?) But that's because you are able (for now) to deny the truth that this woman could not.

It is the most brutal of truths that rarely shows its face. To look full in the face all the time at the terror would consume us, and so we push it into the background and by and large remain oblivious to it in our daily lives. Psychoanalyst Gregory Zilboorg says it this way: “A man will say, of course, that he knows he will die some day, but he does not really care. He is having a good time with living and he does not think about death and does not care to bother about it—but this is purely intellectual, verbal admission. The affect of fear is repressed.”<sup>1</sup>

William James says the same thing: “Let sanguine healthy-mindedness do its best with its strange power of living in the moment and *ignoring* and *forgetting*, still the evil background is really there to be thought of *and the skull will grin in at the banquet*” (italics added).<sup>2</sup>

In the story, the grinning skull demanded a seat at the widow's table. She no longer could live the illusion of immortality. The terrifying truth had shattered it. If

you have been given ears to hear, Death as *your truth* shows its face in this story.

If the story matters to you, notice that Elijah does not minister to this woman by repressing the truth, or by telling her that everything will be okay, i.e. “God is watching over you” and so on. He said: “Give me your son.” And he stretched himself three times over the body and asked God to raise him. AND GOD LISTENED! Then Elijah gave the boy back to his mother and said: “Look, your son’s alive.” Just like that!

*Can God do that? Will God do that? Is there another Elijah—a prophet who has God’s ear? Can I find him? Can he do that for me? Can it happen again?* When the truth has shattered *your* illusions, when the skull hangs there grinning at *you*, then the *truth* of this story *matters*. We all know deep down that the only solution for the ever-present fear of death is *resurrection*.

Therapy, psychoanalysis, ignoring, forgetting, won’t really get you anywhere. The only rescue from death is being raised from it. The only true comfort for this widow was just what Elijah did—he gave her dead son back alive!

One reason we keep repeating this story and others like it is to bring the possibility to your imagination. We tell it, so that in our grief and longing we imagine what it would be like for such a thing to happen! *Just imagine it!* Our liturgy and hymns and prayers, music and art and architecture all serve the same purpose—to confront the terror of death with the hope—the beautiful dream—of resurrection. The ultimate balm against Death’s mortal wound!

In with and under it all, of course, stands the Resurrection Story: the death of God’s own Son. And *then* ... just when all seemed lost ... his resurrection! God did a resurrection for this widow! God did a resurrection for his own Son. Is it *true*? Will it be *true* for you? Instead of the skull grinning in on the banquet, is Jesus doing the smiling, the laughing at your banquet? At THIS banquet [Holy Communion]? The questions *matter* like nothing else!

At the end of the story, the widow says kind of an odd thing. She says to Elijah: “Now I know that you are a man of God and the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth.” It’s that phrase, “the word of the Lord in your mouth is *truth*.” The woman knew truth when she saw it! Her son was dead, but now he was alive. Yea, she knew truth!

And her witness calls out to us through the ages: *The Word of the Lord in your mouth is truth*. It’s the Word of the Lord you hear in your *Baptism*: you are buried and raised with Christ. It’s the Word of the Lord you have at his *Banquet*: this is my body and blood given for you for the forgiveness of your sins! You hear it in the *Absolution*: your sins are forgiven.

Get it? The Word of the Lord is in *your* story too! The Lord has spoken to you as well. And with it is the *truth* of the resurrection. Amen.

Tim Saleska

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Ernest Becker. *The Denial of Death* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973), 17.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

### The Setting

During the season of Pentecost, the texts appointed for the third week underscore God the Holy Spirit's specific activity of convicting us of our sin, calling us to repentance and faith, and pronouncing absolution. By means of a story, prophet Nathan convicts king David of his 'affair' with his general's wife, yet absolves him as the Lord has taken away his sin (12:13). In the Gospel lesson (Lk 7:36–8:3), in a Pharisee's house our Lord forgave in no uncertain terms the *many sins* of a woman who had been leading a sinful life in a particular town. The selected verses from Galatians chapters 2 and 3 speak of God who justifies Jew and Gentile alike in Christ who in our place became a curse for our sins that we might through faith in him receive the Holy Spirit (3:14).

Read together, these very familiar texts accentuate a very familiar and an equally significant biblical theme, namely, "Sin and Grace."

### Message Analyzed

In our text, King David stands out as a type. He typifies the human predicament Christians know as sin with all its predictable dimensions and consequences. Coveting is sin, and it includes craving to claiming as his own another man's wife. With the intention of making Uriah's wife his own, David plotted to kill Uriah, his own personal body guard, by strategically placing him in harms way in the battlefield. David in every way tries hard to cover up his crime. Nevertheless, sin's rippling effect visits David with a vengeance in his relationship with God and fellow human beings as is clearly evident in this account. Once convicted, David confesses that he has sinned against the Lord (v.13). He had made a mockery of himself [and God] among the public. In fact, by disobeying what appears to be one commandment, David had become guilty of breaking all commandments. This sin would prick David's own conscience and cost his child its life. Later, his son Absalom would lie with David's own concubines in public places in the sight of all Israel (16:22). How much more shame could be brought to a father by his own son?

Apparently the king's scandalous "affair" with Bathsheba is familiar even to those who may not know who the biblical king David actually is. Regardless of the admonition to not let this specific sin reign over the mortal body and be its master, adultery and its cronies continue to be perhaps the most popular and the least resisted sins in our world. This sin against the sinner's own body is the most committed and the least admitted and, pitifully, the least acknowledged and the most overlooked. Neither royalty nor poverty can plead exception to this unholy rule, and neither affluence nor influence can conceal this quandary forever.

## Message Applied

If in this text king David is a ‘type’ of sin, he also points to David’s greater Son, Jesus Christ who alone can forgive sins (Lk 7:49). The ingressive intentionality of sin can never be overemphasized. Through Nathan the prophet, God’s law convicted David as sinner undeniably (v. 7). David’s own conscience, by means of the prophetic word and by his own words, pronounced judgment on him that sin, regardless of who the culprit might be, must be punished. Once convicted, David became aware that his crafty and cunning ways at justifying his actions were futile before God and people. His privileged royalty may have legitimized his actions in customary fashion before the public; but before God who sits on his throne to judge, none of it could help escape divine retribution. Yet, for David, there was nowhere to turn except to the mercy seat of God and say, “I have sinned against the Lord” (v.13).

Equally relentless and reassuring is the prophetic word that absolved David, “The Lord has taken away your sin; you shall not die” (v.13). Just as sin squashes the relationship between God and man and fabricates unsettling repercussions in the moral, social, and political living of communities, forgiveness of sin on the merits of Jesus Christ the unblemished Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world brings life and salvation to all who believe, and in his name restores all broken relationships. Where there is forgiveness, there is life and salvation.

God has kept his promise to save his people through One Man, David’s Son who is also David’s Lord. David’s bloodline would continue through Solomon whose mother had been Uriah’s wife. God’s promise remains “yes” all the time, in spite of man’s sin, in that One Man and by his death and resurrection.

Hence, the Scriptural warrant stays put that just as by one man’s disobedience sin became the destiny of all, by One Man’s obedience God has imputed his righteousness to all who believe in him; Jew and Gentile, man and woman, slave and free. In that One Man, God has broken down the walls of hostility and brought near those who had been once far off. Especially during this season of the Pentecost, empowered by the Holy Spirit, the gospel of the kingdom will be preached as a testimony to all people. After all, the grace of God is convicting, affirming, and comforting for all who believe that Christ Jesus came to the world to save sinners.

As a Qumran document has stated, “When I thought of my guilty deeds, I said in my sins, ‘I am lost.’ But then when I remembered the strength of your hand and the *fullness of your grace*, I rose again and stood upright ... for you will pardon iniquity and you will purify man of sin through your justification.”<sup>21</sup>

Victor Raj

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 266.

## Proper 7 • Isaiah 65:1–9 • June 20, 2010

Let's be honest. Given the wondrous epistle reading from Galatians 3 ("But now that faith has come ... There is no longer Jew or Greek ... But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son ... So you are no longer a slave but a child ...") and the multifaceted account of the Gerasene demoniac in Luke 8, this reading from Isaiah might take third place on the preacher's hit list. Yet it has some striking features. Are there prophetic themes here that might resonate in the rhetorical heights of Paul and the amazing act of the Christ?

We should begin by acknowledging that, beginning in Isaiah 65, God answers the people's cry out of the depths in 63:7–64:12. "There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity" (64:7). That's the context. God's answer forms the grand finale of the book of Isaiah, a finale that anticipates the entire future of God's reign (65:17, 66:22–23).

