



# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

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After Canons, Councils, and Popes

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Anthropology: A Brief Discourse

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Reclaiming the Easter Vigil

**Randy K. Asburry**

# Concordia Theological Quarterly

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### Editors’ Note

The year 2019 marks the 500th anniversary of the Leipzig Debate (or Leipzig Disputation). In Leipzig at the Pleissenburg Castle, Luther's colleague Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt debated John Eck from June 27 to July 3 on grace, free will, and justification. From July 4 to 8, Luther took Karlstadt's place and debated with Eck especially on the question of whether the pope was established by God as head of the Church. Our first two articles commemorate this debate. They were presented originally at the Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions at CTSFW, which was held Jan. 16–18, 2019. They remind us of what was at stake, and what we still joyfully affirm: Christ as the head of the Church, and God's Word as the sole infallible authority.

## After Canons, Councils, and Popes: The Implications of Luther's Leipzig Debate for Lutheran Ecclesiology

Richard J. Serina Jr.

A common criticism of Luther's Reformation is that it set off a host of competing interpretations of Scripture, now represented by some 30,000 existing denominations.<sup>1</sup> As the critics allege, Luther's rejection of church authority in favor of Scripture ultimately splintered Western Christianity and evolved into a massive sea of conflicting churches and doctrines, all claiming to be based on the Bible.<sup>2</sup> In the wake of Luther and his Reformation, Protestants could no longer default to popes or councils or church tradition, as it is found in canon law, the early fathers, or the medieval doctors. All they had left was Scripture with little mechanism for reconciling conflicting interpretations of Scripture. This criticism has more truth to it than some might be willing to admit. That is the problem facing Lutheran Protestants who trace their origins to the Reformation, and its source may very well be the events that happened in Leipzig during the summer of 1519. At Leipzig, Luther concluded that since every source of authority outside of Holy Scripture is human, fallible, and therefore subject to correction, Scripture and Scripture alone is the single trustworthy source of church doctrine and the basis for church authority. Luther may not have said this in so many words, but it was the implication of his arguments against the Ingolstadt theologian John Eck, and it was recognized for what it was by supporter and opponent alike. It has also left subsequent Lutherans with a perennial dilemma: If Scripture is the only trustworthy source of church doctrine and basis for church authority, then how *are* we to decide between two conflicting interpretations of Scripture? If we no longer have popes, councils, or canon law to help make that judgment, where do we turn?

That is the legacy of the Leipzig Debate for the Lutheran view of church authority. Historians have described the Leipzig Debate as an "emancipation" for Luther, a "revolutionary crusade" against the church of his day, an attack on the very "Catholic concept of the church," and an assertion of "independence"

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<sup>1</sup> These numbers are notoriously difficult to estimate, but see *World Christian Encyclopedia*, ed. David B. Barrett et al., 2 vols., 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1:16.

<sup>2</sup> One can cite a variety of such critics, from Roman Catholic apologists to ecumenists. For one recent example, see Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2012), especially 365–387. Gregory's goal is much broader than this criticism, but it plays a part in his well-crafted argument.

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from “church authority over the individual Christian.”<sup>3</sup> Even the usually tempered, ecumenically sensitive Jaroslav Pelikan wrote that Leipzig “made both Luther and his opponents begin to recognize the extent of the alienation between him and the Roman Church” and “more than either the 95 *Theses* of two years earlier or even his excommunication of two years later, initiated Luther’s Reformation.”<sup>4</sup> But what was so historically significant about Luther’s conclusions at Leipzig in their context? What made his view of church authority such a departure from medieval precedent? When looking at a historical event like this, it is easy to read back subsequent or current controversies onto it and find a significance that was not there at the time. That is especially the case for the Leipzig Debate. The conclusions Luther reaches regarding the authority or infallibility of pope, council, and canon law were in and of themselves not as significant in their own day as we might think. His positions were not mainstream or popular, let alone accepted, but nothing he said about those sources of authority was unprecedented or novel. What in fact *was* so significant about the Leipzig Debate at the time and in its context? This essay will show just where the implications of Luther’s argument at Leipzig did ultimately depart from the traditional medieval view of church authority and the significance that departure has for a Lutheran approach to church authority today.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Leopold von Ranke, *History of the Reformation in Germany*, trans. Sarah Austin, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, Green, Brown, and Longmans, 1845), 454; Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 7 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1889–1910), 7:182; Joseph Lortz, *The Reformation in Germany*, trans. Ronald Walls, 2 vols. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1968), 1:250–253; and Robert Herndon Fife, *The Revolt of Martin Luther* (New York: Columbia UP, 1957), 394.

<sup>4</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels: Catholic Substance and Protestant Principle in Luther’s Reformation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 54.

<sup>5</sup> There is ample literature on the Leipzig Debate, but it is mostly in German. The best source in English remains W. H. T. Dau, *The Leipzig Debate in 1519: Leaves from the Story of Luther’s Life* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1919). A new volume hoping to surpass it is Mickey Mattox, Richard J. Serina Jr., and Jonathan Mumme, eds., *Luther at Leipzig: Martin Luther, the Leipzig Debate, and the Sixteenth-Century Reformations* (Leiden: Brill, 2019). There is also an extended treatment of the debate in Leif Grane, *Martinus Noster: Luther in the German Reform Movement, 1518–1521* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1994). For the best of the German studies, see Markus Hein and Armin Kohnle, eds., *Die Leipziger Disputation 1519: 1. Leipziger Arbeitsgespräch zur Reformation* (Leipzig: Leipziger Verlagsanstalt, 2011); Anselm Schubert, “Libertas Disputandi: Luther und die Leipziger Disputation als akademisches Streitgespräch,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 105 (2008): 411–442; Kurt-Victor Selge, “Die Leipziger Disputation zwischen Luther und Eck,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 86 (1975): 26–40; and Kurt-Victor Selge, “Der Weg zur Leipziger Disputation,” in *Bleibendes im Wandel der Kirchengeschichte*, ed. Bernd Moeller (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1973), 168–210.

### I. Church Authority in the Leipzig Debate

It is important to remember that Luther never set out to debate the authority of pope, council, or canon law. Nothing prior to the *Ninety-Five Theses* had dealt with church authority, and nothing during the indulgence controversy directly addressed it. The topic came to the forefront only when Luther's early opponents raised it. While Luther argued that indulgences lacked scriptural warrant, his opponents responded that indulgences were instituted on papal authority, and to question indulgences was to question the pope himself.<sup>6</sup> John Eck joined the chorus against Luther in 1518. He had been influenced by humanism, much like Luther, and he even established a friendly correspondence with Luther in 1517 before the controversy over indulgences. As Luther's profile grew, so did the stakes of debating with him. Soon, that private correspondence with Eck turned public and contentious, and the stage was set for a university debate.<sup>7</sup>

The original plan at Leipzig called for a disputation between Eck and Luther's colleague, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, who had also struck up a war in print with Eck. There were to be a number of debated topics, but the most pivotal was the topic of the primacy of the pope—whether the pope as bishop of Rome had jurisdiction over all other bishops in the church. Eck published a set of theses dealing with the topics of indulgences, purgatory, sin, and grace, but he included one thesis taking aim at a side comment of Luther's about the papacy. In this thesis, Eck maintained that Roman primacy was not a human invention, but had been established by divine right.<sup>8</sup> Luther responded with a set of counter-theses alleging that canon law alone had established the primacy of the pope.<sup>9</sup> After much delay establishing venue, format, and participants for the disputation, Luther was granted

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<sup>6</sup> This was the case especially for the Dominican theologians John Tetzel, Sylvester Prierias, and Cardinal Cajetan. David V. N. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents: Catholic Controversialists, 1518–1525* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 17–65.

<sup>7</sup> On this backstory, see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to the Reformation, 1483–1521*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985), 1:299–309, as well as Johann Peter Wurm, "Johannes Eck und die Disputation von Leipzig 1519: Vorgeschichte und unmittelbare Folgen," in *Die Leipziger Disputation 1519*, 95–106.

<sup>8</sup> For Eck's theses, see Dau, *Leipzig Debate*, 58–60.

<sup>9</sup> Luther's theses are found in *Disputatio et excusatio F. Martini Luther adversus criminationes D. Iohannis Eccii* in Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), vol. 2, pp. 160–161 (hereafter WA) and Martin Luther, "The Leipzig Debate" (1519): vol. 31, pp. 317–318, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE. All translations of the debate by Carl D. Roth and Richard J. Serina Jr., taken from a translation of select sections published in Mattox, Serina, and Mumme, *Luther at Leipzig*, 321–343.

permission to debate, and the primacy of Rome made its way onto the debate agenda. During a break in the proceedings, Luther preached a sermon on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul—on the passage of Matthew 16, no less—that stoked the controversy.<sup>10</sup> Eck referred to the sermon as “Bohemian,” in reference to the condemned teachings of the fifteenth-century Czech reformer Jan Hus. Eck and Karlstadt took to the stage first for several days, then on July 4 Luther joined in the festivities. The Augustinian friar from Wittenberg took the obligatory vow of a disputant to uphold the teachings of the church, went to the podium, and jumped into a debate over the papacy with Eck.

Eck came out swinging. He immediately questioned Luther’s statement that the primacy of the pope was an invention of canon law.<sup>11</sup> Luther reiterated his position that primacy was not stated by Scripture, but was established by human right or human arrangement, and therefore not binding doctrine.<sup>12</sup> The two went back and forth over a series of passages from Scripture and canon law, then Luther contested primacy on the basis of the Greek church: the Greeks did not accept primacy, yet they were Christians, so the doctrine should not be considered necessary for salvation, as the 1302 bull *Unam Sanctam* of Boniface VIII had declared.<sup>13</sup> Eck accused Luther of making a Bohemian argument, again in reference to the condemned errors of Jan Hus.<sup>14</sup> Luther did not deny the Bohemian charge, however, but defended Hus. Many of his articles were “most Christian and evangelical,” Luther said.<sup>15</sup>

The question of Hus proved to be a turning point in the debate. Hus was excommunicated and burned at the stake by the Council of Constance in 1415 for, among other things, holding the teachings of the English theologian John Wycliffe, who was also condemned posthumously at Constance. By speaking positively about Hus, Luther was not only subtly advocating for those views, but also questioning the authority of a council.<sup>16</sup> This caused Duke George of Saxony, the

<sup>10</sup> WA 2:244–249. On the sermon, see Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 1:317–319.

<sup>11</sup> WA 59:435.

<sup>12</sup> WA 59:439.

<sup>13</sup> WA 59:448.

<sup>14</sup> WA 59:461.

<sup>15</sup> WA 59:466; Roth and Serina, *Luther at Leipzig*, 323, “It is also certain that among the articles of John Hus or the Bohemians there are many things that are clearly most Christian and evangelical, which the universal church cannot condemn, such as this and the like: there is only one universal church. This, you see, has been unjustly condemned by those most impious flatterers, even though the whole church confesses, ‘I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints.’ This most celebrated article of faith they number among the articles of John Hus.”

<sup>16</sup> The memory of Hus and debates over his views remained a live topic into the sixteenth century. On this, see Thomas Fudge, *The Memory and Motivation of Jan Hus, Medieval Priest and Martyr* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), and Phillip N. Haberkern, *Patron Saint and Prophet: Jan Hus in the Bohemian and German Reformations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

patron and host of the debate, to blurt out in disgust, “The pest take the man!”<sup>17</sup> Eck disputed Luther’s claim. If the Council of Constance condemned Hus for his teachings, then it could not have been in error because councils were infallible.<sup>18</sup> Luther twice interrupted Eck to insist that he was not questioning the infallibility of councils—he did not doubt the conclusions those councils reached regarding the faith, but rather was admitting the possibility that they could be wrong in some of their opinions.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, for Luther a council decision is not on par with Scripture, but is a “creature of the Word,” and therefore prone to error.<sup>20</sup> Popes and councils are human, fallible, and subject to correction by Holy Scripture.<sup>21</sup> A flabbergasted Eck would go on to accuse Luther of setting himself up as the authoritative interpreter of Scripture over pope, council, and the tradition.<sup>22</sup>

The debate came to a head on the afternoon of July 7, 1519. Following a lunch recess, Luther and Eck were set to conclude their disputation on the controversial topic of primacy before moving on to other subjects, as the debate rules had dictated. Luther proceeded to double down on his contentious point regarding the authority of church councils: “I agree with the Lord Doctor that the statutes of the councils in those things which concern the faith should be esteemed in every way. This alone I reserve for myself, which also must be reserved, that a council has erred and is able to err at any time, especially in those things which do not concern the faith. Nor does a council have authority to establish new articles of faith, otherwise we would finally have as many articles as there are human opinions.”<sup>23</sup> In an apparent display of one-upmanship, Eck addressed the crowd and responded in disgust:

That the reverend father mixes the article of Jan Hus concerning ecclesiastical obedience with the other article concerning the works of man’s progress by the authority of Gregory of Rimini, who is defended in all the universities, I have heard a defense to this point in no university (although I have been to very many)—nevertheless, he asks me to prove that a council is not able to err. I do

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<sup>17</sup> That is to say, “a plague be upon him.” This can be found in “Das Leipziger Colloquium, beschreiben von M. Sebeastian Fröschel, der es selbst mit angehört hat,” in *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämmtlichen Schriften*, 24 vols., ed. G. Walch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1880), 15:1207.

<sup>18</sup> WA 59:468, 472.

<sup>19</sup> WA 59:472.

<sup>20</sup> WA 59:480; Roth and Serina, *Luther at Leipzig*, 336. “Moreover, that he argues from the example of Augustine, that if any falsehood is admitted in a council, the entire authority of the council will be weakened, is an unfortunate comparison. Augustine is arguing about the Divine Scripture, which is the infallible word of God; but a council is a creature of that very word. Therefore, injury happens to the word of God through this comparison, since one can concede that a council is able to err, as Panormitanus notes, in the chapter *Significasti*.”

<sup>21</sup> WA 59:480.

<sup>22</sup> WA 59:494.

<sup>23</sup> WA 59:500; Roth and Serina, *Luther at Leipzig*, 342.

not know what he wants with that petition, whether he secretly wants to consider the praiseworthy and glorious Constance council suspect. I say this to you, Reverend Father, if you believe a council legitimately convoked has or can err, you are to me as a heathen and a publican. Let us not plead the case of what may be heretical in our presence.<sup>24</sup>

And with that, the proverbial line in the sand was drawn. Luther's position on church councils implied that all human sources of church authority—church father, medieval doctor, canon law, pope, even councils—were inherently fallible. For Eck, this made him a “heathen” and a “publican” who did not deserve to debate publicly.

The rest of the debate devolved into a rather uneventful postlude. Luther and Eck disputed over purgatory and indulgences for several more days, even finding points of agreement. Karlstadt replaced Luther at the podium on July 14. Luther left town for Wittenberg the same day. Both parties immediately declared themselves victorious. A publicity war ensued championing each of them.<sup>25</sup> The official record of the debate, transcribed by four notaries, was sent to universities in Erfurt and Paris to render their judgment. Erfurt declined, while Paris waited until 1521—after the Diet of Worms, in fact—to declare Luther heretical.<sup>26</sup> Report of the debate reached Rome and led to resumed heresy proceedings against Luther. Eck made his way to Rome and helped draft the bull threatening Luther with excommunication. The bull itself specifically reflected the Leipzig Debate when it noted Luther's rejection of councils and of the condemnation of Hus at Constance.<sup>27</sup> Leipzig and the arguments Luther made there had changed the trajectory of the Reformation. No longer did the decisive question deal with indulgences or purgatory, grace or the law, faith or works, as it had in Wittenberg the previous two years. After avoiding the topic of church authority as best he could, now Luther had brought it front and center, and the sides would never be the same again.

## II. Luther and Medieval Church Authority at Leipzig

Returning to the larger question: What was so historically significant about Luther's position on church authority at Leipzig? Why did it create the rift it did? Here it may be best to start with what was *not* so historically significant

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<sup>24</sup> WA 59:511; Roth and Serina, *Luther at Leipzig*, 343.

<sup>25</sup> Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 1:322–348.

<sup>26</sup> *Determinatio Theologicae facultatis Parisiensis, super Doctrina LVTHERIANA Hac tenues per eam visa* (Cologne: Quentel, 1521).

<sup>27</sup> Note especially condemned articles 29 and 30, in Kurt Aland and Carl Mirbt, eds., *Quellen zur Geschichte des Papsttums und des römischen Katholizismus*, 6 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1967), 1:504–513.

about Luther's position at Leipzig when the historical context is taken into account. This will require some attention to the relationship between Luther's view of church authority at Leipzig and corresponding medieval views of church authority.<sup>28</sup> It will be clear that Luther's positions on church authority at Leipzig were not entirely novel, but had at least some precedent in the immediate centuries preceding him.

First, Luther's criticism of canon law as a legitimate theological authority was not historically significant from the perspective of the Middle Ages. Luther made this point in his controversial Proposition 13 against Eck's original theses: "That the Roman church is superior to all others is proved by the most trivial (*frigidissimis*) decrees of the Roman pontiffs which have appeared the last four hundred years. Against them stand the history of eleven hundred years, the text of divine Scripture, and the decree of the Council of Nicaea, the most sacred of all councils."<sup>29</sup> By "most trivial decrees," he has in mind canon law, which included the authoritative collection of regulations from ancient church councils and synods, brought together and synthesized by a twelfth-century monk and teacher named Gratian of Bologna, as well as several centuries' worth of subsequent papal bulls and council decrees.<sup>30</sup> For Luther, these were merely human, manmade laws, or what medievals called "positive law." They were not to be equated with Holy Scripture, or what medievals called "divine law."<sup>31</sup> The primacy of the bishop of Rome as head of the universal church had been established by human right or manmade, positive law, not by divine right or Holy Scripture, and therefore was not binding and could be rejected.

While this opinion was controversial and far from accepted, it was not in and of itself a complete departure from precedent. The medieval church never accorded canon law the same authority as Scripture. Canon law was always provisional and subject to revision. Much like the practice of law today, canon lawyers sought to identify and rectify conflicting laws, and to apply them to pressing theological,

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<sup>28</sup> A caveat: describing the "Middle Ages" or anything medieval comes with a risk of overgeneralization. The "medieval church" included nearly a millennium's worth of Christians across Europe, so there was a great deal of change and variety. There was no single medieval church, but many medieval *churches*; there was no single medieval theology, but many medieval *theologies*; there was no single medieval ecclesiology or view of church authority, but many medieval *ecclesiologies* and views of church authority. On this point, see Gary Macy, "Was There a 'The Church' in the Middle Ages?" on *Unity and Diversity in the Church*, ed. R. N. Swanson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 107–116.

<sup>29</sup> "Romanam Ecclesiam esse omnibus aliis superiorem, probatur ex frigidissimis Romanorum Pontificum decretes intra CCCC annos natis, contra quae sunt historiae approbatae MC annorum, textus scripturae divinae et decretum Niceni Concilii omnium sacratissimi." WA 2:161; AE 31:318.

<sup>30</sup> On the origins of the *Decretum*, see Anders Winroth, *The Making of Gratian's Decretum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-I, q. 91.

ecclesiastical, and academic issues of the day.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, throughout the late Middle Ages, theologians like Luther found reasons to criticize canon law and to reject its authority. Theology and canon law, theologians and canon lawyers had long been at odds. Theologians criticized canon law for placing its discipline on par with theology and the Holy Scriptures, or even for calling itself a “sacred science”—a title reserved for the study of theology alone.<sup>33</sup> The fact that Luther denied canon law’s prerogative to establish the divine right of the papacy as head of the universal church apart from Holy Scripture, while controversial, was not in itself novel. He was doing what any good medieval theologian and doctor of Scripture might do. He believed canon law was human, manmade, positive law, and therefore subordinate to the divine law of Holy Scripture. Canon law could not establish doctrine or have the final say over matters of theology, especially where its opinion was found nowhere in Scripture, as was the case for papal primacy to Luther’s mind. This view of canon law was not unprecedented or historically significant in the context of the medieval church.

A second conclusion Luther reached at Leipzig that, upon further consideration, was not as historically significant as one might think was his claim that councils could err. While this argument may have been the most pivotal at Leipzig, Luther had developed it with much qualification. He explained that many of Jan Hus’s views were “most Christian and evangelical,” and that the Council of Constance had not condemned those “Christian and evangelical” teachings. But if it had, then it was entirely possible for the council to be in error. At the same time, both at Leipzig and in his *Explanations* of the indulgence theses, Luther claimed that while it was possible for a council to err, councils could not err in matters of faith, that is, those things related to salvation.<sup>34</sup> What he had in mind are particularly the trinitarian and christological affirmations of the first four councils, which even medieval canon law set apart from later councils.<sup>35</sup> Luther did not reject councils

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<sup>32</sup> Stephan Kuttner, *Harmony from Dissonance: An Interpretation of Medieval Canon Law* (Latrobe, PA: Archabbey, 1960).

<sup>33</sup> For examples, see Walter Ullmann, *Medieval Papalism: The Political Theories of the Medieval Canonists* (London: Methuen, 1949), 38–49; Brian Tierney, “‘Sola Scriptura’ and the Canonists,” *Studia Gratiana* 11 (1967): 345–366; G. H. M. Posthumous Meyjes, “Exponents of Sovereignty: Canonists as Seen by Theologians in the Late Middle Ages,” in *The Church and Sovereignty, c. 590–1918: Essays in Honor of Michael Wilks*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 299–312; and Takashi Shogimen, “The Relationship between Theology and Canon Law: Another Context of Political Thought in the Early Fourteenth Century,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60 (1999): 417–431.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, WA 59:479, 547, 567, as well as his *Resolutiones* at AE 31:157, 172.

<sup>35</sup> Hermann Josef Sieben, *Die Konzilsidee des lateinischen Mittelalters (847–1378)* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1984), especially 188–231.

per se, but rather believed they were not beyond accountability to Scripture and could not carry more weight than Scripture.

Again, this was not a marked departure from medieval precedent. Many believed that councils were fallible and thus subject to correction. For instance, the fourteenth-century Franciscan thinker William of Ockham argued that a council could be wrong, and when it was it fell to the laity—indeed, to *any* believing Christian—to correct it.<sup>36</sup> An important fifteenth-century bishop and canon lawyer, Panormitanus, wrote in his commentary on canon law that a single Christian who is right outweighs an entire council, and Luther cited this opinion time and again during these debates.<sup>37</sup> The fifteenth-century German cardinal Nicholas of Cusa had been a member of the conciliar movement, which sought to place limits on papal authority and force popes to assist in church reform. However, he left the conciliar cause and supported the papacy instead when the council he was a part of—the Council of Basel—degenerated into partisan bickering.<sup>38</sup> He reasoned that councils were more likely than popes to be wrong precisely because there were so many conflicting voices at a council.<sup>39</sup> If a pope is sinful and therefore subject to error, then a council is an aggregate of many sinful members and therefore just as subject to error, if not more so.<sup>40</sup> The fact that Luther believed councils could be and had been wrong was not in itself unprecedented or overly significant. It created a stir at Leipzig and it may not have been popular, but it had standing in the medieval church.

Finally, Luther makes another point throughout the debate that at first glance may seem like a novelty: the fallibility of popes—that popes, too, could be wrong. Here Luther applies the same reasoning as for the councils: “The Roman pontiff and the councils are men, therefore, they should be tested and thus held in check.”<sup>41</sup> Luther argues that even if he were to grant primacy, the pope is still a human and therefore capable of error. At this point, Luther had not publicly declared the papacy

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<sup>36</sup> Ockham addresses this in various places, but for commentary see Antony Black, *Political Thought in Europe, 1250–1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 71–78, and Arthur Stephen McGrade, *The Political Thought of William of Ockham: Personal and Institutional Principles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 48–63.

<sup>37</sup> “Hinc est quod concilium potest condemnare papam de haeresi . . . puto tamen quod si papa moveretur melioribus rationibus et autoritatibus quam concilium, quod standum esset sententiae suae, nam et concilium potest errare.” Knut Wolfgang Nörr, *Kirche und Konzil bei Nicolaus de Tudeschis (Panormitanus)* (Köln Graz: Böhlau Verlag, 1964), 104–106.

<sup>38</sup> Morimichi Watanabe, “Authority and Consent in Church Government: Panormitanus, Aeneas Sylvius, Cusanus,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 33 (1970): 217–236.

<sup>39</sup> *Oratio coram Dieta Francfordensi* 41, in Nicholas of Cusa, *Writings on Church and Reform*, ed. and trans. Thomas M. Izbicki (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 223.

<sup>40</sup> *Dialogus concludens Amedistarum errorem ex gestis et doctrina concilii Basiliensis* 25, in Izbicki, *Writings on Church and Reform*, 315.

<sup>41</sup> WA 59:480.

to be the antichrist, and he still hoped for his case to be heard and settled.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the modern doctrine of papal infallibility was not official church teaching at the time. The discussion of infallibility originated in the fourteenth century due to a debate between two branches of the Franciscan order.<sup>43</sup> The church did not officially accept it, however, and it continued to be a topic of conversation, as it was still in Luther's day.<sup>44</sup> It took until 1870 and the First Vatican Council for Rome to dogmatize the position that what popes declared in an official capacity on behalf of the church was infallible.<sup>45</sup>

Here again Luther's position did not represent a departure from medieval precedent. It had long been thought that popes were capable of error and that there had to be safeguards to protect the church when popes did err. For instance, in the twelfth century canon law specifically stipulated that the church could depose a pope for heresy. One canon in particular said that the pope "is to be judged by no one unless he deviates from the faith"—and if a pope can deviate from the faith, then it stands to reason that he is fallible.<sup>46</sup> Later canon lawyers went on to argue that if popes did fall into heresy, then church councils could unseat them as popes.<sup>47</sup> At Leipzig, Luther frequently cited a famous statement by the canonist Panormitanus to make his point: "For in matters concerning the faith even the statement of one private person could be preferred to that of the pope, if the former were inspired by better reasons and authorities."<sup>48</sup> Again, this position was neither popular nor prominent, but it did have its proponents. They may not have held the particular view on biblical authority Luther would come to hold, nor did they reach the same

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<sup>42</sup> This came in a March 1519 letter to Georg Spalatin. WA Br 1:359.29-31; AE 48:114.

<sup>43</sup> David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century after Saint Francis* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), and Brian Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility, 1150–1350: A Study on the Concepts of Infallibility, Sovereignty and Tradition in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

<sup>44</sup> Ulrich Horst, *Papst, Konzil, Unfehlbarkeit: Die Ekklesiologie der Summenkommentare von Cajetan bis Billuart* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1978).

<sup>45</sup> For discussion of this, see Richard F. Costigan, S. J., *The Consensus of the Church and Papal Infallibility: A Study in the Background of Vatican I* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005); Margaret O'Gara, *Triumph in Defeat: Infallibility, Vatican I, and the French Minority Bishops* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988); and Hermann J. Pottmeyer, *Towards a Papacy in Communion: Perspectives from Vatican Councils I and II* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

<sup>46</sup> *Decretum Gratiani* Dist. 40, c. 6, in *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, ed. Emil Friedberg, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1879), 1:146: "Quia cunctos ipse iudicaturus a nemine est iudicandus, nisi deprehendatur a fide dei." "

<sup>47</sup> Brian Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory: The Contribution of the Medieval Canonists from Gratian to the Great Schism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 57–60.

<sup>48</sup> *Decretalium Gregorii IX*, liber I, tit. 6, c. 4 (Friedberg 2:49): "Nam in concernentibus fidem, etiam dictum unius privati esset praeferendum dicto papae, si ille moveretur melioribus rationibus novi et veteris testamentis quam papa."

conclusions as Luther did about the pope, but the Wittenberg reformer had plenty of precedent on his side when it came to questioning papal infallibility.

### III. Luther and Scriptural Authority at Leipzig

If those positions were not departures from the medieval view of church authority, then what was? Luther's view of Scripture. It wasn't so much what Luther said explicitly at Leipzig, but what his position there implied: it implied that Holy Scripture must be the sole, unopposed authority in the church, even if that potentially rendered all other authorities in the church moot—whether that means pope, council, canon law, tradition, history, or reason. In the Middle Ages, Scripture was always considered the primary authority in the church.<sup>49</sup> Canon law itself stipulated that its laws could never contradict what Scripture said.<sup>50</sup> It also cited a dictum of Saint Augustine that no doctrine could be considered necessary for salvation if it was not in Scripture.<sup>51</sup> Medieval doctors of theology were obligated to affirm the authority of Scripture over all other authorities. They reserved the right to dispute theological opinions on the basis of Scripture unless—or until—their views were deemed contrary to the faith.<sup>52</sup> No less a medieval doctor than Thomas Aquinas himself argued that only the Scriptures were a necessary authority; he considered all other sources merely probable authorities and their opinions subject to error.<sup>53</sup> At Leipzig, Luther quoted another late medieval theologian, Jean Gerson, as saying that no authority should be permitted against the Scriptures and that doctrines contrary to the Scriptures must be rejected.<sup>54</sup> Even John Eck maintained that he did not intend to oppose councils to Scripture.<sup>55</sup>

What Luther does at Leipzig, however, is different. He takes it a step further. By questioning the infallibility of other sources of church authority and insisting that Scripture alone is infallible, he is forced to concede that the only reliable authority in the church is Scripture precisely *because* it is infallible. This represented a stark departure from medieval views of church authority. In the Middle Ages, there

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<sup>49</sup> The following discussion owes much to Ian Levy, "The Leipzig Disputation: Masters of the Sacred Page and the Authority of Scripture," in *Luther at Leipzig*, 115–144.

<sup>50</sup> *Decretum Gratiani*, causa 25, q. 1, c. 6 (Friedberg 1:1008).

<sup>51</sup> *Decretum Gratiani*, dist. 9, c. 3–10 (Friedberg 1:17–18).