Yet, verse 1 opens with irony. "I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask," God says, "to be found by those who did not seek me." God answers those who have been seeking him—the children of Abraham (64:16) and Moses (63:11)—by opening himself to those who do *not* seek him. This irony is not lost on Paul, who cites this text in Romans 10 as evidence that God has opened salvation to the Gentiles through faith in Christ (Rom 10:20). Matter of fact, there is deep resonance between this section of Romans 10—particularly vv. 10–12, 17–21—and today's Galatians 3 pericope.

God extending an invitation beyond his chosen people is a Lukan theme as well. The opening verses of Isaiah 65 are reminiscent of the great feast parable in Luke 14:15–24: "... Then the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled'" (Lk 14:23). Of course, it almost goes without saying that today's Luke 8 pericope begins with Jesus arriving "at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee" to a "hillside where a large herd of swine was feeding" (8:26, 32; cf. Is 65:4). In other words, Gentile country.

Isaiah 65:4 is significant in light of Luke 8 for another reason too. God is addressing those "who sit inside tombs, and spend the night in secret places." Sound like anyone else we know (cf. Lk 8:27)? Interestingly enough, most of the "abominable things" that God cites in Isaiah 65 connote pagan divination, bordering on the demonic. Again, sound familiar (cf. Lk 8:29–30)?

There is an intense law-Gospel dialectic at work in Isaiah 65, between a God who has "held out my hands all day long" (v. 2) and a people whom God "will indeed repay into their laps their iniquities" (vv. 6–7). Nevertheless, God's loving kindness has the final word: "As the wine is found in the cluster, and they say, 'Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it,' so I will do for my servants' sake,

and not destroy them all” (v. 8). This word of promise is for both Jew and Gentile (v. 9). And again, the text reverberates in Luke, in the parable of the fig tree (Lk 13:6–9).

In the end, Isaiah 65 goes a long way in helping us understand Jesus’ curious instructions to the healed Gerasene man. We all can identify with his impassioned plea to stay with his healer. Who wouldn’t want to soak up every second at the feet of the Christ? We can almost hear the disciples: “Please, Lord, let the man come with us. There is nothing for him here.”

But no: “Return to your home,” Jesus says, “and declare how much God has done for you” (Lk 8:39). Stay to proclaim good news to those who haven’t heard? Sure. But more importantly—as Isaiah 65 would remind us—stay because God is just as much at work in the Gerasenes as in Galilee. Sometimes even more so. “Bloom where you are planted,” the old cliché goes. Because, wherever that happens to be, as grapes become wine, “there is a blessing in it.”

Travis J. Scholl

## Proper 8 • 1 Kings 19:9b–21 • June 27, 2010

### Notes on the pericope

This pericope presents Elijah’s encounter with Yahweh on Mount Horeb and his call of Elisha. Recently Elijah had been on another mountain, Carmel, where he challenged the prophets of Baal and demonstrated the truth about Yahweh (1 Kg 18). This infuriates Jezebel, so he runs for his life. Once he makes it to the desert, however, Elijah crawls under a tree and prays not for deliverance but for death. But just as God had sustained him once with ravens and again through the widow of Zarephath, now he sends an angel to feed him and send him on his way to Horeb, the mountain of God (19:1–8).

Once he arrives, the greeting is pointed. The Word of Yahweh comes to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” The first half of verse 9 reads: “And he entered *there* a cave and lodged *there*.” But God wants to know, “What are you doing *here*, Elijah?” The situation and these adverbs suggest that we also could infer this: “and not *where you are supposed to be*.” (Later developments reinforce this suggestion.) Elijah explains that he has been very zealous for Yahweh; that of the prophets he alone remains alive; and that the people of Israel seek to kill him. But the response is simply the instruction to go and stand before Yahweh himself. As Yahweh approaches, the wind breaks rocks, the earth shakes, and a fire rages. But God was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire. We might say that these come “before Yahweh,” that is, they signal his advent. But when Yahweh himself arrives, he arrives in *quietness* (v. 12). Elijah recognizes this and covers his face before God.

Readers have not agreed about this quietness (*qol dammah daqah*), as a look at English translations show. The KJV and RSV render this as “a still small voice,” while the NIV says “a gentle whisper,” the ESV “the sound of a low whisper,” and the NASB “a sound of a gentle blowing.” The NRSV, however, suggests a more dramatic or awesome encounter: “a sound of sheer silence.” I prefer this rendering, but the exact English words chosen are less important than the mood conveyed. However you render this phrase, the words must fit the context. Walter Brueggemann helpfully explains why and how: “In the end, it is evident that the phrase is beyond us. Care must be taken that one does not take the phrase out of context; for, in context, it is prelude to a demanding confrontation. It is not the offer of intimate solace, for such an offer would seem incongruous to both parties in the narrative” (from *1 & 2 Kings*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary [Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2000], 236).

“Demanding confrontation” summarizes well what happens on the mountain. In person, Yahweh says: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” As I suggested earlier, we can well imagine what is left unsaid: “and not where you are supposed to be.” The prophet repeats himself to God. Yahweh, however, offers neither comfort nor support. He orders Elijah to return and get to work: “Go back whence you came and go to the Desert of Damascus,” Yahweh tells him. “And when you get there, do this: anoint Hazael king over Aram; anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel; and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat as your successor. Jehu will kill anyone who escapes the sword of Hazael, and Elisha any who escapes Jehu.” Then Yahweh adds: “I have kept seven thousand in Israel who have not bowed down to Baal or kissed him.” God has called Elijah, and God expects Elijah to heed his call. It doesn’t matter to God that prophets throughout the country have been killed and that his life is in danger, and so it shouldn’t matter to Elijah. “Get back and get going,” is the Word of the Lord. “Here are a few things to take care of when you get there...”

The story continues with Elijah calling Elisha. He throws his cloak on Elisha as he is plowing. Elisha leaves the oxen behind, runs after Elijah, and tells him says that he will follow right after he says farewell to his parents. Elijah makes him reconsider. “Go back; what did I just do to you?” Elisha gets the point: he goes back to the oxen, sacrifices them, cooks a nice meal for the people, and goes along with Elijah. As for the other instructions to Elijah, it is Elisha who declares to Hazael that he would be king over Syria (2 Kgs 8) and who sends a prophet to anoint Jehu king over Israel (2 Kgs 9).

### Notes for preaching

This passage probably was selected because its final verses (19–21) parallel the appointed Gospel for the day (Lk 9:51–62, especially vv. 57–62). The lectionary identifies Elijah as a type of Christ in his calling of Elisha and in his response to Elisha’s wish to bid farewell to his parents before departing.

In this way the lectionary suggests a “topical” sermon about the nature and some implications of discipleship. Both lessons point to the discipleship as utter devotion and complete confidence, and to the call to discipleship as a matter of urgency. Such a sermon might begin by asserting that the Old Testament lesson and the Gospel appointed for today both have something definite to teach about what it means to be a disciple. Then the sermon might make the call of Elisha the point of departure and make the calling of disciples and in the teachings about discipleship in the Gospels as its fulfillment. The Gospel lesson gives one instance; Luke’s Gospel also reflects these features in the calling of the disciples, who left everything and followed Jesus (4:11; 4:28); in his teachings about the “cost of discipleship” (see especially 8:23–26 and 14:25–33); in the episode with the rich ruler (18:18–30); and in the parable of the wedding banquet (14:15–24). Assuming a sermon before a Christian congregation, the *call* to follow Jesus will have happened already. It would make sense, however, to repeat the promises for disciples; to recall God’s faithfulness in keeping his promises; and to urge ongoing faithfulness, especially, as our lessons suggest, in view of such temptations as the affections of family and friends and the security that money, possessions, and income provide.

Clearly, a sermon that deals with entire pericope would have to move along different lines. Such a sermon would recognize Yahweh as the central figure and his character and plan as basic motifs.

To make it clear why you would stress some things and not others, and also to avoid the impression that you are treating the Scriptures merely as a source of illustrations for doctrinal and ethical instruction, the sermon first might show how this pericope fits into the Scriptures’ account of God and his dealings with his chosen people, before it tries to show how it bears on today’s hearers and their lives. Yahweh’s instructions to Elijah make it clear he is in control of the future of Israel. He shows that the unfaithfulness and disobedience of Ahab, Jezebel, and [most of the nation] matter greatly to him. He lets Elijah know that he has the situation well in hand and tells him how he plans to address it. He shows Elijah his own part in the plan. Moreover, his abrupt dealings with Elijah, who has fled Israel and feared for his life, suggest that Elijah has been a man “of little faith,” as Jesus might have said. He should have known better than to run, and he now should know that God expects him to get back to his responsibilities right away.