<sup>52</sup> See Ian Levy, "Liberty of Conscience and Freedom of Religion in the Medieval Canonists and Theologians," in *Christianity and Freedom, Volume 1: Historical Perspectives*, eds. Timothy Samuel Shah and Allen D. Hertzke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 149–175, and G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes, "Quasi Stellae Fulgebunt: On the Position and Function of the Doctor of Divinity in Mediaeval Church and Society," in *In Divers Manners*, ed. D. W. D. Shaw (University of St. Andrews: St. Mary's College, 1990), 11–28.

<sup>53</sup> *Summa Theologica* I, q. 1, a. 8.

<sup>54</sup> WA 59:466.

<sup>55</sup> WA 59:490–491.

were generally speaking three broad categories of authority admissible for the theologian. The first was Scripture. The second was tradition, and that included everything from the decrees of councils, papal bulls, and canon law to church fathers and medieval doctors. The third category was reason, and this could include logic, dialectic, history, or any other discipline in medieval higher education. With Luther's stand at Leipzig, he separates Scripture from those other sources and functionally sets it in opposition to them. Now, Luther did not declare these other authorities impermissible in theological discussion, nor did he oppose Scripture to them explicitly, but the consequence of his argument is clear: *if* council, pope, and canon law are human, fallible, and subject to correction, and *if* Scripture is divine, infallible, and not subject to correction, then the only sure foundation for doctrinal claims and church authority is Scripture.

Luther did not plan to come to this conclusion when he stepped to the podium at Leipzig. He simply wanted Scripture to have the chief place and to ensure that opinions of canon law did not detract from other authorities, like Scripture, councils, and history.<sup>56</sup> Yet in the course of the debate, Eck pushed Luther to acknowledge the fallibility of councils, and by extension pope, canon law, or any other authority. This left Luther with only one source of authority—Scripture—resulting in an opposition between the trustworthiness of Scripture and the fallibility of those other sources. In the words of Bernhard Lohse, “With the intensifying of the conflict Luther was led to accent his ecclesiology in a way he did not intend. Continuing escalation of the debate forced him to a conclusion he would happily have avoided. The result was that specific possibilities that were previously open were now ruled out.”<sup>57</sup> The possibilities previously open but now ruled out included not just pope or canon law, but those same sources Luther appealed to prior to and even during the debate—councils, church fathers, and history. And this is why Luther's admission that councils could be wrong elicited such adverse reactions. He did not reject what councils taught, but rather rejected their authority *as councils*.<sup>58</sup> To the medieval mind, which sought synthesis and resolution, Luther placed Scripture not just over, but *over against* other authorities in the church, such as the Council of Constance when it condemned Hus.<sup>59</sup> This is what made Leipzig so

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<sup>56</sup> WA 59:534–535.

<sup>57</sup> Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 118.

<sup>58</sup> Thus his 1539 *On Councils and the Church* tightly circumscribes what a council can and cannot do *qua* council. See AE 41:123–131.

<sup>59</sup> This impetus toward synthesis existed in theology and canon law alike. For instance, see Clare Monagle, *Orthodoxy and Controversy in Twelfth-Century Religious Discourse: Peter Lombard's Sentences and the Development of Theology* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2013), and Atria A. Larson, *The Master of Penance: Gratian and the Development of Penitential Thought and Law in the Twelfth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2014).

significant. This is what caused Duke George to blurt out, “The pest take the man!” This is why Eck called Luther “a heathen and a publican.” This is what led to the resumption of Luther’s trial and the heresy charges against him. This is what caused many to abandon Luther and others to fall in line behind him.

The consequences would be felt for the remainder of the Reformation. In September 1519, right after the Leipzig Debate, Philip Melancthon presented a set of theses for debate at the graduation disputation for his degree as bachelor of Bible. Those theses directly reflected Luther’s conclusions at Leipzig and stated unequivocally that Scripture was the sole authoritative source for theology.<sup>60</sup> It also led in some measure to Luther’s famous stand at Worms, where he claimed his conscience was held captive to the Word of God unless proven wrong by Scripture or sound reason—but not pope, council, canon, doctor, or father. It led to subsequent divisions and misunderstanding among Protestants, as spiritualists like Thomas Müntzer and Karlstadt and sacramentarians like Zwingli and Oecolampadius appealed to Luther’s interpretive method, yet rejected traditional doctrines that Luther affirmed in favor of their own interpretations of Scripture.<sup>61</sup> It led even to Luther’s argument in *On Councils and the Church*, where he accepted the first four ecumenical councils and their statements about the Trinity and Christology not on their own merits as ecumenical councils, but because he deemed their interpretations of Scripture correct.<sup>62</sup> Beginning with Leipzig, Scripture became the singular, unopposed, sufficient basis for the exercise of authority with respect to doctrinal decisions. All other authorities were thus inherently fallible, subject to error, and—with Ockham’s razor duly sharpened—dispensable.

The conclusion Luther reached was not just significant for his break with the medieval understanding of church authority; it also created a longstanding problem for subsequent Lutherans. Following Luther, the evangelical theologian must substantiate every point from Scripture, and where there is no text of Scripture, there can be no Lutheran doctrine. Luther unquestionably lands on the side of the angels with his affirmation of the sufficiency of Scripture against Eck at Leipzig. But he has also created a perpetual difficulty within Lutheranism: what option do we have when two purportedly Lutheran interpretations of Scripture are irreconcilable? If Scripture alone is the sufficient basis for doctrine and church authority, then where

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<sup>60</sup> On this, see Volker Leppin, “Die Genese des reformatorischen Schriftprinzips: Beobachtungen zu Luthers Auseinandersetzung mit Johannes Eck bis zur Leipziger Disputation,” in *Reformatorsche Theologie und Autoritäten: Studien zur Genese des Schriftprinzips beim jungen Luther*, ed. Volker Leppin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 97–139.

<sup>61</sup> This point is now made forcefully in the important new work by Amy Nelson Burnett, *Debating the Sacraments: Print and Authority in the Early Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>62</sup> AE 41:121–122.

are we left when interpretations of Scripture conflict with one another and we cannot reconcile them? Who decides which interpretation of Scripture is correct? If we cannot default to popes or councils or canons, to tradition or church father or medieval doctor, then how do we decide between them? This is the challenge Luther's conclusion at Leipzig has left for subsequent Lutherans.

#### IV. Lutherans and Church Authority after Leipzig

Two brief qualifications are in order. First, the medieval church had its own difficulties resolving conflicting theological views. The church mostly left it to university faculties or religious orders to settle their differences, and only seldom to popes and bishops.<sup>63</sup> There was a great deal of ambiguity, debate, and diversity in the Middle Ages, and in fact that was one of the problems for Luther and his colleagues. There was *too much* diversity and *too much* uncertainty for their liking. Or, in the words of Notre Dame medievalist John Van Engen, too many "options" for the reformers: "What these Reformers found no longer sustainable or indeed desirable was the fifteenth-century church's carnival of religious options, multiple, competing, contested, coexistent, negotiated, overlapping, local, personally appropriated."<sup>64</sup> Luther and the reformers wanted something more certain than the medieval church could give them. Second, the pope is no panacea for this problem of resolving theological conflict. Very few popes were ever theologians. The two most recent popes, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, were exceptions to the rule. They were genuine scholars prior to their pontificates, and they made substantial theological statements as popes. But that was not the case during the Middle Ages, nor has it been the case since. Most popes were Italian statesmen and bureaucrats, because the office of the papacy required that: someone who could handle the complex political and economic machinery of Rome and the Papal States, someone who could arbitrate disputes between kings and princes and dukes, someone who could manage a diverse, international church.<sup>65</sup> But that sort of person was seldom a serious theologian capable of engaging theological disputes between scholars. And

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<sup>63</sup> For examples, see Louis B. Pascoe, *Church and Reform: Bishops, Theologians, and Canon Lawyers in the Thought of Pierre d'Ailly, 1351-1420* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 165-181; Alan E. Bernstein, *Pierre D'Ailly and the Blanchard Affair: University and Chancellor of Paris at the Beginning of the Great Schism* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 1-19; and Roger Gryson, "The Authority of the Teacher in the Ancient and Medieval Church," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 19 (1982): 176-187.

<sup>64</sup> John Van Engen, "Multiple Options: The World of the Fifteenth-Century Church," *Church History* 77 (2008): 284.

<sup>65</sup> See especially Paolo Prodi, *The Papal Prince: One Body and Two Souls: The Papal Monarchy and Early Modern Europe*, trans. Susan Haskins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), esp. 1-16, 79-101.

that may account for Luther's own disappointment in Leo X, for whom he had high hopes.<sup>66</sup>

Those qualifications aside, however, the outcome of the Leipzig Debate created a vacuum of church authority, and Lutherans are still dealing with the repercussions. In the years immediately following the Reformation, the monarchies of northern Europe filled that vacuum. For several centuries, kings and princes in Germany and many Scandinavian countries took up the mantle of church leadership. They oversaw and funded theological faculties and provided bishops and superintendents. They authorized church orders (*Kirchenordnungen*) and church laws (*Kirchenrechten*) that regulated everything from worship to marriage and education.<sup>67</sup> They ensured that the Augsburg Confession had legal and political standing and that theological controversies did not divide Lutheran state churches. They stood behind the adoption of theological statements, like John Frederick of Saxony promulgated Melancthon's Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope or August of Saxony promulgated the Book of Concord.<sup>68</sup> That framework more or less worked for Lutherans over several hundred years. It worked at least until a monarch decided to force the joint worship of Lutherans and the Reformed, as Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia did in and after 1817.<sup>69</sup>

That leads to this country and to the immigration of confessional Lutherans from across northern Europe in the nineteenth century. They organized themselves in various ways from episcopal structures to representative democratic structures like the Missouri Synod's, and everything in between. So it was that Walther addressed the 1848 convention after the formation of the denomination and declared that the Synod would accept a democratic process of governance. He mentioned the success of the Swedes with their episcopal polity and the state church

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<sup>66</sup> AE 31:155.

<sup>67</sup> Discussion of this can be found in Wilhelm Maurer, *Die Kirche und ihr Recht: Gesammelten Aufsätze zum evangelisch Kirchenrecht* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1976), and John R. Witte, *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>68</sup> On the role of early modern monarchies in stabilizing Europe after the Reformation, see Theodore K. Rabb, *The Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). On how the monarchies did this religiously, the most accessible literature on confessionalization in English includes Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation: Central Europe 1550–1750* (London: Routledge, 1989); Gerhard Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and Heinz Schilling, "The Reformation and the Rise of the Early Modern State," in *Luther and the Modern State in Germany*, ed. James D. Tracy (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Publishers, 1986), 21–30.

<sup>69</sup> Walter H. Conser Jr., *Church and Confession: Conservative Theologians in Germany, England, and America, 1815–1866* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 13–54, and Nicholas Hope, *German and Scandinavian Protestantism, 1700–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 336–348.

of their German forebears, then went on to say that the Synod would take a different approach. After all, he reasoned, they were in America, and Americans would never accept such authoritarian structures:

Perhaps there are times and conditions when it is profitable for the church to place supreme deciding and regulating power into the hands of representatives. Who, for instance, would deny that at one time the consistories of our German fatherland were an inestimable blessing, especially when the prophecy of Isaiah was being fulfilled in the German Lutheran Church: “And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers” (Is. 49:23)? Which person acquainted a bit with history would deny that the Swedish church grew splendidly under its episcopal constitution, especially so long as men like Laurentius Petri, the famous Swedish translator of the Bible and student of Luther, bore the episcopal dignity, and so long as men like the two Gustavuses wore the royal crown of Sweden?

Walther goes on:

If, however, we glance at the conditions in which the church finds herself here, we can hardly consider any other constitution as the most salutary except one under which the congregations are free to govern themselves. . . . In a republic, as the United States of America is, where the feeling of being free and independent of man is nourished so strongly from childhood, the inevitable result [of another constitution] would be that any restriction beyond the limits drawn by God himself would be empty shells, and our apparent growth would often be nothing but a process of becoming stiff and dying in a great mass of lifeless forms.<sup>70</sup>

Now, Walther never imagined voting on church doctrine or interpretations of Scripture, and the Constitution and Bylaws of Synod assert that its scriptural and confessional basis may not be repealed. Yet this raises another inherently sticky question: If a representative democratic convention adopted this confessional position, can such a convention not also one day reopen that question and potentially make a different determination? Lutherans no longer have popes, councils, or canons—or even kings, princes, or bishops—to reconcile their disagreements; instead, they have denominational conventions and electronic ballots.

And that’s the dilemma Lutherans face today: How should we proceed when we find ourselves at odds over differing interpretations of Scripture? And what happens when the Synod in convention rules against our preferred interpretation? This is

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<sup>70</sup> Carl S. Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 174–175.

what Leipzig has left us. For five centuries, it has invigorated the Lutheran study of Scripture precisely because Scripture is the final authority in the church. For five centuries, however, Lutherans have relied on a variety of ecclesiastical structures, from absolute monarchies to historic episcopates, even representative democracy, to choose between rival Lutheran interpretations of Scripture. And we are still left with the same nagging ecclesiological question: Who decides? When there are conflicting interpretations of Scripture, when we have done the historical and grammatical and lexical analysis, and we still come to differing conclusions, who decides between those two options?

More to the point, what happens when the decision doesn't go *my* way? When the Missouri Synod, using whatever mechanism, does decide on an interpretation of Scripture, and when I do not agree with that interpretation, what am *I* to do? One option is to leave. We have the religious liberty to join another denomination or start a new one. That has long been a live option in American Lutheranism. There is another option: to pull the political levers and manipulate the political system until we have the votes and our opinion wins the day. That is also a live option. But there is another, better option: we can continue engaging one another in the hopes of persuading those with whom we disagree. After all, isn't that what we want—to agree? We can seek to engage and persuade one another with new and better arguments. We can seek to frame the debate in new and different ways. We can seek to change one another's minds. This is really no different than something else Walther said in his 1848 address. He said that apart from the Word of God we only have the power of convicting, or persuasion.<sup>71</sup> And if we cannot agree on the Word of God, then all we really have left is the ability to persuade others of the right interpretation of that Word. That remains as true for Lutherans now as it was in 1848 for Walther, and as it was in 1519 at Leipzig for Luther. If there is any hope of reconciling our exegetical, theological, or ecclesiastical disagreements, it will not happen through the creation of another micro-synod or through political machinations. Instead, it will come through continued dialogue and debate—dialogue and debate undertaken in the confidence that, as Luther said in a letter shortly following his disputation with Eck in 1519, “Truth will prevail.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Moving Frontiers*, 170.

<sup>72</sup> “Veritas vincet.” Luther, letter to Joh. Lang (September 3, 1519), WA Br 1:505.13, no. 196.

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# The Leipzig Debate and Theological Method

Roland F. Ziegler

## I. Introduction

The Leipzig Debate is one of the iconic moments in the history of the Reformation.<sup>1</sup> The picture of Luther standing against Eck is part of a series of iconic moments, which includes Luther and Cajetan in 1518 and Luther before the emperor at Worms in 1521. It is the picture of the lonely monk before the authorities of the Roman Church. In the case of the Leipzig Debate, this picture is not quite correct. Luther was not alone; he was not even the first to debate Eck. That honor fell to his colleague Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt. Nor was the debate a confrontation with an ecclesiastical authority figure, but rather a meeting between colleagues. The debate is most famous for the discussion on ecclesiology, especially the authority of the pope and the councils. This essay, however, will look at the Leipzig Debate not as a contribution to ecclesiology, but rather to theological methodology.