Hearers in the United States are in a significantly different situation than Elijah’s. He was a prophet, called to speak to the Northern Kingdom and threatened by the queen. In his distress he gets an audience with God. The office, the situation, the persecution, and the recourse of Elijah make him different than any of us today.

But it still matters whether God is in control, what he plans to do, and how God’s people should face their situation. Why? Because God has yet to fulfill his

promise to establish his reign. As God's people wait, we find all kinds of unfaithfulness and disobedience, even among those who identify with Jesus Christ and his Church. Should we give up? Should we think our lives don't matter? Should we wonder what God is up to? No. Just as God appointed Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha to take care of things, so he has appointed Jesus as Lord to deal with all things. God has matters well in hand. His plan is unfolding in a way that may seem excruciatingly slow, but Christians should trust in God. From God's dealings with Elijah, we find that this means believing in his promises, especially in the face of threats and troubles, and living according to the offices to which called each of us.

Joel P. Okamoto

## Proper 9 • Isaiah 66:10–14 • July 4, 2010

### Introduction

Several challenges face the preacher of this text: one challenge is how best to understand this text in its literary and historical context where it speaks to the restoration of Israel from captivity and how—if at all—this message then relates to our hearers today. Other challenges stem from this text using the imagery of Jerusalem as a nursing mother: some Christians may readily make a connection from “mother Zion” to “mother Church,” but one must ask if this move is justified on the basis of this text. Yet another challenge is how the preacher might proclaim a message of God's love using the imagery of Jerusalem as a nursing mother to a contemporary American audience that may not readily identify with this image.

### The Context

Today's lesson comes in the second thematic half of Isaiah—chapters 40–66. One main concern in these chapters is Yahweh's promise to restore those exiled in the Babylonian captivity. The initial exhortation to the preacher in 40:1 is “Comfort, comfort my people!” This exhortation is recalled as we hear Yahweh's promise in 66:13: “I myself will comfort you and in Jerusalem you will be comforted” (the verb **נָחַם** is used in both 40:1 and 66:13).

A look through several Isaiah commentaries shows that there is some disagreement in seeing how the various prophetic utterances in Isaiah 66 are to be organized in relationship to one another. The Masoretic paragraphs in BHS indicate that vv. 10–11 are read together and vv. 12–14 with v. 15ff (see my outline below). Several modern commentaries suggest that vv. 7–14 are a literary unit (see also the division in ESV). Verses 7–9, if read with our text, do provide the most important immediate context: in these verses God speaks of Zion giving miraculous birth to a

son. The context indicates that this non-literal language describes the restoration of Israel from captivity. This “rebirth” of the nation then seems to be the basis for the exhortation to rejoice in v. 10.

## The Text

*Verses 10–11.* Three synonymous verbs in the imperative exhort the hearers to “rejoice with Jerusalem.” Again, if we read with vv. 7–9, the basis for this joy is that Zion/Jerusalem will give miraculous birth to this son/nation/children. Thus those who are called to rejoice are those who both “love Jerusalem and mourn over her.” These are those who, as Daniel in Daniel 9, understand why Jerusalem was punished, mourn over this, and trust in Yahweh’s promise to restore her; they maintain the true faith in the midst of the exile. *Jerusalem/Zion* is key because it is *the* central location around which the people of God based their identity: It is the capital of the Davidic kingdom and the place where the Temple was (and will be again), the place where Yahweh has put his name and where Israel is to go and present themselves to him.

In the imagery of vv. 7–10 the city is likened to a mother giving birth. The “Zion as mother” image continues in v. 11 where the hearers are promised that they will “nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast” and “slurp/drink deeply from her glorious abundance.” The hearers are both invited in v. 10 to rejoice at the birth of the son/nation/children mentioned in vv. 7–9 and promised in v. 11 that they too will nurse as children themselves. *Are the hearers supposed to see themselves as distinct from the son of v. 7 to whom Zion gives birth?* The promise of v. 11 may indicate that the hearers are perhaps identified with the children of v. 8, but there appears at least an initial distinction made between the hearers and the son of v. 7 when the hearers are invited to rejoice at the birth of Jerusalem’s son before they then are promised that they too will nurse from Jerusalem as children. The son of v. 7 is the nation of Israel and the hearers each members of this nation.

*Verses 12–14.* “For thus said Yahweh”—the initial line of v. 12 indicates that what follows will contain explanation/exposition of vv. 10–11. Verse 12a promises that peace and the glory of the nations (see Isaiah 2:2–3) will extend/flow to Jerusalem like a river/wadi. Verse 12b recalls once again the imagery of “Jerusalem as mother” in the promise that the hearers will be cared for as children by this mother. Verse 13, however, is most important in explaining what the earlier non-literal language means: the agent of this act of comforting is not Jerusalem but Yahweh: “As a man whose mother comforts him, I myself will comfort you, and you will be comforted in Jerusalem.” *Yahweh is the one who will bring about this rebirth and restoration of the nation in Jerusalem.*

The promise in v. 14a is that the hearers will see, rejoice, and thrive. Verse 14b contains a promise and threat that actually provides a good summary of the wider context of Isaiah 65:9–66:24: “The hand of Yahweh will be made

known with his servants and he will be indigent with his enemies.” The threat of punishment is then developed further beyond our text in vv. 15ff. Those who trust in Yahweh’s promise to restore his people to Jerusalem will be comforted and live; those who scoff and reject this promise will be subject to his wrath and punishment.

### Considerations for Preaching

In its original literary and historical context this text speaks to the restoration of Israel from exile. Yahweh promises that those in exile will return to Jerusalem; the faithful response to these words by those in captivity would have been to believe this promise. The narrative of Ezra-Nehemiah records the fulfillment of Yahweh’s promises when many did return and the Temple and Jerusalem were rebuilt. *Yahweh was faithful to Isaiah’s bearers and fulfilled his word to them.*

Though Yahweh’s promises are fulfilled in the return from exile, nevertheless the prayer of Nehemiah 9, Daniel’s prayer in Daniel 9, and even Zechariah’s prayer in Luke 1:67–79 indicate that the return of the exiles from Babylon did not alone represent a full restoration of Israel: David’s kingdom was not restored. Israel remained under foreign rule. The Messiah had not yet come. Peace and the glory of the nations (see 66:12a) had not flowed into Jerusalem. *And so the OT narrative itself indicates that there is still more that God will do to restore his people.*

In the NT this story picks up again with the person, life, and ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and we are now called to believe in him. As the Gospels see Isaiah 40 fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist, Jesus’s forerunner, so perhaps we can also say that the comfort promised in Isaiah 66 is also ultimately fulfilled in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. (Many would probably object to the idea that Jesus can be identified as “the son” of 66:7, but that *son* is the nation, and Jesus is by extension Israel-reduced-to-one.) Yet the disciples’ question in Acts 1:6 indicates that although repentance for the forgiveness of sins is now preached to the nations in Jesus’s name (Luke 24:47), we also still await the final restoration of the kingdom of Israel. Thus we find ourselves in a similar (though not exactly the same) situation as Israel in exile: as they awaited the return from exile, we await the restoration of all things on the last day. *In the meantime we, as they once did, live by faith in the word and promises of God.*

Since the non-literal language of 66:10–12 speaks of Yahweh’s act of comforting his exiled people—as literally expressed in second half of the simile in 66:13—I do not think that the interpreter needs to (or even can) make more of the metaphor and so force a connection between Jerusalem and the Church based on this passage. If the preacher chooses to make this move from “mother Jerusalem” to “mother Church” for *homiletic reasons*, then he should still stress that it is God the Father who gives and sustains life through the work of his Son; the Church may be his agent, but he is the cause.

In cultures where breastfeeding is simply accepted as the natural and normal means through which very young children receive their daily nourishment (duh!), the image of Jerusalem nursing Isaiah's hearers can be a very powerful image of God's sustaining comfort. In a culture where "polite society" often marginalizes this motherly activity, this image may seem bizarre and even offensive. The preacher should be aware of this if he chooses to speak at length in unpacking this image for his hearers in the pews.

David I. Lewis

## **Proper 10 • Leviticus (18:1–5); 19:9–18 • July 11, 2010**

### **A Bible Study**

**What statement is made repeatedly here to help God's people remember and take to heart what is said?**

It is "I am the Lord your God," sometimes abbreviated: "I am the Lord." It tells the people of God that they are his special possession, redeemed and governed by him.

**What does this remembrance call for, according to Leviticus 19:2 and other passages?**

God's people are to be holy, for which he makes his own being the standard.

**What is holiness?**

It refers to being set apart. God is holy because he is exalted and transcendent over all. This has a moral dimension, since it includes being set apart from sinners, in absolute purity. So God's people are to be set apart for God and consecrated to serving Him. The moral dimension of his holiness is the standard for their lives, as manifested in the examples of moral injunctions and prohibitions given in this pericope.

**How can this remembrance be a painful one?**

It will be, if considered apart from the Gospel truth, since we never satisfy all that is demanded in the commands in this text and elsewhere. Apart from the Gospel, the Law always accuses us, as the Apology says (IV, 166–7 in Tappert, also indicated on p. 148 in Kolb-Wengert). The people in the time of the Old Testament Scriptures could not gain eternal life by obeying the holy demands, as the wise among them said (e.g., Ps 65:3; 106: 6; 1 Kgs 8:46; Eccl 7:20). Nor can anyone since then, Romans 3:20.

**How can the remembrance be one that cheers and comforts?**

It will in the light of the Gospel, since then the remembrance of the holy God includes knowledge of his will that sinners be reconciled to him—and of what he has mercifully done to bring this about.

### **How is it possible for a just and holy God to declare sinners righteous?**

Some hearers in the congregation may recognize this Gospel question as one they have used in *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (No. 182 in 1991 ed.). The answer: "God declares sinners righteous for Christ's sake, that is, our sins have been imputed or charged to Christ, the Savior, and Christ's righteousness has been imputed or charged to us. 2 Corinthians 5:21." This also is part of the remembrance of our holy God: reconciliation through faith in Jesus Christ is in conformity with the demands of divine holiness. He, the holy God-man, was the only one who was perfectly obedient to the Law, and his obedience and penalties are imputed to those who trust in him. The promised atonement of the Messiah was the ultimate basis of reconciliation also for Isaiah's people (Is 53:5–6) and Abraham's (Gn 12:3; 15:6; Gal 3:6–10).

### **Why was it a helpful remembrance for the Old Testament Israel to hear God saying to them, "I am the Lord your God"?**

He was their God, because they belonged to him (Dt 7:6–7), whom they knew chiefly as their deliverer from oppression (Lv 11:45; 19:36; etc.). Taken seriously, this was remembrance fruitful in loving praise and service, consecrated to him in grateful recognition of his love shown in acts of deliverance.

### **How does the Epistle for the Day (Col 1:1–14) help us New Testament believers in Christ to use ancient Israel's remembrance?**

We have supreme deliverance through him and have been brought into the community of the holy people, or saints, and so are truly part of the Israel of God (vv. 12–13). Furthermore, we too are called to live a life worthy of (i.e., appropriate to) such a deliverer, by being fruitful in good works (v. 10). If we take this seriously, we are deeply moved to live in imitation of him and his love (Eph 5:1–2; Jn 15:12; 1 Tm 2:1–6), and in confidence and joy before the holy God (Rom 5:1)

### **Why was the remembrance in the Old Testament pericope helpful and fruitful for ancient Israel in obeying the divine commands?**

It was an encouraging remembrance of their God's promised help for living the new life—of his will to restore and edify them. The Old Testament people knew, or were reminded, that they could not flawlessly keep the commands of the Law, because of the sinful flesh (e.g., Ps 51:5; Jb 5:7). But the wise also had the knowledge that God gives help for the obedient life, seen in many prayers for him to lead, guide, open lips, incline hearts, or turn (e.g., Ps 5:8; 25:5; 31:3; 51:15; 119:3, 35–37; 1 Kgs 8:57–58). They were familiar with his gifts of renewal and the creative work of his Spirit (Ps 51:10–11).

### **Why is this remembrance helpful for the New Testament people of God?**

Believers in the days of the Messiah have still clearer and fuller revelations of their God's promises of help for the obedient life, both in Messianic prophecies (such as Ez 36:26–27 and Jer 24:7) and in disclosures of their own times (like Jn

7:38–39; 1 Cor 6:11; Gal 5:22–23; Rom 8:13–14). In these bestowals the image of God is being restored in his people (Col 3:8–10; Eph 4:24–32) to transform them, and thus the Lord himself brings about the fulfillment of the command to be holy like him.

**Can the promise of Leviticus 18:5 ever be applied by earning eternal life with God, as the lawyer in the Gospel for the day (Lk 10:25–28) thought?**

The Lord Jesus answered his question by indicating that the promise applies *if* you perfectly serve the neighbor with a whole heart. His parable showed the lawyer's (and our) failure to do so. St. Paul lamented with all his heart that his fellow Jews were wandering down this false path in their thinking (Rom 10:1–5).

**Does this mean that this well-known parable should not be used at all for commending obedience to God's Law?**

By no means! But the Law's command to help the neighbor must be understood in a proper way: *not* as one way to merit eternal life, but rather as the way of life in which it is worthy (appropriate) for the children of God to walk, as they express Christian inward delight (Rom 7:22) in what God's Law calls for.

**How is the remembrance in the Old Testament pericope productive for the holy work of helping the neighbor?**

It is also a remembrance of the relation with the neighbor which the holy God wants us to have. Whether it is the relation with the neighbor in the church as a fellow believer and servant of Jesus, or the relation with the neighbor outside the church, even the alien to the community of believers and saints, we recognize that each person is an object of his love, as each of us is in this world of sinners, for all of whom the Savior died. Each is a person with needs and problems, physical and spiritual. We are to help and avoid hurting them, as much as we can, and we should not lose sight of the Lord's desire that all share the joy that his people have (1 Tm 2:3–4).

**Can Leviticus 19:18 and 34 be misused as encouragement of a self-centered, self-gratifying approach to the religious life?**

Of course they can, and pastors and teachers should admonish against such misuse and misconceptions of what "loving yourself" might be. But on the other hand gratefulness for deliverance and empathy arising from memories of afflictions common to us and to others—are proper components of the obedience which Moses and the Lord Jesus (Mt 23:39) are calling for in the lives of God's people.

## **Suggested Outline**

### **The Fruitful Remembrance**

- I. This is a remembrance that calls for God's people to be holy.
  - A. Considered apart from the Gospel, it is a painful remembrance.

- B. But in the light of the Gospel it is a remembrance of the will of our holy God that we be reconciled to him.
- II. It is also a remembrance that is fruitful for a holy life.
  - A. It is a grateful remembrance that is fruitful in loving praise and service.
  - B. It is an encouraging remembrance of his promised help for living the new life.
  - C. It is a productive remembrance of the relation between the child of God and the neighbor.

Thomas Manteufel

### **Proper 11 • Genesis 18:1–10a (10b–14) • July 18, 2010**

#### **General approach to preparing your sermon**

- A. Start the process by praying about the subject or topic area**
- B. Select and clearly state to the audience the subject area that you plan to address.**
- C. At the point of your sermon delivery, start with an arousing statement or illustration in order to gain your audience’s attention.**
- D. For the body of the sermon there are several styles from which to choose: Topical or Textual with an illustration, application, and conclusion.**

#### **The untimely prediction**

Childbearing is a miracle. Have you ever been in a labor/delivery room? I can imagine the wait—long or short, with its exciting anticipation of that miraculous bouncing baby. The miracle of a child is still God’s great wonder to our human mind. That promised wonder has truly been exemplified through Sarah as God’s covenant to Abraham and to us all as God’s everlasting promise.

The unthinkable is happening before our very eyes. God’s timing and purposes quite often perplexes our finite human mind. The thought of Sarah at that advanced age (Gn 17:17), speaks not only to impossibility but something laughable. God’s purpose though, is characterized by its specific time reference. In Genesis 18:10, the *Layman’s Parallel Bible* places God’s return to Sarah during “spring time.” To be this specific is an indication that there is a promise which is not laughable but real and that the Lord would overcome the impediments for the sake of

fulfilling his promise. Pessimism however is one of our greatest human problems. There is a human lack of trust which by itself undermines our faith and belief in God to the extent that miracles are either trivialized or easily dismissed. The miracle of childbirth or life itself is nothing but a miracle, taken as a simple mundane thing. After you go to bed at night you wake up the following day. In my mind that constitutes a miracle.