But is this a fair reading of the Leipzig Debate? The Reformation started out as a debate on indulgences, but it soon became a debate on ecclesiology. The debate on the reformational turn in Luther's theology—that is, the question of what made Luther the Reformer and when it happened—focuses on Luther's teaching on justification and the mediation of salvation.<sup>2</sup> In all of this, questions of material dogmatics are at the center; theological method is not. On the other hand, the great

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<sup>1</sup> On the Leipzig Debate in general, see the essays in Markus Hein and Armin Kohnle, eds., *Die Leipziger Disputation 1519, vol. 1, Leipziger Arbeitsgespräch zur Reformation*, Herbergen der Christenheit Sonderband 18 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlangsanstalt, 2011). On the prehistory of the debate, see Kurt-Victor Selge, "Der Weg zur Leipziger Disputation zwischen Luther und Eck im Jahr 1519," in Bernd Moeller and Gerhard Ruhbach, eds., *Bleibendes im Wandel der Kirchengeschichte: Kirchenhistorische Studien* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, Paul Siebeck, 1973), 169–210. For the whole context and the aftermath of the debate, see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483–1521* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 299–348. The text of the Leipzig Debate is found in Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [Schriften], 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), 59:433–605 (hereafter WA). There is no English translation of the debate. The most comprehensive summary in English is still W. H. T. Dau, *The Leipzig Debate in 1519: Leaves from the Story of Luther's Life* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1919).

<sup>2</sup> For an introduction to the discussion on Luther's Reformation turn, see Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483–1521*, 221–237.

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change in what Luther says compared to the theology of his time does at least imply a change in theological method.<sup>3</sup> A fresh reading of the Latin text of the Leipzig Debate in the new edition of 1982 will highlight Luther's theological methodology.<sup>4</sup>

In the Leipzig Debate between Luther and Eck, the great topics are the authority of the councils, the primacy of the pope, and purgatory. These discussions show different theological methods in Luther and Eck in the different ways they argue and in what each of the disputants accept as a valid argument. Kurt-Victor Selge used the term *Autoritätengefüge*, "structure of authorities," in an article on the Leipzig Debate.<sup>5</sup> Such a "structure of authorities" structures theological teaching and debate. What is meant by that? Theological statements are propositions, sentences that claim to be true. Theologians have to argue for the truth of such statements. Even to say, "But it is obvious; everybody sees it," is an argument. For practically all theological statements, though, such an appeal to a direct apprehension of the truth is not a viable option, for most theological statements do not state basic beliefs that, for example, are based on immediate sensory experience or are known a priori.<sup>6</sup> Theological statements are most commonly derived from other statements. The question of authorities is thus twofold: First, what kind of statements are allowable as reasons for a theological statement (which raises the question of sources and authorities in theological argumentation)? Second, what are the rules to get from these statements to a theological statement? The second question does not need to concern us here much, because there was no controversy between Luther and Eck. Both used traditional logic in the Leipzig Debate. Whatever concern Luther had in regard to the use of logic in theology, in this debate he did not reject the syllogistic form of argument.<sup>7</sup> At the beginning of the disputation, the disputants issued what was called a *protestatio*, a declaration of intent. Karlstadt said:

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Leif Grane, *Modus loquendi theologicus Luthers Kampf um die Erneuerung der Theologie, 1515–1518* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1975).

<sup>4</sup> The new edition by Franz Tobias Bos from 1982 is in WA 59:433–605. This presents a text based on more printed editions than what was published in 1884 (WA 2:254–383), and it adds many helpful footnotes.

<sup>5</sup> Kurt-Victor Selge, "Das Autoritätengefüge der westlichen Christenheit im Lutherkonflikt 1517 bis 1521," *Historische Zeitschrift* 223 (1976): 591–617.

<sup>6</sup> Two candidates for such basic beliefs could be the belief of the existence of God, if one accepts Alvin Plantinga's argument (cf., for example, Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2000], 175–180), and the self-authenticating nature of Scripture (cf. Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 1 [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970], 296–300).

<sup>7</sup> On Luther and logic, cf. Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist: A Study of the Logical Methods Used in Martin Luther's Disputations in the Light of Their Medieval Background*, *Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft* 30 (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 1994); Stefan Streiff, "Novis linguis loqui": *Martin Luthers Disputation über Joh 1,14 "verbum caro factum est" aus dem Jahr*

First, we testify and want it to be testified everywhere, that we do not want to depart anywhere from the Catholic church a finger's breath. But if there is anything found of that kind, we want it to be regarded as something that has lapsed out of human ignorance, not intentionally, and that it should be seen now as recanted. We do not dictate to the judgment of the scholars, nor do we prejudge the authority of the public schools. Let each one's judgment remain inviolate, as long as the Scriptures are not treated indistinctly [*per nebulam*] but in their entirety. But we give to the sacred Scriptures this honor, that we do not want to assert or teach anything without them. In other things, which cannot clearly be taught from them, we give the first place only to the ecclesiastical writers.<sup>8</sup>

Eck said:

I state in theological candor: as I have taken up this task to the praise of God, the honor of the church, the salvation of souls, and the elucidation of the truth, it is not my intention to say or assert anything that is contrary either to the sacred Scriptures or to holy mother church. I am ready to be corrected and instructed by the apostolic see and by those to whose judgment we have submitted yesterday, according to custom, this our disputation.<sup>9</sup>

Luther stated: "In the name of the Lord, Amen. I embrace and follow the *protestatio* of both excellent lords, Andreas Karlstadt and Johannes Eck." Luther goes on stating that it was not his idea to discuss the primacy of the pope.<sup>10</sup>

These protestations were part of the medieval form of disputation.<sup>11</sup> Disputations have the purpose to discuss and clarify theological issues. For that, one needs some kind of freedom and the chance to explore and investigate different options. On the other hand, theologians had to be orthodox; they had to accept what was already received as truth by the church. Hence, in the protestation they ritually, so to speak, enacted their submission to church authorities and preempted any accusations that they were intending to go beyond the boundaries of church doctrine or to defy the ecclesiastical authorities. Thus, the protestations state the common base of the theological discussion and affirm the structure of authority to which the disputants submit. But the protestations at Leipzig also showed that

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1539, *Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie* 70 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> WA 59:433.19–29. All translations from WA 59 are my own.

<sup>9</sup> WA 59:433.32–434.38.

<sup>10</sup> WA 59:434.40–41.

<sup>11</sup> On the form of the disputation, see Anselm Schubert, "Libertas Disputandi: Luther und die Leipziger Disputation als akademisches Streitgespräch," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 105 (2008): 411–442.

there were differences. Karlstadt invoked the Catholic church but was silent on the authority of the pope, while emphasizing the sole authority of Scripture. Eck explicitly mentioned the apostolic see. Luther seemed to acknowledge the authority of the apostolic see and the *sola scriptura*, and he was open to correction from the apostolic see. But under what conditions? That is the question. The protestations therefore enumerate authorities: Scripture, ecclesiastical writers, the Catholic church, the apostolic see. The protestations do not explicitly state the relation between them, which became the source of conflict and finally a break in the Reformation. Thus, we will look at how the authorities of Scripture, church fathers, canon law, councils, and the papacy were used and described, and how these authorities related to one another in the Leipzig Debate.

## II. The Authorities

Luther stated: “The word of God is, in fact, above all words of man.”<sup>12</sup> The supremacy of Scripture was an uncontroversial statement between Luther and Eck. More controversial was this question: How does this “being above” work itself out in the church? Additionally, the question of the canon becomes controversial in the context of purgatory.

The Leipzig Debate was not simply about the authority of the pope; it was also about purgatory. The Reformation, after all, started with the dispute on indulgences for the dead, a dispute about the power of the church to be able to free the souls in purgatory from temporal punishment. The existence of purgatory was a given for the medieval western church, deeply imbedded in the life of the church with its masses and prayers for the dead and with the sale of indulgences. At the time of the Leipzig Debate, Luther did not deny the existence of purgatory, but he denied that indulgences could influence the state of deceased Christians. But Luther did deny that there was scriptural proof for the existence of purgatory. Traditionally, 2 Maccabees 12:42–45 was quoted as a proof text for the existence of a state of the dead in which they profit from the intercession of the living.<sup>13</sup> Luther raises the issue

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<sup>12</sup> “Verbum enim dei super omnia verba hominum est.” WA 59:445.405–406.

<sup>13</sup> “And they turned to supplication, praying that the sin that had been committed might be wholly blotted out. The noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened as the result of the sin of those who had fallen. He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin” (2 Macc 12:42–45; NRSV).

of the canonicity of Maccabees. From Jerome, he knows that there was a difference of opinion in the early church, and he uses this to state that, since Maccabees are disputed books, they cannot be used in theological debate to decide the issue. A doubtful book is not a canonical book, it cannot serve as a canon of truth, and thus Luther here for the first time opts for the Masoretic canon against the canon of the Vulgate.<sup>14</sup> Against Luther, Eck argues for the canonicity of Maccabees by quoting Augustine and Ivo of Chartres. Strangely, he does not refer to the bull of the Council of Florence, *Cantate Domino* (February 4, 1442), which included Maccabees in the canonical books, though he does refer to the bull of union with the Greeks, *Laetentur caeli*, of the same council, which affirms the existence of purgatory.<sup>15</sup>

Both sides agree that Scripture is authoritative. But there are differences in the understanding of Scripture, and so the question of interpretation becomes an issue, and with it the question of hermeneutics as theory of interpretation. Here, Luther is inside the bounds of tradition, when he privileges the literal sense to prove a point, for even when medieval exegesis proposed the fourfold sense of Scripture and made extensive use of the allegorical, tropological, and anagogical senses, nevertheless, it was also commonly accepted that to establish dogmatic statements, only the literal sense was decisive.<sup>16</sup>

Against Eck's use of allegorical and typological exegesis, Luther argues that in a theological debate only the genuine and proper sense of the Scripture counts.<sup>17</sup> Eck had quoted Bernard of Clairvaux, who had argued that the hierarchical constitution of the church was following a heavenly pattern. For Christ said in John 5:19: "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees

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<sup>14</sup> WA 59:528.2938–2939; 547.3569–3579. Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology, Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 124: "On the question of scriptural authority, we should emphasize that it was at the Leipzig Disputation that Luther first clearly distinguished the canonical writings in the authentic sense from the Apocrypha, that is, from writings contained not in the Hebrew but in the Greek Old Testament."

<sup>15</sup> WA 59:528.2858–2863; 531.3030–3031. Cf. Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum [Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals]*, 43rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), no. 1335; no. 1304.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.1, 10 ad 1: "Thus in Holy Writ no confusion results, for all the senses are founded on one—the literal—from which alone can any argument be drawn, and not from those intended in allegory, as Augustine says (Epis. 48). Nevertheless, nothing of Holy Scripture perishes on account of this, since nothing necessary to faith is contained under the spiritual sense which is not elsewhere put forward by the Scripture in its literal sense." See *The Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 2nd ed. (London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1912–25; online edition, Kevin Knight, 2017), <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1001.htm#article10>.

<sup>17</sup> WA 59:445.412–415.

the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.”<sup>18</sup> When that is combined with the instruction that Moses is to make the tabernacle according to the vision (Exod 25:40), with the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 21:2), and with the fact that in heaven the seraphim and cherubim are under one head, Eck concludes that the church on earth follows this heavenly pattern, and the primates and patriarchs are under one head.<sup>19</sup> Luther rejects Bernard and Eck’s argument, because it relies on an “alien sense” of Scripture.<sup>20</sup> The method of Bernard is one of persuasion, not proof. Luther does not reject typological or allegorical exegesis out of hand, but such an exegesis cannot be proof for a theological point. It can only persuade and adorn a theological point that is established by the proper sense of Scripture, which is the literal or historical sense.<sup>21</sup>

Luther accuses Eck of using isolated quotes of Scripture in the debate. To argue from Scripture cannot mean that one simply quotes verses. Rather, one has to consider the whole of Scripture and understand the verses in the wider context. One must put the “entire Scriptures before one’s eyes” and find an agreement between verses that seem to disagree.<sup>22</sup>

Eck raises the issue of the connection of exegesis and tradition. Luther, so Eck, in his exegesis relies on his own reason, whereas Eck rests on the church fathers.<sup>23</sup> For in exegesis, one should not study alone—studying alone is the mother of errors—but the opinion of the fathers and of holy mother church is to be accepted.<sup>24</sup> Eck says it is Bohemian—i.e., Hussite—to want to understand the

<sup>18</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>19</sup> WA 59:441.271–279.

<sup>20</sup> WA 59:464, 995.

<sup>21</sup> Luther does not use these terms here, but cf. his first lectures on Galatians: “This kind of game may, of course, be permitted to those who want it, provided they do not accustom themselves to the rashness of some, who tear the Scriptures to pieces as they please and make them uncertain. On the contrary, these interpretations [i.e., the tropological, allegorical, and analogical senses] add extra ornamentation, so to speak, to the main and legitimate sense, so that a topic may be more richly adorned by them, or—in keeping with Paul’s example—so that those who are not well instructed may be nurtured in gentler fashion with milky teaching, as it were. But these interpretations should not be brought forward with a view to establishing a doctrine of faith.” Martin Luther, “Galatians” (1519): vol. 27, p. 311, in *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE.

<sup>22</sup> WA 59:575.4475–4478.

<sup>23</sup> Eck says he does not accept his own exegetical solutions, but rests on the holy fathers: “Quare nostro sensui non innitatur sed sanctis patribus.” WA 59:523.2807.

<sup>24</sup> WA 59:506.2257–2259.

Scriptures better than the popes, councils, doctors, and universities.<sup>25</sup> After all, both Arius and Athanasius had a text of the gospel John 14:28, “The Father is greater than I,” but the question is who understood it properly.<sup>26</sup> Since there are different and divergent interpretations of Scripture, there must be a way beyond exegesis to determine the right interpretation of Scripture.

Luther does not engage this question directly. He does not set out to prove that one does not need the magisterium and tradition to tell one what the proper meaning of a text is. Rather, he engages in exegesis and brings forth the arguments why a text should be understood in this way and not in another. Underlying such a procedure is the conviction that the text can be understood. He quotes Augustine, who demands that all authors are to be evaluated by the divine Scriptures, whose authority is greater than the capacity of the whole of humanity. Luther does not condemn the interpretation of the fathers, but follows those who are closest to the Scriptures. “And before all things, when the Scriptures are clear, I embrace the [Scriptures] themselves.”<sup>27</sup> With that, Luther brings in the question of the clarity of Scripture, which will become a prominent theme in the coming years and which undergirds his criticism of the traditional system of authorities. Only because the Scriptures can be understood by the present reader by himself is it possible to evaluate the tradition. Only because the Scriptures are clear can they be the ultimate proof for a theological statement.

Thus, when Eck quotes Jerome for the thesis that Peter is made the head of the church so that there may be no schism—and uses this against Luther, who understands 1 Corinthians 3:5 in combination with 1 Corinthians 1:12–13 as stating that the unity of the church is not based on a person—Luther can say that Paul should not be deserted for Jerome’s sake.<sup>28</sup> Luther does not reject the appeal to church fathers in theological debate. But Luther reserves the right to evaluate them; i.e., he does not submit to their authority automatically. That is true also in regard to the exegesis of the church fathers. While Eck wants to settle exegetical questions by appeal to the interpretation of the church fathers, Luther wants to look for himself and is not afraid to maintain his exegesis against the exegesis of the church fathers. He is supported in this by the fact that the exegesis of the church fathers is less than unanimous, especially in the controversial interpretation of Matthew 16:18. What is the rock on which Christ builds his church? Luther quotes fathers who favor his interpretation that this rock is Christ or the confession of Christ, and not the person of Peter. The moment the “church fathers” are no

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<sup>25</sup> WA 59:470.1176–1179.

<sup>26</sup> WA 59:469.1148–1151.

<sup>27</sup> WA 59:509.2350–2356.

<sup>28</sup> WA 59:445.397–401.

longer a theologically cohering group, appealing to “the church fathers” no longer can settle any theological issue. Here Luther destroys the function of the church fathers as a norm in the church. If the church fathers do not agree among themselves, then one cannot simply claim them for one position. Thus, Luther uses historical arguments to deconstruct “the fathers” as an authority that is in itself cohering and consistent.<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, Luther is more than happy to quote the church fathers when they support his position. Does Luther want to eat his cake and have it too? Not necessarily. First, Luther thinks that this critical use of the church fathers is in harmony with the church fathers’ position. Luther sets against Eck’s quotations from the church fathers the rule of Augustine that all writers must be evaluated by Scripture.<sup>30</sup> The church fathers—at least Augustine—have not set up themselves as authorities in the church which should be blindly obeyed. Who, then, follows the church fathers faithfully: Luther, who respects them as teachers of the word of God who are mindful of their fallibility and submit to the word of God; or Eck, who treats them as infallible oracles? While medieval theology was aware of divergences among the church fathers, it saw its task as reconciling their opinions. Luther draws a different consequence: because they contradict one another, the theologian has to decide who is right. That means that theologians have to weigh their interpretations of Scripture and themselves must do the groundwork of exegesis instead of collecting the exegesis of the fathers and handing down the result of this collecting as the true interpretation of Scripture.

Besides the church fathers, medieval church law served as an authority in the medieval church. The *Corpus Iuris Canonici* is a collection of church law documents, some of which are official, others private, which came into being between 1140 and 1503.<sup>31</sup> The *Corpus Iuris Canonici* was a growing body up to the time of the Reformation. In our context, the *Decretum* of Gratian is of the greatest interest because it contains the oldest documents. Since it contains statements by church fathers, councils, and popes, there is some overlap with what has been said and will be said. Canon law is treated as a separate norm not for systematic reasons—in theology canon law could be subsumed under tradition, councils, and the papacy. Rather, historically speaking, the *Corpus Iuris Canonici* served as an authoritative collection of the binding tradition, even though it started as a private enterprise.

Canon law was not divorced from theology, as if it concerned only legal matters in the narrow sense. This is so, first, because canon law was regarded as containing

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<sup>29</sup> WA 59:464.985–992.

<sup>30</sup> WA 59:509.2352–2355.

<sup>31</sup> *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, ed. E. Friedberg, 2 vols. (Leipzig: B. Tauchnitz, 1879; reprint, Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1959).

laws that are *de iure divino*. These are laws that are either part of natural law (to be known by nature) or given in revelation (as it is contained in Scripture and tradition). Whatever is *de iure divino* is absolutely binding on the church. Second, there are laws *de iure humano*, which are binding on the church as positive law, but which can be changed.

Luther had studied the *Corpus Iuris Canonici* in the months preceding the debate.<sup>32</sup> Before the Leipzig Debate, he had made the historical claim that the primacy of jurisdiction of the pope was only four hundred years old. The primacy of the pope was developed in the *Corpus Iuris Canonici* as a legal claim. Luther deals with it the same way he dealt with the church fathers. He critically evaluates it with Scripture and history, he uses the parts of it that support his position, and he shows contradictions in the *Corpus Iuris Canonici* that make it impossible to use it as a norm. Luther also uses a “marginal canonical tradition,”<sup>33</sup> namely, the commentary by Nicolaus de Tudeschis (Panormitanus), which says that one layperson relying on better authority can be right against pope and council.<sup>34</sup>

The decree of Anacletus played a great role in the discussion. According to tradition, Anacletus I was the second or third successor to Peter as bishop of Rome. Thus, any documents written by him would be proof from the first century for the primacy of the papacy. The *Corpus Iuris Canonici* contains several documents by Anacletus on the primacy of the pope. In the *Decretum Gratiani* I, distinction XXI, c. 2 titled “The Roman church has received the primacy from Christ,” the second letter to the Italian bishops by Anacletus is quoted.<sup>35</sup> The third letter to all bishops by Anacletus is quoted in *Decretum Gratiani*, distinction XXII, c. 2, titled “The Roman Church has gained primacy not from the apostles, but from the Lord himself.”<sup>36</sup> The sources for these letters are the “Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals,” a collection of sources of canon law containing a large amount of forgeries that originated in the ninth century.<sup>37</sup>

The letter by Anacletus, if genuine, would have contradicted Luther’s claim that the primacy of the pope was a relatively recent innovation. Luther rejects the argument by claiming that it is not genuine. Luther was right, as we now know. But how does he argue against the genuineness of Anacletus? Luther calls the decree

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<sup>32</sup> Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 307.

<sup>33</sup> Selge, *Autoritätengefüge*, 609.

<sup>34</sup> Luther, *Ad dialogum Silvestri Prieratis de potestate papae responsio* (1518), WA 1:656.30–33.

<sup>35</sup> *Corpus Iuris Canonici* I.69–70.

<sup>36</sup> *Corpus Iuris Canonici* I.73–74.

<sup>37</sup> Georg May, “Kirchenrechtsquellen. I. Katholische,” *TRE* 19, 10–11:8–47.

*frigidissimus*, a term he uses over and over again, “very cold” or “very weak.”<sup>38</sup> A good Christian, he says, cannot believe that this decree was authored by the martyr Anacletus, because he calls Peter the “head” and the Roman church the “center” (*cardo*).<sup>39</sup> The argument is first a linguistic one: Anacletus states that Peter is called *Kephas*, that is, “head,” because he is to hold the position of primacy.<sup>40</sup> But this is obviously a crude linguistic mistake: *Kephas* is understood in the letter to be derived from the Greek *kephale*, when it is really Aramaic. Such an error is unlikely in a bishop of the first century.<sup>41</sup> Second, he calls the Roman church the “center” of the church, even though, as Luther repeatedly states in other places, the church’s center for the first decades was Jerusalem. The preeminent position of Rome is thus something that has come about in history, but cannot be made in a dogmatic statement about the constitution of the church. Luther engages in a form of critical historical research instead of assuming the historical truth of the tradition.

At the time of Luther, the debate between conciliarism and papalism had not yet been decided dogmatically, but practically conciliarism had lost. The last ecumenical council before the Leipzig Debate, the Fifth Lateran Council (1512–1517), showed that the council had become an instrument of the curia. There was still resistance, and the call for a free council (a council not controlled by the pope, as it was raised by the adherents of reform) was not yet a formal act of rebellion, but a possibility in the Roman Catholic structure of authorities.

That meant, on the other hand, that the authority of the council was sacrosanct. Luther’s statements on councils are somewhat conflicted. On the one hand, he relativizes them, because they are fundamentally assemblies of men—godly men, even saintly men, yes, but still men. And therefore their word has to be evaluated.<sup>42</sup> If a theologian would have to accept the councils as a formal authority *qua* council, then one had to show that they were inerrant. Thus, Luther challenges Eck to prove

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<sup>38</sup> WA 59:462.938–940: “hoc est unum de frigidissimis decretis, quod impugno, nec ullus mihi persuadebit, hoc decretum esse sanctissimi pontificis.” When used of arguments, the word *frigidus* means “failing to produce the effect intended, making no appeal, feeble, flat, lame,” and the like. See P. G. W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 736, s.v. “frigidus” 8.b.

<sup>39</sup> WA 59:465.1028–1031. “Ad decreta nihil dico, quae dixi frigidissima, et praesertim istius Anacleti multum iactati hac hora quod bonus christianus non credit Anacleti martyris, qui Cephas interpretatur caput et Romanam ecclesiam vocat cardinem.” Cf. *Corpus Iuris Canonici* 73–74 (Decr. Grat I, dist, 22, c. 2).

<sup>40</sup> *Corpus Iuris Canonici* I.74.

<sup>41</sup> WA 59:477.1404–478.1408: “Nondum enim confutavit quod idem decretum Cephana interpretatur caput, quae inscitia tanto pontifici non est tribuenda, praesertim eo tempore ubi floruerunt linguae et Iudaeorum habebatur copia. Sed et hoc constat, librum decretorum nondum esse approbatum.”

<sup>42</sup> “Romani pontifex et concilia sunt homines, ergo probandi sunt et sic tenendi, nec eximendi ab hac regula apostolica.” WA 59:480.1473–1475.

that councils cannot err, have not erred, or do not err.<sup>43</sup> Because councils do not have this kind of formal authority, if a theological proposition is supported only with proof from a council, then one does not have a proof that is by divine right.<sup>44</sup> In this question, no one's person is to be regarded, be it council or pope, but the content has to be judged.<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, when Eck claims that the council of Florence has decided the question of purgatory, for Luther this does not settle the question. A council cannot make what is not in Scripture to be scriptural (i.e., a council cannot establish a theological proposition without scriptural support). Luther compares this with the question of canonicity: the church cannot make gospels; it can only recognize gospels. Thus, councils can only recognize what Scripture says; they cannot go beyond it.<sup>46</sup> Almost twenty years later, he will express this in the Smalcald Articles: "This means that the Word of God—and no one else, not even an angel—should establish articles of faith."<sup>47</sup> Luther denies that God will always keep the majority of the church in the truth. For him, the example of the Arian controversy, where for some time the majority of the church subscribed to some christological heresies, is proof for rejecting the idea that the majority will be always right.<sup>48</sup>

While this is all quite radical, Luther also makes positive use of the councils. He quotes the Council of Nicaea against the primacy of the pope.<sup>49</sup> He even says—though as a historical statement, not as a dogmatic statement—that councils and the church have not erred in questions of faith, and that concerning the rest it is not necessary not to err.<sup>50</sup> Eck says that a council cannot be wrong because it is governed by the Holy Spirit. Luther answers that "in these things in which it is governed by the Holy Spirit, that is in matters of faith" the councils have not erred. Here, at least, Luther continues: "And as I say somewhere, I have not said that the council was wrong in giving indulgences, but it can be wrong."<sup>51</sup> This can be understood as saying that councils are prevented from error in theological matters, while they are not so prevented in other matters, which would be something like a limited

<sup>43</sup> WA 59:508.2307–2310.

<sup>44</sup> WA 59:513.2485.

<sup>45</sup> WA 59:557.3902.

<sup>46</sup> Against the claim that the Council of Florence has decided the question on purgatory, Luther says that a council cannot make that which is not in Scripture that it is in Scripture, just as the church cannot make gospels, even though it has approved the gospels. See WA 59:535.3170–3174.

<sup>47</sup> SA II II 15. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 304.

<sup>48</sup> Against Eck, Luther denies that the majority of the church cannot err; see the example of Arianism in WA 59:567.3890.

<sup>49</sup> WA 59:475.1322.

<sup>50</sup> WA 59:547.3578–3580.

<sup>51</sup> WA 59:567.4218–4221.

inspiration of the councils. But with everything else that Luther has said, this statement seems to be at least confusing. Even in matters of doctrine, that a council is governed by the Holy Spirit is something that has to be established, not something that can be taken for granted.

For Eck, the church is what stands behind tradition, canon law, councils, and papacy as the source and norm for theological statements. “Church” means here a constituted organization, structured by the hierarchy that governs, but of course not simply a human organization, but one that is at the same time the body of Christ and in which the Holy Spirit rules. As such, the church has an indefectibility from the truth and can serve itself as a standard of truth.

Luther does agree with Eck that the church cannot err in matters of faith.<sup>52</sup> But then he immediately rejects the importance of this statement for the present situation by saying that indulgences are not a matter of faith. “Matters of faith” seem to be much more narrowly defined than what Eck means.

With the faith in the indefectibility of the church comes the faith that the church will always be right. This means that the church hands down what is true and that its institutions say what is true, and hence theologians have to submit to these institutions. Luther has lost faith in the enduring and infallible truth of the church as it was constituted in his time, and thus he refuses to let his statements be evaluated by tradition, councils, and the papal magisterium.

The universal jurisdiction of the pope was commonly accepted. This not only extends to matters of organization (e.g., that all bishops have to be confirmed by the pope), but also to theological matters. This universal jurisdiction is by divine right, so Eck.<sup>53</sup>

Luther does not deny that the papacy has primacy in the church at the time of the Leipzig Debate. Even though he first entertains the thought that the papacy is the antichrist while preparing for the Leipzig Debate, he does not mention this thought in the debate. Rather, he defends the position that the papacy exists by human right. For Luther, the exalted position of the papacy in the church did not come about without the will of God. Therefore, he can say that the papacy exists because of the will of God. Its authority has to be obeyed according to Romans 13. But Luther rejects the infallibility and final authority of the papacy in the church. This means that in the discussion of theological statements a simple recourse to papal decisions is not a decisive argument.

Luther argues for his position first exegetically. The first proof is from Scripture, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall

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<sup>52</sup> WA 59:557.3888–3890.

<sup>53</sup> Eck asserts this at the very beginning of his disputation with Luther: WA 59:436.101–437.129.

not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt 16:18–19). This passage refers, so Luther, not to the person of Peter, but to the faith of Peter or the content of the faith, the confession of Peter.<sup>54</sup> Second, Peter is here in the persona of all the apostles and all believers, and thus, as he speaks for the apostles, so also the answer is directed to all the apostles.<sup>55</sup>

Luther also uses the church fathers in his argumentation, some of whom support his exegesis. Additionally, Luther argues that there are Christians and Christian churches, namely the Greek churches, which are not under the jurisdiction of the pope. On this basis, he concludes that the church can exist without the jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome.<sup>56</sup>

Luther uses thus not only Scripture, but also the church fathers, history, and experience for his view of the papacy. The last argument is certainly the weakest, as the back-and-forth with Eck shows. For Eck denies flat out that there are true churches that are not under the jurisdiction of the pope. True enough, the Greek churches had many saints, but that was at a time in which they did not deny the supremacy of the papacy, even if they did not explicitly affirm the primacy of the pope. But the present Greek churches that reject the jurisdiction of the pope are schismatic and heretical.

The question that is not discussed in Leipzig is this: What makes a church a church? When Luther says that the Greek churches are true churches, he presupposes that being in union with the Church of Rome is not a condition for being a church. But that really presupposes what he has to prove; hence Eck is not impressed by the argument. In the background of Luther’s arguments is his view that where the gospel and the faith that is created by the gospel are present, there is the church. This is of course a completely different concept of ecclesiology than Eck’s, for whom the papacy is divinely instituted in the church and therefore church and papacy cannot be separated.