The birth of Isaac not only represents faith and trust, it provides a double challenge and acceptance of the human family. That is Jews, Christians, and Muslims need to acknowledge that we share the same planet and so must resist the temptation of either ignoring or refusing to dialogue with each other. There is a practical proclamation piece here. Just as father Abraham is an example of faith and righteousness, so all Christians are invited or challenged to build a bridge of communication between Muslims and Christians. Jesus's birth in the Qur'an (Sura 3:45) is unique and significant. Perhaps when you and I engage them on the concept of faith it may very well lead them to the promise revealed in Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, in the covenant promise all of us, especially those who are in the house of faith, do claim our eternal inheritance in our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as spring brings new life, that miracle of new birth is the presence of our Lord in all who embrace his promise.

John Loum

## Proper 12 • Genesis 18:(17–19) 20–33 • July 25, 2010

### Introduction

The text presents two particular problems for interpreters. The first is the question of how “AD Christians” read the “BC Old Testament.” The second pertains to the whole issue of prayer in general, and intercessory prayer in particular. I will comment on the latter problem first.

It is dangerously easy to take “promises” regarding prayer out of context, even when they occur in direct discourse about the subject. James 1:6–8 is a prime example: “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” In isolation these words drive to despair, for who can banish all doubt from his mind when he prays? But verse 5 actually sets the stage, and takes away most of the difficulty: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” This is a teaching about praying to God *for wisdom*; given the character of God, I do not doubt that he will answer this prayer. So, it will be extremely important to read the

text that describes Abraham's "negotiating prayer" *in its Old Testament context*, rather than assuming too quickly that this narrative teaches about prayer in general.

In answer to the first question, I would highlight the importance of reading the OT typologically. To be sure, there are times when OT figures are exemplars, and we may *mutatis mutandis* apply truths and lessons from their lives to our own; see Hebrews 11. Nevertheless, the fundamental "move" of reading OT texts locates them in the history of salvation, and sees them in light of the one who is the anti-type and fulfillment of the entire OT. Samson, for example, is not "Joe Israelite" with whom each Christian today may identify. Rather, Samson is a deliverer of Israel, and a small (though deeply flawed) type for whom Jesus, deliverer par excellence, is the antitype.

Abraham's *uniqueness* is everywhere in the context. He will be the father of many nations (17:5); with him God first makes the covenant of circumcision (17:9–14). God *uniquely* promises a son to him and aged Sarah (17:15–21). In a *unique* way, God visits Abraham, and repeats the promise (18:1–15). In the history of God's ways in the world, Genesis 18 presents Abraham in his uniqueness as one whom, unworthy though he was, God had chosen and through whom God would work.

If this is the case, then a typological reading of this text, that finds ultimate fulfillment and meaning in Christ who is "greater than Abraham," is appropriate for Christian preaching. The task, then, is to discern the nature of Abraham's prayer, what it says about him and about the world and about God himself, and then to find a valid application in the person and work of Christ Jesus for us and for the world.

### Textual Themes

Because of Abraham's unique place in history, God makes known to him the plan to visit Sodom and Gomorrah, and to judge them in righteousness. Abraham pleads with God on behalf of the righteous in these two cities. Abraham's prayer assumes that God loves the righteous, that is, those who trust his word and keep his covenant in response. While the wicked deserve to be punished, it would not be right for punishment to fall indiscriminately upon righteous and wicked.

Remarkably, however, there is room for Abraham to plead that God's love and care for the righteous "overlap" graciously upon the wicked, so that for the sake of only fifty ... no, forty five ... indeed ... only TEN righteous ones, God will hold back his judgment. Not only does Abraham believe firmly in the justice and mercy of the God; he also clings to the mystery of divine grace whereby the guilty do not always receive what is due them. God grants his prayer and promises that if ten righteous are found, then Sodom and Gomorrah will be spared.

So, then, the significant themes of the text have to do with Abraham's knowledge of God's character, and his desire to intercede for the righteous, and for God to do what is right. This is Abraham, who is God's "friend" (2 Chr 20:7; Is

41:8; Jas 2:23) as one chosen for a crucial role in the history of God's salvation in the world. His intercession is informed, and effective.

In typological terms, Christ is the unique chosen one of God, and his intercession flows out of his perfect knowledge of the Father. Even more, Christ alone makes the Father known to men and women (Mt 11:25–27). Even more than interceding for the righteous, Christ intercedes for all, though none deserve his intercession: Peter (Lk 22:31–34) as well as those who crucified him (Lk 23:34). The unbelief and wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah serve as archetypes, but “all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory” (Rom 3). Greater still is the intercession and work of Jesus on behalf of the world. God's judgment fell upon him, so that it need not fall upon us.

This reading from Genesis 18 could lead the congregation into a renewed sense of the world's and their own fallenness. Specific application should be made, and not just to matters of sexual temptation and sin; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 reminds us that there is no distinction in God's sight between homosexual (and heterosexual!) sin and things like greed or the practice of reviling others. Even as the sermon could call all alike to humble silence before the justice of God, so even more could the good news of Jesus, one “greater than Abraham,” turn all in faith and gratitude to Christ, his atonement, his resurrection, and his intercessor before the Father.

Jeffrey A. Gibbs

## **Proper 13 • Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12–14; 2:18–26 • August 1, 2010**

### **Comments on the text**

1. Whether intended or not, there are remarkable similarities in the emphases of the readings appointed for this Sunday. The “All is vanity” message of the Old Testament reading, our text, is dramatized by the Parable of the Rich Fool in the Gospel, Luke 12: 13–21. Both readings demonstrate that “a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Lk 12:15). The rich man's construction of ever more and bigger barns turns out to be what our text describes as “a chasing after the wind” (Eccl 1:14). The question of God to the rich man, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” (Lk 12:20) echoes the observations of our text that “I must leave them [the things I have toiled for under the sun] to the one who comes after me” (Eccl 2:18) and “he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it” (Eccl 2:21). Also the Epistle, Colossians 3:1–11, cautions against “greed, which is idolatry” (Col 3:5) and urges, “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Col 3:2).

2. “All is vanity” is the theme not only of our text but also of the entire book of Ecclesiastes. Other translations use different words for “vanity” (“futility,” “emptiness,” “meaninglessness”), but we get the idea.

3. Or do we? Ogden Nash in his poem “Ha! Original Sin!” quips, “Vanity, vanity, all is vanity/That’s any fun at all for humanity,” then continues,

The prophets chant and the prophets chatter,  
But somehow it never seems to matter,  
For the world hangs on to its ancient sanity  
And orders another round of vanity.

We painfully recognize that the material things we too often live for are “a chasing after the wind”—and yet, irrationally, we continue to chase after the wind.

4. There is nothing theoretical or philosophical about the “All is vanity” conclusion of our text. It’s not something the biblical author once read about and subscribes to. It’s something he experienced in life. He learned it while he was king over Israel (Eccl 1:12–14).

5. Profound and eloquent as our text is, it is hardly a Gospel text. It is Law: severe, stinging, crushing Law. No apology for that. For it is Law designed to prepare us for the Gospel. The text strips us of all our vanities, all our shoddy goals, all our false hopes, and all our self-delusions, so that we might be desperately open to the Gospel truth that our Lord Jesus is “the one thing needful,” “the Joy of man’s desiring.” “All is vanity” may be the rule, yes, but the Lord Jesus and the salvation he has provided us are the glorious exception to that rule. That is, “All is Vanity—except Jesus and his salvation!”

6. Although the text has nothing to say about the Jesus event and its meaning for us, it does hint at the gracious nature of God in 2:24, where the writer points out that ordinary daily activities like eating, drinking, and working and the satisfaction we derive from these activities are blessings from the hand of God. (It would even be a greater vanity if such daily routines were *not* gifts from a merciful God!) The following verse strengthens the “Gospelly” aspect of this truth by asserting that there can be no enjoyment apart from God: “for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?”

7. Ecclesiastes 2:26 provides the best textual opportunity for Gospel when it asserts that “God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy” (KJV). Here, of course, Gospel will need to be imported from numerous places in the Bible that inform us in clear, direct terms that a man can be “good in [God’s] sight” only when *God declares him to be good in his sight* through the righteousness of his Son, Jesus, credited to him by God’s grace.

8. As indicated above, Gospel will need to be imported to this text when the preacher makes it the basis for his sermon. This importation will seem less forced

and arbitrary if one uses a Gospel handle. Ecclesiastes 2:21 provides such a handle. The RSV version of that verse reads, “Sometimes a man who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by a man who did not toil for it.”