The conflict over the authority of the papacy in the church and thus also in theology comes to a head-on collision when Eck quotes the decree “Cum postquam” by Leo X. It was published on November 9, 1518, after Luther’s meeting with Cardinal Cajetan, to give a magisterial definition and support for the practice of granting indulgences and to make it impossible for Luther to claim that the

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<sup>54</sup> WA 59:456.754–457.764.

<sup>55</sup> WA 59:495.1918–1924.

<sup>56</sup> WA 59:462.930; 462.968.

church had no definite position so that he had the right to advocate his view of indulgences. It is directed to the Emperor Maximilian. It reads:

And lest in the future anyone should allege ignorance of the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church concerning such indulgences and their efficacy or excuse himself under pretext of such ignorance or aid himself by pretended protestations, but that these same persons may be convicted as guilty of notorious lying and be justly condemned, We have decided that you [sc. Maximilian] should be informed by these present <writings> that the Roman Church, which the other churches are bound to follow as their mother has decreed:

The Roman pontiff, successor of Peter, bearer of the keys, and the vicar of Jesus Christ on earth, in virtue of the power of the keys—to which it belongs to open the kingdom of heaven by taking away the obstacles in Christ’s faithful (namely, the guilt and the punishment due to actual sins: the guilt indeed, through the sacrament of penance, by the temporal punishment due to actual sins according to divine justice by means of ecclesiastical indulgence)—can, for reasonable causes, concede indulgences from the superabundant merits of Christ and the saints to the same faithful of Christ, who are members of Christ by the bond of charity, whether in this life or in purgatory; and, by granting an indulgence for both the living and the dead in virtue of apostolic authority, he has been accustomed to dispense the treasury of merits of Christ and the saints <and> to confer the indulgence itself by way of absolution or to apply it by means of suffrage.

And, therefore, all those, whether living or dead, who have truly obtained all such indulgences are freed from the temporal punishment due to their actual sins according to divine justice in a measure equivalent to the indulgence granted and acquired.

And by the tenor of these present <writings> . . . in virtue of apostolic authority, we decree that this must be held and preached by all under penalty of *latae sententiae* <automatic> excommunication.<sup>57</sup>

This document was written to leave no wriggle room, so no wonder Eck uses it. What is Luther’s reaction when he is confronted with this solemn affirmation and declaration of the teaching authority of the pope? Luther says: “He [Pope Leo X!] does not articulate it sufficiently nor does he prove one syllable what he said. I have spoken more fully about that in my *Proceedings at Augsburg*.”<sup>58</sup> One could not more

<sup>57</sup> Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, nos. 1447–1449.

<sup>58</sup> WA 59:559.3978–560.3980. Regarding the *Proceedings at Augsburg* (1518), see AE 31:264–270; WA 2:9.25–13.5.

tersely express the difference in how to prove a theological statement than by this exchange between Eck and Luther.

### III. The Consequences for Theological Method

Luther did not set out to attack the complex structure of norms of the late medieval church of Scripture, tradition, councils, and papacy. His first concern was biblical exegesis and justification, then the debate on indulgences. But when Luther was confronted with the norm of councils and papacy in the meeting with Cajetan,<sup>59</sup> he had to evaluate their significance for theological method. Luther, finding himself in a conflict between what he had found in Scripture and other theological authorities, could not deny what he had found in Scripture. Of course, he was haunted by questions: Are you alone wise? Are all others wrong?<sup>60</sup> The question could not be answered for Luther by an appeal to ecclesiastical authorities, tradition, or majorities, but by Scripture, because the claims of authority of ecclesiastical authorities, tradition, and majorities had to be evaluated by Scripture itself. Hence, the Scriptures were not only acknowledged as the highest authority—that was not controversial—but the Scriptures were no longer seen as a unity with tradition and magisterium, and thus Scripture could be used critically to evaluate tradition and magisterium. It is this critical function of Scripture that causes the break in the western church.

That does not mean that Luther rejects all tradition. But he rejects the concept that there is a harmonious body of teachings handed down authoritatively in a church that is infallibly guided by the Holy Spirit. This picture does not do justice to tradition itself, which is not harmonious, nor to the state of the church whose hierarchy is in opposition to the central teaching of Scripture. What those before us have taught can be used gladly, after those teachings are evaluated by Scripture. But tradition is neither necessary for the understanding of Scripture, nor is it binding on the church by divine right where it goes beyond Scripture. Luther never deviated from this view; hence his remark in the preface to his collected writings in German: “I would have been quite content to see my books, one and all, remain in obscurity and go by the board.”<sup>61</sup> Why? “Neither councils, fathers, nor we, in spite of the

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<sup>59</sup> *Proceedings at Augsburg* (1518), AE 31:253–292.

<sup>60</sup> Early on, Luther had to face this question: Why do you think you alone are right, and all the others are wrong (WA 1:611.8; 625.15)? Charles V raised the issue at Worms in 1521: “Yl est certain, que ung seul frère erre en son opinion laquelle est contre toute la crestienneté tant du temps passé mille ans et plus que du present.” Selge, *Autoritätengefüge*, 607.

<sup>61</sup> Luther, “Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther’s German Writings” (1539), AE 34:283; WA 50:657.1–2.

greatest and best success possible, will do as well as the Holy Scriptures, that is, as well as God himself has done.”<sup>62</sup>

As the example of purgatory shows, Luther had not drawn all conclusions from his position at the time of the Leipzig Debate. Only later would he come to reject purgatory because of its lack of biblical support. This raises questions about whether the Scripture principle was not the most fundamental principle for Luther. Some researchers have proposed exactly this.

Ernst Kähler states in his article “Observations on the Problem of Scripture and Tradition in the Leipzig Debate of 1519” that the fact that Luther did not reject purgatory in the early Reformation shows the “paramount significance” of his “overall theological conception.”<sup>63</sup> Whatever can agree with it—like Luther’s rather idiosyncratic view of purgatory at the time of the Leipzig Debate—can stay. What Kähler means is that Luther does not start with the Scripture principle; what drives his theological thinking is not opposition to tradition or to the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but the gospel of free forgiveness on account of Christ. It is historically true that Luther’s reformational turn—however one defines it and whenever one dates it—is not the assertion of *sola scriptura*. But to say that Luther’s theological argumentation in the Leipzig Debate is not driven by the *sola scriptura* speaks against the text. For Luther, the authority of Scripture is always the authority of rightly understood Scripture, and rightly understood Scripture is the one that leads to the proclamation of justification without works through faith. But for Luther, Scripture has formal authority because it is the word of God over and against human traditions. The reason Luther did not reject purgatory at the time of the Leipzig Debate is therefore not the absence of the Scripture principle, but because it took Luther time to work out the consequences of his insights.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Luther, “Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther’s German Writings” (1539), AE 34:284; WA 50:657.25–27.

<sup>63</sup> Ernst Kähler, “Beobachtungen zum Problem von Schrift und Tradition in der Leipziger Disputation von 1519,” *Hören und Handeln: Festschrift für Ernst Wolf zum 60. Geburtstag* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1962), 226.

<sup>64</sup> Luther discusses the question of the biblical foundation of purgatory in a letter to Spalatin some months after the Leipzig Disputation (November 7, 1519, WA BR 1:552–555) and comes to the conclusion that purgatory is not an article of faith and that no one who does not believe in purgatory should be called a heretic.

## Luther and Liberalism: A Tale of Two Tales (Or, A Lutheran Showdown Worth Having)<sup>1</sup>

Korey D. Maas

When originally asked if I might speak to this Symposium on some subject concerning Luther's theology, I replied that I might indeed be interested in addressing what has come to be called his "political theology." Almost immediately, however, I began to question the wisdom of doing so. Not only because, as Harro Höpfl has rightly noted, it is "impossible to give . . . a brief summary of his political theology,"<sup>2</sup> but also because, as the cliché has it, politics and theology are the two subjects one ought to avoid in polite company. Addressing both at the same time, then, seems doubly unwise. Yet despite contentious, perhaps even unanswerable questions concerning the nature and relevance of Luther's political theology, I do take small comfort in the conviction that, precisely because such questions are contentious, they remain incredibly important—perhaps especially so in our own context and at this particular juncture of the American experiment, which only coincidentally overlaps with an important anniversary of the Reformation.

Before turning to Luther himself, however, I would like, by way of introduction, to summarize a debate taking place among some Roman Catholics, as it might helpfully highlight the sorts of questions and concerns with which Lutherans ought also to be more intentionally wrestling. Perhaps the most useful entrée to this debate is a much-discussed essay written two years ago by Notre Dame political theorist Patrick Deneen, titled "A Catholic Showdown Worth Watching."<sup>3</sup> The showdown in question is not the frequently covered contest between so-called liberal and conservative Catholics, but between two factions of what most would colloquially call conservatives. The one is united, according to Deneen, by a shared belief that

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<sup>1</sup> The present essay is a version of remarks presented as the keynote address for the Thirty-Ninth Annual Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, on January 21, 2016. I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. David Scaer and the Symposium organizers for their kind invitation.

<sup>2</sup> Harro Höpfl, "Introduction," in *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*, ed. Harro Höpfl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), xxii.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick J. Deneen, "A Catholic Showdown Worth Watching," *The American Conservative*, February 6, 2014, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/2014/02/06/a-catholic-showdown-worth-watching/>.

there is “no fundamental contradiction between liberal democracy and Catholicism,”<sup>4</sup> that they are not only compatible but in fact mutually beneficial.

This line of thought will undoubtedly be familiar to you, as it has been on prominent display in recent debates about the contraceptive mandate, public accommodation of gay and transgender individuals, and similar controversies. In all cases, the unsurprising response of those affected has been an appeal to that very important aspect of America’s own liberal democracy: the constitutional protection of religion’s free exercise. Perhaps more surprising and more interesting, though, are those narratives which have attempted to portray religious liberty and freedom of conscience as having always and everywhere been constitutive of Catholicism. Writing in *First Things*, for example, George Weigel characterized the 1648 Peace of Westphalia—which brought to an end the Reformation-era “wars of religion,” and is often identified as having birthed the modern idea of the nation state—as having reversed a policy of religious toleration stretching back nearly two millennia to Constantine’s Edict of Milan. As such, he offers, it was, “in fact, the West’s first modern experiment in the totalitarian coercion of consciences.”<sup>5</sup> More officially, by way of inaugurating the now annual “Fortnight for Freedom,” the US Conference of Catholic Bishops released a statement on “Our First, Most Cherished Liberty,” lauding Catholics for having been pioneer defenders of religious liberty and freedom of conscience (without, of course, highlighting a history of inquisitions, heresy trials, European Crusades, or Catholic confessional states).<sup>6</sup>

On the other side of Deneen’s showdown worth watching is what he dubs “radical Catholicism,” which “rejects the view that Catholicism and liberal democracy are fundamentally compatible.” It is, he notes, “wary of the basic premises of liberal government” because “liberalism is constituted by a substantive set of philosophical commitments that are deeply contrary to the basic beliefs of Catholicism.” Therefore, and most pointedly: “Because America was founded as a liberal nation, ‘radical’ Catholicism tends to view America as a deeply flawed project,” the philosophical commitments of its founding “leading inexorably to civilizational catastrophe.”<sup>7</sup>

Now, to be sure, this is not likely what most American Catholics are hearing from their pulpits, but neither is it novel or necessarily fringe. If one of the central principles of liberalism, for example, is a religious liberty such as that codified in a

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<sup>4</sup> Deneen, “A Catholic Showdown.”

<sup>5</sup> George Weigel, “The ‘Edict of Milan,’ 1,700 Years Later,” *First Things*, June 26, 2013, <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2013/06/the-edict-of-milan-years-later>.

<sup>6</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, “Our First, Most Cherished Liberty: A Statement on Religious Liberty” (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Deneen, “A Catholic Showdown.”

separation of church and state, it must be admitted that this is not, contrary to Weigel, a long-held or “basic” Catholic belief. It was a principle explicitly rejected as “absolutely false” and “a most pernicious error” by popes as recently as the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> In the previous century’s *Syllabus of Errors* was reiterated the traditional proposition that “the Catholic religion should be held as the only religion of the State, to the exclusion of all other forms of worship.”<sup>9</sup> The Second Vatican Council notwithstanding, a number of contemporary Catholic scholars understand such proclamations to remain prescriptive. Indeed, King’s College London philosopher Thomas Pink, among others, has argued with some persuasive force that the careful wording of Vatican II’s *Dignitatis Humanae* does not—and cannot—reverse the traditional Catholic teaching of both popes and councils that the state is obligated to act, when circumstances allow, as the “police department of the Church.”<sup>10</sup> Journalist John Zmirak recounts visiting a small Catholic college and conversing with a student who very excitedly explained to him this interpretation: “So that means the Pope has the right to throw any Lutheran in jail?”, I asked skeptically. ‘I know, *right?*’ he said, beaming a smile.”<sup>11</sup>

And so we come, at last, to the Lutherans. But what does any of this have to do with Luther himself? As will have become obvious, the Catholic showdown worth watching is a showdown over the very legitimacy of what Deneen calls “liberal democracy” and “the basic premises of liberal government.”<sup>12</sup> As I hope is also obvious, by “liberal” Deneen does not simply have in view the Obama administration or the readership of *Mother Jones*; he uses the term in its more traditional sense, to encompass virtually the whole of the modern western understanding of the origins, nature, and purpose of our political life—and its relation to religion—as articulated most influentially by seventeenth-century philosopher John Locke. As such, “liberal” might be understood simply as a synonym for “modern.” What this has to do with Luther, then, concerns the relation of Luther to the rise of liberalism, or the origins of western modernity.

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<sup>8</sup> Pope Pius X, *Vehementer Nos* (February 11, 1906), § 3.

<sup>9</sup> Pope Pius IX, *Syllabus of Errors* (December 8, 1864), § 77.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Thomas Pink, “The Right to Religious Liberty and the Coercion of Belief,” in *Reason, Morality, and Law: The Philosophy of John Finnis*, ed. John Keown and Robert P. George (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 427–442. The characterization of the medieval state as the “police department of the Church” derives from John Neville Figgis, *Political Thought from Gerson to Grotius, 1414–1625* (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 1999), 8, but is also accepted, e.g., by William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 84.

<sup>11</sup> John Zmirak, “Illiberal Catholicism,” *Aleteia*, December 31, 2013, <http://aleteia.org/2013/12/31/illiberal-catholicism/>.

<sup>12</sup> Deneen, “A Catholic Showdown.”