The man talked about in this verse is any man and every man. It could be anyone of us. A person works wisely and industriously in this life. And what may well happen? He leaves the accumulated fruits of his labor to another person who is nowhere near so wise and industrious and hard-working as he.

Yet, come to think of it, isn't that precisely what the Man, the God-man, Christ Jesus, has done? He spent a lifetime on earth toiling “with wisdom and knowledge and skill.” He went about the land of Palestine doing good and being good, keeping every one of God, his Father's, commandments perfectly. And what was the outcome? He left “all to be enjoyed by a man who did not toil for it!” He left it to you and me. Christ accumulated the righteousness, and we, in the goodness of God, inherit it, we who have “not toiled for it”—indeed, could not toil for it even had we wanted to. Our Lord is a classic instance of “a man who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill” and has left it “all to be enjoyed by a man [you and me] who did not toil for it.”

That is not what the Preacher in Ecclesiastes meant to say in our text. But it is what God tells us in the Bible. And this is not vanity. This is the Gospel!

## **Suggested outline**

### **The Rule—and the Exception to the Rule**

- I. The rule: “All is vanity.”
  - A. The author of our text experienced the truth of this rule (Eccl 1:12–14).
  - B. The rich man in today's Gospel experienced the truth of this rule.
  - C. Alas, we too have experienced the truth of this rule.
    1. An enumeration and analysis of our individual vanities, shoddy goals, false hopes, and self-delusions.
    2. Despite better knowledge, we still pursue these vanities, we still “chase after the wind.” (Refer to the Ogden Nash poem quoted above.)
- II. The exception to the rule: “All is vanity—except Jesus and the salvation he won for us!”
  - A. Even the cynical author of our text hints at the gracious nature of God (Eccl 2:24–25).
  - B. Clarify that “the man who is good in God's sight” (Eccl 2:26) is a man who has been declared good in God's sight through

the righteousness of his Son, Jesus, credited to that man through God's grace.

- C. Import additional Gospel through the Gospel handle provided by Ecclesiastes 2:21 (cf. No.8 above).

Francis C. Rossow



# BOOK REVIEWS

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## **CONCORDIA COMMENTARY:**

**Proverbs.** By Andrew E. Steinmann. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. 719 pages. Hardcover. \$42.99.

Andrew Steinmann has provided the church and academy with an excellent resource for the study of the book of Proverbs. With careful research and great insight, he illuminates the meaning of the text and situates its teaching within the context of the whole canon. Like most commentaries, Steinmann begins his work with an introduction that covers issues of authorship, date, literary form, structure, and text. In addition, he treats the rich vocabulary of wisdom and folly as well as poetical conventions (particularly different forms of parallelism). Steinmann also describes how law and gospel play out in the book (39–42), a topic that proves very important for his passage-by-passage analysis of the book.

The body of the commentary provides an exposition of the text. Each unit begins with Steinmann's translation of the passage. The translation is close to the text, but not at all wooden. His translation is explained and supported by well-written and helpful textual notes that deal with the textual, grammatical, and philological issues of the passage. The textual notes appear written with the advanced student particularly in mind since the pertinent text is cited in Hebrew, making it difficult for those who do not know the language. After the textual notes, Steinmann expositis the passage in a

section simply called "Commentary." This section is written with clarity and in a way that will elicit interest from all readers, specialists and non-specialists alike. Each passage is discussed quite fully, though of course no single commentary will answer every question that the reader will bring to the text. Special mention should be made of the dozen excurses in which Steinmann takes pause to dig more deeply into a discussion. These range from a discussion of the connection between specific passages in Proverbs to other biblical texts to an important consideration of the relationship between Proverbs 8 and Christ in the light of the Arian controversy. Readers, not only Lutheran ones, will find fascinating Steinmann's essay on Luther's approach to the book of Proverbs (499–502).

I greatly benefited from reading this commentary and will reference it in my future work on Proverbs. Even so, I found myself disagreeing with Steinmann on certain key issues and with particular exegetical conclusions. I will briefly mention one example.

One of Steinmann's concerns, a theme of the commentary series as a whole, is to highlight that which "promotes Christ" in a passage, a feature not surprising in confessional Lutheran interpretation. I must say that I applaud and promote Christological readings of the text and I pursue such in my own work, including my commentary of Proverbs.<sup>1</sup> In my opinion, however, Steinmann moves too quickly and without explanation to a Christian reading of the book. A case in point

is his treatment of Woman Wisdom. According to Steinmann, “Wisdom is Christ himself” (61). In other words, Woman Wisdom is to be identified as Christ. Contrary to this approach, I would treat Wisdom as a personification of the wisdom of Yahweh, standing ultimately for Yahweh himself (and therefore not a hypostasis). The choice between Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly in chapter 9 is then a choice between Yahweh and pagan deities. Proverbs 9 theologizes the very concepts of wisdom and folly so actions and attitudes associated with wisdom indicate that a person is acting like a proper worshipper of Yahweh, whereas those who are fools are acting like idolaters. Steinmann is correct that the New Testament relates Christ and Woman Wisdom, but not by way of identification but rather association. By this approach (again as opposed to Steinmann’s), we preserve what Brevard Childs called “the discrete voice of the Old Testament.”<sup>2</sup> I think it is important to first interpret the text in terms of what the original author and the original readers would have thought before proceeding to the important, indeed essential for Christian reading of the Old Testament, task of reading the Old Testament as anticipating Christ, as our Savior himself encouraged his disciples in Luke 24:25–26, 44–49. Again, though, I affirm Steinmann’s impulse to see the Gospel in the Old Testament thus helping ministers present Christ from their sermons based on the Old Testament.

In spite of this and other disagreements, I enthusiastically encourage students of the book of Proverbs, especially ministers, to add this commentary to their library. It is an invaluable resource for the study of this ancient text of wisdom.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Tremper Longman III. *Proverbs: Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 64–69 and throughout.

<sup>2</sup> Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 76.

## A HISTORY OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: Volume 2.

**The Medieval through the Reformation Periods.** Edited by Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, with Schuyler Kaufman. Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009. xi + 570 pages. Hardcover. \$50.00.

As students of the Holy Scripture have come increasingly to recognize that all exegesis is part of a longer conversation, stretching back over the centuries, and as the stranglehold of historical-critical presuppositions or hermeneutics on the public discussion of biblical interpretation has been broken (though not entirely set aside), the importance of looking at the history of interpretation has become ever clearer. Eerdmans Publishing Company has

performed a significant service for biblical scholarship by providing this series of a projected three volumes to guide readers into an appreciation for current discussions of the history of hermeneutics and exegesis, discussions that are expanding among exegetes and church historians alike.

The essays are designed to lead readers into the story of biblical interpretation but to do so with special focus on secondary literature, recent scholarly explorations of aspects of each of the volume's fifteen topics. The editors provide an eighty-page overview of the essays, in which they integrate these contributions. The overview enhances the reader's ability to digest and assimilate the material presented throughout. At several points tables offer a variety of materials, including lists of exegetes, Bible translations, manuscript sources, important published works, etc. in a given period or for a specific interpreter.

Five essays treat western and eastern Christian exegesis and Jewish interpretation in the Middle Ages. Two essays, "the text of the Tanak" and "the text of the New Testament" (the latter by occasional Concordia guest instructor Keith Elliott), survey current studies in text criticism in the period. An essay on "the Renaissance humanists" leads to six essays on Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, English, Anabaptists, and Catholic reformed exegesis. A concluding essay treats "Scriptures in the vernacular up to 1800." Readers find some repetition,

not only from the editors' anticipation of what is to come but also because certain topics fall naturally into more than one chapter assignment. In general, the repetition reinforces rather than distracts from the learning experience which the volume affords.

Lutherans will find themselves well served by the essays on Luther and Melancthon, by Mark D. Thompson of Moore Theological College, Sydney, Australia, and Timothy J. Wengert, of Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. Thompson labels "Luther's engagement with the Scriptures...[as] undeniably the critical catalyst for the tumultuous Reformation in the European churches in the sixteenth century" (299). He acknowledges how complex the attempt to read Luther's comments on the nature and use of Scripture in the absence of any treatise focusing on the subject specifically and due to the several issues Luther faced when commenting on Scripture. But Thompson makes clear that Luther held to the sole and ultimate authority of the Bible within the context of his Christological confession of the centrality of Jesus Christ for the faith and consolation of the individual. Luther's insistence on the twofold clarity of Scripture, internal and external, his use of the law-gospel hermeneutic, and his dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit are clearly treated. Thompson also relates the biblical text to Luther's belief in the necessity of the oral form of God's Word, the "living voice of the gospel."

Although he does not use this formulation, he makes it clear that Luther believed that God is truly present in the pages of Scripture and works his will through its words, whether read or heard.

Wengert's quarter century of living with Melanchthon's exegetical labors comes to as full a flowering as a short essay permits. His exposition of Melanchthon's original work on rhetorical criticism and his assessment of the *Præceptor Germaniæ's* use of dialectics, the *loci communes* method, and other humanistic tools, along with his law-gospel hermeneutic, provide an excellent introduction to the topic. Wengert offers a succinct overview of Melanchthon's lectures on the Bible in his Wittenberg career. He concludes with a brief view in the direction of his continuing influence on Lutheran exegetical insights and practices.

In addition, I found Keith Elliott's evaluation of early modern textual criticism a delightful introduction, a foundational education, on the topic. Christopher Ocker's survey of scholastic biblical interpretation will serve readers well as a background to understanding much of what happened in Reformation exegesis. Barbara Pitkin's essay helps readers grasp Calvin's own approach to the biblical text, how his exegetical preaching and teaching formed as a significant element of his reforming career, and where current Calvin scholarship stands on the variety of issues the topic raises.

The editors and publishers are to be thanked for a second useful tool for

the study of the history of exegesis and must be encouraged to complete the set with the future volume(s) that will complete this valuable series.

Robert Kolb

*Editor's Note: The following reviews by Professor Tim Saleska reflect some of his latest research in anticipation of his Concordia Commentary on the Psalms. The fact that he reflects on both scholarly and spiritual issues in the Psalms make these reviews helpful for theological, pastoral, and devotional reflection.*

**ANCIENT CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY ON SCRIPTURE: Psalms 1–50.** Edited by Craig A. Blaising and Carmen S. Hardin. Downers Grove: IVP, 2008. 458 pages. Cloth. \$40.00.

**ANCIENT CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY ON SCRIPTURE: Psalms 51–150.** Edited by Quentin F. Wesselschmidt. Downers Grove: IVP, 2007. 499 pages. Cloth. \$40.00.

In the General Introduction to this two volume set the Series Editor, Thomas Oden, describes the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* series (ACC) as “a Christian Talmud” (xii) because like the Talmud the series is a compendium of comments on the biblical text but with exegetical comments drawn from the Greek and Latin Christian tradition rather than the rabbinic tradition. However, to this reviewer, the genre more closely resembles Dr. M. M. Kasher's *Torah Shelemah*

(Complete Torah), and especially the English translation of part of that work, entitled: *Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*. In this work, Dr. Kasher has attempted to organize and make accessible the vast sea of Jewish exegesis and commentary, encyclopedia-style, on every verse in the Bible. The smaller translation is especially useful for non-specialists who need an accessible entree into what is normally a highly specialized field of study.

The ancient *Christian Commentary on Scripture* performs the same function for Christians. The series, of which this two-volume set on the Psalms is an exemplary contribution, is written not specifically for specialists in patristic literature, but for pastors, students and lay persons who would like to see what the church fathers said about the particular texts on which they are meditating or preaching.

To that end, these volumes contain much information that is helpful to scholar and layperson alike. For example, both volumes contain the following Appendices: a. an appendix listing the early Christian writers and their documents cited in the Commentary. This enables readers to easily see the depth and nature of the material from which the quotes in the Commentary are taken. b. biographical sketches of the Christian authors. This appendix gives the dates when each father lived and brief information about him. For people with no prior knowledge of the authors of the excerpts, this section is crucial for getting a basic orientation to the material. c. a time line of writers in

the patristic period. Again, this appendix is handy for tracing the influence of the authors on each other. d. complete bibliographies of original language works and works available in English translation. Students who want handy references to the major works of the excerpted authors will appreciate these bibliographies.

Both volumes have brief and helpful Introductions to their section of Psalms. Quentin Wesselschmidt has written a particularly enlightening piece in which he describes a number of ways that the early church made use of the Psalms (xvii–xxiii). Wesselschmidt traces the use of the Psalms in the liturgical and devotional life of the church, the church’s use of the Psalms to support its teachings and to refute heresy, and the use of the Psalms in the New Testament. His overview underscores the importance of the Psalms in the life of the church throughout her history. His point is that Christians of all ages have been enriched by the Psalms, and he hopes that this volume of excerpts will continue to enrich the spiritual lives of twenty-first century Christians as well (xxiii).

As might be expected with a work of this nature, the excerpts themselves can provide only brief glimpses into the questions and concerns that occupied the fathers. They can leave modern readers “begging for more,” so to speak, or with their own questions such as, “Why is the writer reading the text like that?” Or, “What is behind that explanation?” This “provoking” of the readers to ask how the biblical text is

being read or should be read is a positive thing, because it may force us to think about psalm interpretation in new ways and to examine our own assumptions by which we interpret the text.

One example will suffice. The meaning of Psalm 24:7–8 is enigmatic: *Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle!* Since the previous verses of Psalm 24 seem to talk about the physical sanctuary on Zion, the “gates” in vv. 7–8 would naturally seem to refer to the sanctuary gates. However, almost unanimously, the fathers interpret these verses as a description of Christ’s ascension to heaven and the gates as the gates of heaven. The angels are said to speak these words as Christ approaches.

The excerpts themselves don’t explain how the writers arrived at this interpretation, nor how they connect this explanation with the earthly sanctuary, which seems to be the subject of the first part of the psalm. What assumptions lie behind their understanding? In this case, the excerpts leave readers wanting more explanation to help them connect the dots. (By looking again at the well-known Hymn “Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates” [LBS 340], readers will soon see that this interpretation of Psalm 24 is not the only one in the church’s history.)

In addition, the question of v. 8, “Who is the King of Glory?” seems to be understood by some of the fathers,

not as rhetorical, but as a real question asking for information. In other words, the question in the biblical text (assumed to be spoken by angels) raised the question in the minds of some the fathers: “why didn’t the heavenly princes or angels recognize Christ?” Justin Martyr suggested that they didn’t recognize him because he appeared without beauty, honor or glory, and it was the Holy Spirit who answered, “The Lord of hosts. He is the King of glory.” Theodoret of Cyrus, picking up on the tradition that the angels did not see the divine nature concealed in the human nature, explained that angels, like other heavenly powers, know only as much as they are taught and had to learn the divine wisdom through the life of the church.

Most modern readers of this passage would not see the problem that the fathers did, nor attempt to solve it in this fashion. Whether all readers agree with these earlier exegetes or not, through these commentaries, they are exposed to interpretive perspectives that they did not previously have. Thus, the commentaries provide a valuable service in bringing hermeneutical questions—questions about how the biblical text was/is/should be read within the Christian community—back to the church for critical discussion and reflection. The editors of these two volumes are to be thanked for bringing these interpretive voices back into the conversation about the Christian interpretation of Scripture.

Tim Saleska

**PSALMS FOR LIFE: Hearing and Praying the Book of Psalms.** By John Eaton. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006. 389 pages. Paper. \$19.95.

**PSALMS THROUGH THE YEAR: Spiritual Exercises for Every Day.** By Marshall D. Johnson. Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2007. 393 pages. Paper. \$14.99.

Both *Psalms for Life* (PL) and *Psalms through the Year* (PTY) fit under the general category of “devotional literature.” Beginning with Psalm 1 and continuing through Psalm 150, both books contain short meditations and spiritual exercises on each of the psalms in the Psalter. PTY has the additional feature of assigning one psalm or part of a psalm to each day of the year, resulting in 365 short meditations. The devotions in PL are not attached to particular days of the year and are slightly lengthier than the devotions in PTY.

But for the most part, the similarity between the two books ends at genre. The specific interpretations that each author constructs differ considerably. Some examples will illustrate this point: In his meditation on Psalm 2:7–12, Johnson (PTY) writes:

What would happen to Psalm 2 when the monarchy came to an end? It was not simply discarded but instead came to be read as applying to the future king, the messiah. It is therefore not surprising that verse 7, “You are my son; today I have begot-

ten you,” is used to interpret the resurrection of Jesus as the beginning of Jesus’ divine sonship in Acts 13:33 and Romans 1:4... *Christians honor Jesus as the Son of God in a unique sense—not as a leader in battle but as the model of the ideals of peace and justice among nations* (italics added).

In his meditation on the same psalm, Eaton (PL) writes:

Still today the psalm calls out to the nations... *The psalm may be heard to foreshadow the voice of Christ, calling to the nations to ponder the cross on Zion’s hill. By this divine work, evil will be shattered* (italics added). It is the supreme sign of love, given through the Son begotten in the ‘day’ of eternity. But it is a love terrible to evil, utterly certain in its final conquest. Wise are the peoples and rulers who acknowledge God the King and bow down to him. Happy are all who come to trust and shelter in him.