This is a long-debated question, perhaps most famously engaged in the early twentieth century by Ernst Troeltsch and Karl Holl.<sup>13</sup> I will touch briefly on the Troeltsch thesis in a bit, but it now approaches consensus that it did not prevail in that debate. And perhaps it could not have been expected to, as by that time Holl's portrayal of Luther as "the pivotal figure for the emergence of modernity" had a good deal of momentum behind it.<sup>14</sup> As early as the eighteenth century, Luther was being hailed as "a veritable guardian angel for the rights of reason, humanity, and Christian liberty of conscience."<sup>15</sup> In the nineteenth century, Heinrich Geffcken could claim that "it remains an everlasting title to glory of the Reformation that political liberty . . . first became possible through its principles."<sup>16</sup> An early twentieth-century work called *The Political Theories of Martin Luther* concluded by insisting that "we must recognize in Luther not merely a prophet, or a forerunner, but the founder of the modern theory of the state."<sup>17</sup> Later in that century, Gerhard Ebeling offered that "in the long history of the concept of conscience, since the days of classical antiquity, the phrase 'freedom of conscience' appears first . . . in Luther."<sup>18</sup> And recently Joseph Loconte wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*, "The European states endured a long season of religious violence and political absolutism, drenching much of the continent in blood, until Luther's vision of human freedom quickened the conscience of the West. In this sense, whatever our religious beliefs, we are all Protestants now."<sup>19</sup>

I will forego comment on that conclusion, but would like to point out that when he is not writing opinion pieces, Loconte's research interest is not Martin Luther, but John Locke.<sup>20</sup> This is worth noting because, just as Locke is widely regarded as the "father of liberalism," it is regularly asserted that "Locke's political philosophy is

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<sup>13</sup> Cf., e.g., Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress: A Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World*, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1912), and Karl Holl, *The Cultural Significance of the Reformation*, trans. Karl Hertz, Barbara Hertz, and John Lichtblau (New York: Meridian, 1959).

<sup>14</sup> As Holl's thesis is summarized by Hans J. Hillerbrand, "The Legacy of Martin Luther," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 236.

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Germanus Lüdke, *Über Toleranz und Geistesfreiheit* (Berlin, 1774), 204; quoted in Hillerbrand, "The Legacy of Martin Luther," 234.

<sup>16</sup> Heinrich Geffcken, *Church and State: Their Relations Historically Developed*, 2 vols., trans. Edward Fairfax Taylor (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1877), 1:309.

<sup>17</sup> Luther Hess Waring, *The Political Theories of Martin Luther* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1910), 278.

<sup>18</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, "Zum Gegensatz von Luther-Enthusiasmus und Luther-Fremdheit in der Neuzeit," in *Lutherstudien*, vol. 3 (Tubingen: Mohr, 1989), 385.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Loconte, "When Luther Shook Up Christianity," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 29, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/when-luther-shook-up-christianity-1446159795>.

<sup>20</sup> See Joseph Loconte, *God, Locke, and Liberty: The Struggle for Religious Freedom in the West* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014).

grounded in Martin Luther's.<sup>21</sup> It is tempting to brush aside such claims by pointing out that Luther as a theologian, and an exegete more especially, simply did not develop or embrace a "political philosophy." And there is of course something to this. But we should also be willing to acknowledge that this was not exactly Luther's own opinion. Instead, he would proclaim—more than once—that before his own writing "no one knew anything about temporal government, whence it came, what its office and work were,"<sup>22</sup> and that "not since the time of the apostles have the temporal sword and temporal government been so clearly described or so highly praised as by me."<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, when he does "clearly describe" temporal government, he regularly does so in what can sound astonishingly like Lockean terms. To note only some of the most obvious examples: As Locke will do in his *Second Treatise of Government*, Luther would insist that "temporal government has laws which extend no further than to life and property and external affairs."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, as Locke would do in his published *A Letter concerning Toleration*, Luther counseled that temporal authorities should "let men believe this or that as they are able and willing," in part because, just as Locke would argue, it is "impossible to command or compel anyone by force to believe."<sup>25</sup> Finally, and despite his early and firm rejection of any right of resistance, Luther, like Locke, would eventually acknowledge and advocate a right to resist even duly elected authorities.<sup>26</sup> In this light, it is perhaps not surprising that contemporary scholars regularly conclude that it is "largely right to argue for a connection between Protestant theology and the emergence of political liberalism."<sup>27</sup>

Now, if one appreciates the advantages of political liberalism, with its emphases on individual rights, religious liberty, free markets, and governments contracted

<sup>21</sup> Charles D. Arthur and Philip A. Michelbach, "He Jumbles Heaven and Earth Together: John Locke, Martin Luther, and Political Theology," unpublished paper presented at the 2009 National Conference of the Midwest Political Science Association (Chicago, Illinois), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Luther, "On War against the Turk" (1529): vol. 46, p. 163, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE.

<sup>23</sup> Luther, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved" (1526), AE 46:95.

<sup>24</sup> Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed" (1523), AE 45:105.

<sup>25</sup> Luther, "Temporal Authority," AE 45:108, 107.

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., the brief summary of Luther's development on this question in W. D. J. Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, ed. Philip Broadhead (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1984), 102–103.

<sup>27</sup> Brad Littlejohn, "The Two Kingdoms: A Guide for the Perplexed, Pt. 1," *Political Theology Today*, October 25, 2012, <http://www.politicaltheology.com/blog/kingdoms-guide-perplexed-pt-1/>.

of, by, and for the people, there is a great temptation at this point to wax Whiggish and give three cheers to Luther for getting the ball rolling. And so it is precisely at this point that we might want to pause and consider whether doing so is warranted. I want to suggest three reasons why it may not be. The first is simply that, especially for committed Lutherans, such a triumphalist narrative smacks of the very “theology of glory” that Luther himself denounced. A second is that, among those who do embrace a triumphalist account of liberalism, plenty have argued that its origins are better traced to Catholic—or Reformed, or Enlightenment—thinkers and institutions.<sup>28</sup> The particular reason for hesitation I would like to emphasize, however, is that precisely the same Luther-to-liberalism story told by liberalism’s loudest cheerleaders is told also by its most vociferous detractors.

The most recent example, with which many of you will be familiar, is Brad Gregory’s 2012 tome, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*.<sup>29</sup> Its thesis, greatly expanding on Sheldon Wolin’s evaluation of Luther’s thought as “ominously modern,”<sup>30</sup> has been summed up succinctly: “Protestants created the modern world; Brad saw it and it was not good.”<sup>31</sup> The teleological history of the liberal narrative remains, but it is, as Victoria Kahn observes, a teleology in reverse.<sup>32</sup> Or, in Mark Lilla’s more memorable characterization, “Its method is an inverted Whiggism—a Whiggism for depressives”<sup>33</sup>—for depressives because, from the vantage point of modernity critics such as Gregory, the world wrought by liberalism can only be cause for depression. It is constituted, he notes, by

a hyperpluralism of divergent secular and religious truth claims[,] . . . individuals pursuing their desires whatever they happen to be[,] . . . Highly bureaucratized sovereign states wield[ing] a monopoly of public power[,] . . . The hegemonic cultural glue [. . . of . . .] all-pervasive capitalism and consumerism. . . . There is no shared, substantive common good, nor are there any realistic prospects for devising one.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For an example of the Catholic narrative, see e.g., Thomas E. Woods Jr., *How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), 194.

<sup>31</sup> William Storrar, “Blame It on Scotus,” *Commonweal* 139, no. 12 (2012): 24.

<sup>32</sup> Victoria Kahn, “Get Over It,” *The Immanent Frame*, September 16, 2013, <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2013/09/16/get-over-it/>.

<sup>33</sup> Mark Lilla, “Blame It on the Reformation,” *The New Republic*, September 14, 2012, <https://newrepublic.com/article/107211/wittenberg-wal-mart>.

<sup>34</sup> Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 377.

And we eventually arrived at this point because Luther's doctrine of *sola scriptura* could lead only to irresolvable doctrinal disagreements, which ineluctably led

to war, which led to the creation of confessional states, which led to more wars. Modern liberalism was born to cope with these conflicts. . . . But the price was high: it required the institutionalization of toleration as the highest moral virtue. . . . It thus left . . . us to sink ever deeper into the confusing, unsatisfying, hyper-pluralistic, consumer-driven, dogmatically relativistic world of today.<sup>35</sup>

And that, as Lilla wryly summarizes Gregory's book, is "how we got from Wittenberg to Wal-Mart."<sup>36</sup> That is also why Alasdair MacIntyre, a great influence not only on Gregory but on all the "radical" Catholics with whom we began, would conclude that "only by going back before the fall—before Luther—can modernity be healed."<sup>37</sup>

Now, without endorsing nostalgia for a golden age that never was, we can certainly acknowledge that all is not well in the modern West. If individual rights are understood to include, for example, a right to murder the unborn, if capitalism inevitably cultivates a consumerism driven by—and stirring up—our basest passions, and if religious liberty increasingly means a liberation from religion and any public influence it might have, then perhaps liberalism is not all it was cracked up to be. Whatever our ultimate assessment of liberalism, however, the fact remains that from the eighteenth century into the twenty-first, some of the most dominant narratives of both its proponents *and* opponents tend to begin with Luther. And, with respect to Luther, the only alternative narrative given much attention is that popularized especially by Troeltsch, echoed in the Marxist historians, and culminating in what is still sometimes called the "Shirer thesis." That is, rather than being a progenitor of liberalism, Luther—in reaction to the Peasants' Revolt, for instance—undermined it (in the words of Friedrich Engels) "as no bootlicker of absolute monarchy had ever been able,"<sup>38</sup> and so encouraged the kind of illiberal authoritarianism issuing eventually in the Third Reich.<sup>39</sup>

What we have on the table, then, are three interpretive and evaluative options. Characterized with gross simplicity, they are as follows:

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<sup>35</sup> Lilla, "Blame It on the Reformation."

<sup>36</sup> Lilla, "Blame It on the Reformation."

<sup>37</sup> As summarized by Joshua Mitchell, "Luther and Hobbes on the Question: Who Was Moses, Who Was Christ?" *The Journal of Politics* 53, no. 3 (1991): 681.

<sup>38</sup> Friedrich Engels, "The Peasant War in Germany," in *Marx & Engels on Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 108.

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., Uwe Siemon-Netto's treatment of this narrative in *The Fabricated Luther: The Rise and Fall of the Shirer Myth* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995).

1. Luther was a proto-liberal, and that's a good thing.
2. Luther was a proto-liberal, and that's a bad thing.
3. Luther was not a proto-liberal, and that's a bad thing.

If for no other reason than symmetry, though, a fourth option deserves to be in the mix, which is that Luther was not a proto-liberal, and that's a good thing. So far as I am aware, however, no one is setting forth in any serious or sustained fashion the argument that (to revise Deneen) "liberalism is constituted by a substantive set of philosophical commitments that are deeply contrary to the basic beliefs of Lutheranism," and therefore we ought to be "wary of [its] basic premises."<sup>40</sup> Perhaps it is an argument that cannot convincingly be made. Or perhaps it can be, but we have so accommodated ourselves to liberal modernity that we would rather not entertain it too seriously. That it is not currently being made, however, means that there is at present no "Lutheran Showdown Worth Watching." But I leave you with the suggestion that it is a showdown very much worth having.

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<sup>40</sup> Deneen, "A Catholic Showdown."

## Scripture as Philosophy in Origen's *Contra Celsum*

Adam C. Koontz

### I. Origen as a Problem

In words he would come to regret, Jerome described Origen as the outstanding man whom the church had produced:

But why, you ask me, have I thus mentioned Varro and the man of brass? Simply to bring to your notice our Christian man of brass, or, rather, man of adamant<sup>1</sup>—Origen, I mean—whose zeal for the study of Scripture has fairly earned for him this latter name. Would you learn what monuments of his genius he has left us?<sup>2</sup>

Aware that Origen's reputation was not universally good, Jerome went on,

Yet what reward have his exertions brought him? He stands condemned by his bishop, Demetrius, only the bishops of Palestine, Arabia, Phoenicia, and Achaia dissenting. Imperial Rome consents to his condemnation, and even convenes a senate to censure him, not—as the rabid hounds who now pursue him cry—because of the novelty or heterodoxy of his doctrines, but because men could not tolerate the incomparable eloquence and knowledge which, when once he opened his lips, made others seem dumb.<sup>3</sup>

The disciple's enthusiastic praise is not always the church's historical judgment, and Origen's reputation fared much worse after his death than in his own lifetime. During the first Origenist controversy, Jerome's tone was far different, as the political temperature of reading and approving Origen had risen drastically.<sup>4</sup> Within a bare list of eight points from the *Peri Archon* (*On First Principles*)—Origen's systematic exposition of the faith written in his earlier Alexandrian period—Jerome was willing to say things patently untrue: "Fifthly, he most openly

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<sup>1</sup> Origen's alternate name was Adamantius, see Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* VI.14.

<sup>2</sup> Jerome, Letter XXXIII.3 as found in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Church Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 28 vols. in 2 series, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1994), 2/6:46 (hereafter *NPNF*).

<sup>3</sup> Jerome, Letter XXXIII.4 (*NPNF* 2/6:46).

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 121–150.

denies the resurrection of the flesh and the bodily structure, and the distinction of senses, both in his explanation of the first Psalm, and in many other of his treatises.”<sup>4</sup>

Though Origen was recognized in his own life as a man of many great gifts, his methodological and theological idiosyncrasies were denounced during his life but much more after his death. He is derided for an insufficiently high Christology or an open binitarianism, so that when the Arian controversy exploded, Origen’s Christology was found wanting by some, although he was a significant intellectual influence on the Cappadocian fathers, the formulators of the church’s post-Nicene Christology.<sup>5</sup> Origen’s best-known aberration is *apokatastasis*, the restoration and salvation of all things in Christ, apparently involving the salvation of the devil himself, as God’s plan for the renewal of creation in the fullness of time. This initially startling doctrine is predicated on Origen’s understanding of God’s wrath and anger as always rehabilitative, aimed at the reformation of the sinner and not his destruction.<sup>6</sup> The condemnation of Origen and of Origenism in the sixth century consigned to theology’s ash heap the father of the continuous biblical commentary, one of the few ancient Christians fully conversant in Hebrew, the editor of the *Hexapla*—perhaps ancient Christianity’s greatest edition of the Bible—and a man renowned in his time for his eloquence, piety, and fervor.<sup>7</sup>

We cannot here untangle all the skeins of *Dogmengeschichte* and ecclesiastical politics that made the fifth century so drastically different from the third and obtain a comprehensive concept of how Origen and “Origenism” are related. We can, however, examine Origen’s last major work, the *Contra Celsum*, and find in it some keys to understanding Origen’s thought patterns. We will look closely at how Scripture functions as philosophy and Christians as philosophers in the *Contra Celsum* to see how Origen articulated the gospel in a Hellenistic philosophical setting natural to his native city of Alexandria. The missionary salience of *Contra Celsum* is Origen’s presentation of Christian life and thought in conversation with and, at times, identical to philosophy.

Every expansion of the Christian faith is uncomfortable, both for those who bring the message and those who receive it. Unfamiliar terms, persons, and stories must be elucidated, a task to which Christianity has demonstrated its commitment

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<sup>4</sup> Jerome, *Contra Joannem Hierosolymitanum* 7 (NPNF 2/6:428). Cf. Origen’s defense of bodily resurrection in *Peri Archon* II.10, inter alia.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen* (London: Routledge, 1998), 62–66.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., *Peri Archon* II.10, III.6, *Contra Celsum* VIII.52.