In another example from his meditation on Psalm 22 Johnson (PTY) writes:

It is understandable that Christians often have thought of a crucified victim and that some have sought here a prefiguring of the death of Jesus. The psalm does not predict things to come; it describes the real suffering of a real person in the real time of the worshipping community. *It should be read as an expression*

*of the agony of all those who face the extremities of life... The psalmist gives voice to the plea of all such sufferers. It is appropriate to lament when the occasion calls for it* (italics added).

In contrast, Eaton (PL) writes:

An amazing psalm indeed! Sounding from depths of suffering and the victory of faith, *it is somehow of a piece with the death and new life of Christ, somehow prophetic of his destiny* (italics added). It is as though the voice of the Crucified could echo through centuries *before* as well as *after* those days under Pontius Pilate. And so we recognize in Christ's salvation a light that shines to the Beginning as well as to the End. We recognize the eternal dimension of the divine sacrifice, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Finally, in his meditation on Psalm 98 Johnson (PTY) writes:

Images of final judgment in ancient and medieval Christian writings and art often centered on terrifying and horrific punishment of evildoers, with the obvious purpose of scaring people into following the right path. In Psalm 98, by contrast, we have only joy in the ultimate triumph of equity and righteousness for all peoples. There are times in life when it might seem that we live in a hostile environment. In the final analysis,

however, the grace that stems from the heart of God will reign supreme over all.

By comparison, Eaton (PL) writes:

Through the psalm's opening words now shines the marvel of the salvation won by Christ for his people and for all creation... The patterns of Christian services will vary with circumstances, but we can always hear the gospel resounding in such psalms. The one truth shines through the scriptures old and new, the truth that flows from God's ancient purpose and his eternal reality.

These examples illustrate the difference in the ways that Johnson and Eaton read the Psalms. In the NT, Jesus and the Apostles saw that events (i.e., the Exodus), people (i.e., King David), and institutions (i.e., the Temple) foreshadowed or foretold of Christ and his kingdom (Col 2:16–17). The Psalms, which assume Israel's "history" with Yahweh and reflect on it (much as our hymns and liturgical music reflect theologically on the words and deeds of God), are also read as "prophetic" of the work of Christ. He is the fulfillment of the hopes and prayers of the psalmists (cf. Lk 24:44; Acts 4:25–27; Acts 13: 33–35).

In PL, Eaton takes his place in this line of interpreters. He and the NT authors practice the same kinds of reading. Eaton, as he says in his *Preface* (ix), reads the Psalms within the tradition of the NT and the Christian

Church, which understands them to be prophetic of Christ and his kingdom. One of his core assumptions is that even in OT times, the Psalms had come to be seen as foreshadowing the coming of the Messiah. As a result, Eaton's meditations interpret the Psalms in the light of the person of Christ and his great work of salvation. They are relevant to modern Christians, in large part, because they provide theological insight and reflection on what God has done for us in Christ.

Johnson, in contrast, argues against this kind of reading (379–80). He writes: “Christians who read the psalms reflectively will often be reminded of similar details in the story of Jesus in the New Testament Gospels. They will especially find links between the psalms of lament and the story of Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection. But all such cases are parallels and not predictions; they are our reading and not that of the worshipers of ancient Israel” (380).

He also writes: “But many [psalms] also reflect the specific contexts of ancient Israel—worship in the Jerusalem temple, popular attitudes of the time toward the king in Judah, the system of sacrifices, the conquest of the land, and much else that has little to do with Christianity either of the early periods or of today” (379).

As a result of his assumptions, Johnson does not read the Psalms as do Jesus and the apostles, and his meditations do not, for the most part, reflect on the meaning of Christ’s work in light of the Psalms. Instead,

Johnson tends to draw more universal, general truths from them. As he says: “The very act of reading the text with an open or seeking mind, however, initiates a dialogue between the text and our own life situation, and this process can lead to personal growth” (379). Indeed, many of his meditations end with personal reflections on the general state of affairs in our modern world (cf. his comments on 107:4–9), exhortations to people of faith to work for justice (cf. his comments on Psalm 79), and a general hope that somehow God is going to make things right in the end (cf. Ps 98:4–9). Hope in Christ, the center of our Christian faith and life, plays only a bit part in PTY. For this reason, Eaton’s *Psalms for Life*, is much more to be recommended.

Tim Saleska

### **MARTIN LUTHER’S INTERPRETATION OF THE ROYAL PSALMS: The Spiritual Kingdom in a Pastoral Context.**

By Michael Parsons. Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2009. 318 pages. Cloth. \$119.95.

Parsons’ goal in this study is to investigate how Luther uses the concept of the kingdom of Christ to comfort Christian believers in their distress (15). Specifically, Parson wants to show how Luther uses the “two kingdoms doctrine” in his exposition of the royal psalms explicitly to comfort believers who face suffering, persecution and temptations (19).

Following his Introduction in Chapter 1, Parsons begins with a succinct summary of Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms (chapter 2). Here he summarizes previous scholarship and lays out Luther's teaching in a very accessible way. Throughout the chapter, Parsons is careful to show how Luther uses the two-kingdom doctrine to comfort believers. Pastors will find Parsons' explanation clear, coherent, and mercifully brief. Pastors will also find the chapter to be a relevant help for thinking about the church-state issues that confront us today.

In the next five chapters, Parsons examines Luther's expositions of five royal psalms (82, 2, 45, 110, and 118). Again, Parsons is able to analyze and synthesize Luther's commentary in a way that makes Luther's thought accessible to non-specialists. Throughout these chapters, Parsons convincingly supports his argument that Luther writes as a pastor who is interested in comforting Christians who are troubled.

For example, in his explanation of Psalm 110, Parsons points out that Luther comforts God's people by speaking as a theologian of the cross and not as a theologian of glory. Quoting Randall Zachman, Parsons writes:

'As a theologian of the cross, Luther consistently contrasts what we see with what we believe, and he claims that the truth is hidden under an appearance that contradicts it.' This appears to be the gen-

eral or underlying context for Luther's comments as he seeks to encourage believers that the way things appear is not as they are. He concedes that whereas Christ is 'an invisible, eternal, immortal Person' his people live in 'this miserable, mortal condition, subject to death'... We must trust God's Word, not our senses or experience. In this way, Luther wants to highlight the contradiction between the Word that we hear and the things that we see and experience... (175-77).

Throughout his study, Parsons highlights themes such as this one, which Luther uses to comfort distressed believers on the basis of the royal psalms. Over and over in Parsons' analysis we are treated to Luther's Christological perspective and to his focus on the Word and Promise of God as that through which the Holy Spirit comforts troubled Christians. For Luther, these royal Psalms were written for just this purpose, and Parsons shows us how Luther read them and found comfort in them.

As Parsons analyzes Luther's commentary, he also highlights some of the personal reflection of Luther as he undergoes his own suffering during the period in which his comments on these psalms were written. Lutheran pastors will deeply resonate with Parsons' analysis of Luther's pastoral theology. These chapters can provide helpful review and spiritual guidance for pastors today as they seek to comfort their

own people who are undergoing suffering and temptation.

In the final chapter (chapter 8) Parsons brings together the main insights from the previous chapters. He summarizes “the pastoral problem” (262–64) and then “Luther’s pastoral method” (264–73). The summary

coheres well with the rest of the book and nicely reinforces what Parsons had earlier highlighted. Though the \$119 price tag is a bit steep for pastors, this book is worth checking out of the library. It can serve as a valuable spiritual resource for all Christian pastors.

Tim Saleska



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**June 21-23: Isaiah, The Fifth Gospel – Dr. Reed Lessing.** Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Dearborn, MI.

**June 21-23: Cristo, redentor de la familia: Ministrando a la familia hispana/latina en el contexto norteamericano (Christ, Redeemer of the Family: Ministering to the Hispanic/Latino in a North American Context) (English only) – Mark Kempff.** Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO.

**June 25-26: Cristo, redentor del matrimonio: Herramientas para la consejería pre-matrimonial y matrimonial (Christ, Redeemer of Marriage: Tools for Premarital and Marital Counseling) (Spanish only) – Benito Pérez López.** Messiah Lutheran Church, Tampa, FL.

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**Aug. 2-4: The Johannine Epistles and the Apostle of Love – Dr. Louis Brighton.** Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO.

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