<sup>7</sup> The extirpation of Origenism as one theologically deviant strain of thought among others was connected to Justinian’s unifying efforts throughout his empire. See Fergus Millar, “Rome, Constantinople, and the Near Eastern Church under Justinian: Two Synods of C.E. 536,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 98 (2008), 63.

by the translation of Scripture, liturgies, and catechisms throughout its history. What is unfamiliar must become in some measure familiar to the recipients of the message, a process of familiarization known as “inculturation,” familiar in the way that phrases from the King James Bible are familiar to Anglophones.

Transmission may be successful in reaching its intended audience, yet something may be lost or added in the transmission. Information illegitimately added may occlude the true purpose or meaning of the message. One’s cultural framework for a concept such as “god” or “sacrifice” may be understood as identical to a biblical framework for similarly named concepts and yet be a thousand miles off the mark. When Alfons Fürst described the work of Origen as “inculturation” in his book on Alexandrian Christianity, he indicated a fundamental shift in meanings and foci from Jewish Christianity to a thoroughly Hellenistic Gentile Christianity.<sup>8</sup> Inculturation in this sense *could become* adulteration. In becoming all things to all men, one hazards something. In winning some Greeks for Christ, Origen risked making Christ a Greek. Origen was active in a period of relative peace for the church, a time Eusebius described as missiologically opportune, “this period of rapid expansion of the Faith, when our message was being proclaimed boldly on every side.”<sup>9</sup> It is within the missiological context of Origen’s thought that we find its promise and its peril.

## II. Scripture as Philosophy, Christians as Philosophers

Scripture is copiously present in nearly every line of *Contra Celsum*, so our focus will be on how Scripture appears as philosophy and Christians as philosophers. We will find that the commerce between Scripture and philosophy is not one way with the Christians forever in philosophy’s debt. Although *Contra Celsum* was authored firmly near the end of Origen’s life, well within his Caesarean period, Origen had been teaching the Scriptures since he had charge of a catechetical school in Alexandria at age 18.<sup>10</sup> Scholten has demonstrated that Origen’s school was not for the instruction of inquirers or neophytes in the Christian faith but was a school of philosophy like so many others in Alexandria or any larger Hellenistic city, where a philosopher instructed *anyone who would listen* in the dogmata of his school.<sup>11</sup> Thus Origen himself attended the lectures of Ammonius Saccas

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<sup>8</sup> Alfons Fürst, *Christentum als Intellektuellen-Religion: Die Anfänge des Christentums in Alexandria* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk GmbH, 2008), 9.

<sup>9</sup> Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* VI.36 (hereafter *HE*).

<sup>10</sup> Eusebius, *HE* VI.3.

<sup>11</sup> Clemens Scholten, “Die alexandrinischen Katechetenschule,” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 38 (1995): 16–37. For the missionary context of Origen’s school, see also W. Oliver, “The Catechetical School in Alexandria,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36, no. 1 (2015), 1–12.

in Alexandria, although Saccas was an apostate Christian and was later the teacher of the famous Neoplatonist Plotinus.<sup>12</sup> Origen's school was not unique in its structure, in Origen's Hellenistic education, or in the ideological diversity of its students. It was unique because Origen would lecture not from his copy of Plato's works or the Pythagorean Numenius (two favorite philosophers of Origen); he would have lectured on "philosophy" directly from the Scriptures. Origen functioned as a philosopher through teaching the Bible.<sup>13</sup>

It is thus unsurprising so many years later to find in *Contra Celsum* that Origen used Scripture as a direct opponent of the various Greek philosophical schools (Platonists, Peripatetics, Stoics, Epicureans, Cynics, inter alia) and used the terminology appropriate to those schools in conjunction with Scripture. *Dogmata*, the particular teachings of a school, are also in the Bible, which teaches its own disciples. There is a stark difference in the capacity of Christianity to make mankind wise and philosophy's capacity to do the same. Plato taught a small number of intelligent men, and in Origen's day almost no one had read or understood the teachings of Plato, however widespread his teachings were among the intelligent.<sup>14</sup> Origen everywhere presumed a vast difference in the intellectual capacities of the few intelligent inquirers among the human race and the many "simple-minded folk,"<sup>15</sup> but the philosophers largely failed to deal with the great mass of humanity incapable of comprehending or without opportunity to hear the teachings of the Greek philosophers.

What is distinctive about Scripture is that it has enlightened the lives of men of every kind and every capacity across the world. For the intelligent, there is endless room for growth in wisdom and the attainment of perfection that Origen understands as the goal of Christian life and discipline.<sup>16</sup> For the multitude, there are wholesome, straightforward teachings that provide them with the full knowledge of Christ, the Logos of the Father, who will enlighten them and turn them from the power of demons to his own rule. Scripture employs a generally simple style, and Jesus commissioned uneducated men precisely so that it would be accessible to the multitudes in need of enlightenment.<sup>17</sup> Scripture provides richly for all, whereas the philosophers have provided only for a few in the meager wisdom they have found.

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<sup>12</sup> The quotation of the pagan philosopher Porphyry at Eusebius, *HE* VI.19.

<sup>13</sup> Fürst, *Christentum als Intellektuellen-Religion*, 62.

<sup>14</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* (hereafter CC) VI.1–2, all quotations from *Contra Celsum* are found in Origen: *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).

<sup>15</sup> E.g., CC VII.41.

<sup>16</sup> CC III.61.

<sup>17</sup> CC I.62.

Both Scripture and philosophy teach dogmatically but differ greatly in their breadth of audience and their actual capacity to change men's lives.<sup>18</sup>

The hierarchy of the intelligent and the simple is the human side of a similar twofold structure to Scripture. Where there are a few who can understand the complex, the symbolic, and the esoteric, all of which are included in Origen's concept of allegory,<sup>19</sup> just so there is a side of Scripture and teachings of Scripture available only to the intelligent.<sup>20</sup> This method of exoteric text and esoteric allegory Origen finds to be in agreement with Plato's handling of Greek mythology and with Paul's handling of the Old Testament. "It is not we who teach that *brides and maidservants* are to be interpreted allegorically, but we have received this from wise men before us. . . . Anyone who likes to take up the Epistle to the Galatians will know how the stories about the marriages and the intercourse with the maidservants may be allegorized."<sup>21</sup> It is crucial to acknowledge that Origen does not find allegory to be alien to Scripture, a contraband Hellenizing import. He finds the same method in the Bible as in the philosophers and asserts over and over again that the wisdom the philosophers have in treating their shameful myths with some allegorizing reverence is far surpassed by the wisdom of Christ, who spoke some things outwardly to all and some things obscurely and in parables so that the unintelligent and the intelligent could likewise benefit from his words.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, allegory is the Scripture's own desired method of being interpreted. "But since the very authors of the doctrines themselves and the writers interpreted these narratives allegorically [going on to cite 1 Cor 9:9–10; 10:1–4; Eph 5:31–32], what else can we suppose except that they were written with the primary intention that they should be allegorized?"<sup>23</sup>

A modern reader may remain skeptical about Origen's concept of allegory or the firmness of its anchoring in Paul's exegetical method, but for our purposes there is great significance in Origen's weighing of his method against philosophy. He does not have an inferiority complex about theology, as might be the case in the modern

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<sup>18</sup> CC I.64; VII.41.

<sup>19</sup> Charles J. Scalise's "Origen and the *sensus literalis*" in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and Legacy*, ed. Kannengieser and Petersen (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 117–129, fails to appreciate fully Origen's training in Hellenistic rhetoric but makes the valuable point that Origen limits the literal sense to what is obvious to the simple man (*Peri Archon* IV.2, 4). Peter W. Martens makes the much more historically informed point that Origen's exegetical method, especially in its opposition to literalism, was developed in opposition to Alexandrian Judaism and its denial of the Christological nature of Scripture. Cf. his *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 133–148, 216–221.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. what is available to the intelligent who can truly grasp "wonders of your law" (Ps 139:18) with what was written for the simpleminded in CC IV.50. Also, "the resurrection of the flesh which, while preached in the churches, is understood more clearly by the intelligent," VI.18.

<sup>21</sup> CC IV.44.

<sup>22</sup> Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 156–160.

<sup>23</sup> CC IV.49; VII.20.

era when theology has been largely banished from the university where it used to reign. He does not need a method from outside the Bible to understand the Bible. He believes his methodology is biblical and that certain Greeks have, in their love of wisdom and desire to know the truth, obtained a consonance with biblical thoughts and methods in some regard.

How could that be? The argument for superiority from antiquity exists throughout *Contra Celsum*; in quoting Plato on the highest good, Origen says, “Our wise men, Moses who was the most ancient and the prophets who succeeded him, were the first to understand that ‘the highest good cannot at all be expressed in words.’ . . . In the words of our Jesus, ‘blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.’”<sup>24</sup> Part of Celsus’s foolishness was his ignorance or ignorant refusal to acknowledge the much greater antiquity of Moses and the prophets to Plato, to Homer, and even to the Greek alphabet itself.<sup>25</sup> Since in the ancient world antiquity was much preferred to novelty, the antiquity of Christian revelation is proof of its superiority to the relative novelty of Hellenic philosophy. Indeed, Plato may have derived some of his teachings from acquaintance with the writings of Moses, especially in his travels in Egypt.<sup>26</sup> In that case, the most sublime teachings of the Platonists are adulterations of Mosaic dogmata taught long before Plato walked the earth. Moses was a philosopher *avant la lettre*.<sup>27</sup>

Scripture is philosophy, and the readers and followers of Scripture become philosophers themselves. Christ was a philosopher and surpassed all others, as do his followers, because his philosophy united teaching with life.<sup>28</sup> Christians are those “who endeavor to believe rationally.”<sup>29</sup> Philosophy as taught outside the church is not so much entirely erroneous as inadequate to the one who truly loves wisdom.

After [young men] had first been trained in a general education and in philosophical thought I would try to lead them on to the exalted height, unknown to the multitude, of the profoundest doctrines of the Christians, who discourse about the greatest and most advanced truths, proving and showing that this philosophy was taught by the prophets of God and the apostles of Jesus.<sup>30</sup>

Christianity is the study of a wisdom that is itself elite, separated out from the multitude who are unaware of its greatest teachings. That wisdom is contained

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<sup>24</sup> CC VI.4. Cf. also VI.13, 19.

<sup>25</sup> CC VII.29–30.

<sup>26</sup> CC IV.39.

<sup>27</sup> CC IV.11, 21, 36; VI.7, 43; VII.28.

<sup>28</sup> CC II.16, 27.

<sup>29</sup> CC III.16.

<sup>30</sup> CC III.58.

within the philosophical genre of discourse, whether in conversation or written as if in conversation within the academy. That discourse concerns the greatest truths possible and is subject to rational processes of proving and showing, far from the smoke-and-mirrors legerdemain to delude the gullible masses of which Celsus accuses the Christians. That study and those doctrines are “this philosophy” directly drawn from the entire canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

The starkest point of contrast between Christianity and philosophy is for Origen the connection between what is taught and what is lived. Both Christianity and philosophy teach truths: Christianity the entirety of truth and various philosophies some truths. Both Christianity and philosophy concern themselves with metaphysics, cosmology, anthropology, eschatology, and any other number of subjects. The salient distinction between them is that Christianity has produced and does produce disciples who have integrity. The tragedy of Plato is that having known God, he did not worship God according to his eternal attributes. Paul’s description of pagan theologizing in Romans 1 recurs several times in the *Contra Celsum* as a tagline for the best efforts of the Greeks.<sup>31</sup> Origen finds any elevation of the Egyptians as wiser than all other nations particularly absurd and disgusting because they almost uniquely worship the full panoply of creation mentioned in the apostolic list of false gods.<sup>32</sup> Philosophy cannot produce a teacher or a disciple who worships purely in accordance with a pure knowledge of the Creator. Christianity can make even the simplest of human beings capable of knowing God truly and worshiping him with a life of integrity,<sup>33</sup> which is the sacrifice Christians offer in place of the blood-offerings and sacrifices to demons of the pagans. “[God] chose the foolish things of the world, the simplest of the Christians, who live lives more moderate and pure than many philosophers, that He might put to shame the wise, who are not ashamed to talk to lifeless things as if they were gods or images of gods.”<sup>34</sup> The distinction between Christianity and philosophy is finally personal and practical: “From the beginning, therefore, this doctrine of Jesus had great influence upon his hearers, teaching them to despise the life of the multitude, and to seek earnestly to live a life like that of God.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> CC III.47; IV.30; VII.46–48.

<sup>32</sup> CC III.17–19.

<sup>33</sup> CC III.54.

<sup>34</sup> CC VII.44.

<sup>35</sup> CC II.44; III.68.

### III. A Multivalent Apologetic

*Contra Celsum* is not an abstract meditation. It addresses Ambrose, Origen's inquiring patron whom he had turned from some variant of Gnosticism,<sup>36</sup> and any Christian who may be shaken in mind through reading Celsus's *The True Doctrine*, a book rather old by the time Origen responded. In order to shore up the faith of the wavering (for the perfect would have no need of such a book), Origen is eclectic in his argumentation. The robing of Scripture as philosophical teaching or the church as an academy is only one of his stratagems.

Especially when his exasperation with Celsus's unfairness of mind and low carping boils over, Origen describes for his readers the high-minded even-handedness with which he approaches an opponent so patently partisan.<sup>37</sup> This is a conscious display of Christian purity of mind over against the cramped thinking and lazy unacquaintance with the New Testament of his pagan interlocutor. "Here Celsus, who professes to know everything, has fallen into a very vulgar error concerning the meaning of the Bible."<sup>38</sup> Whereas the Christian knows more about philosophy than the pagan, the pagan has some passing knowledge of the Old Testament and of some New Testament traditions.<sup>39</sup> Celsus's knowledge of the Marcionite heresy affects his assertions, many of which land far off the mark for Origen and his focus. It is unclear how much of the New Testament Celsus knew, but his every mistake and breezy ignorance are pointed up by Origen to display the much greater intellectual curiosity and fairness of mind of the Christian apologist. "In these words, however, Celsus seems not to have been quite fair in his intentions, but indeed to have been deeply prejudiced as a result of his hatred of us, so unbecoming to a philosopher."<sup>40</sup>

Likewise, Origen enjoys unraveling logical knots into which Celsus put himself. Origen does this not so much to improve Celsus's argument as to show that any contradiction of Scripture will itself result in logical contradiction. The scriptural philosopher, the Christian, will be able to reason logically from his first principle of divine revelation. The non-scriptural philosopher will not be able to construct his argument in a thoroughly logical manner because he will, for instance, at one time revile the Christians for morally heinous practices and at another excuse the moral turpitude of the traditional Greek gods. "He seems to me to be confused on this

<sup>36</sup> Eusebius, *HE* VI.18.

<sup>37</sup> *CC* I.71.

<sup>38</sup> *CC* VII.18. This is not an exaggeration! Celsus claimed in I.12, "If they would be willing to answer my questions, which I do not put as one who is trying to understand their beliefs (for I know them all)."

<sup>39</sup> *CC* VI.30.

<sup>40</sup> *CC* VI.27.

subject [of daemons]. Sometimes his mind is distracted by the daemons, and sometimes, when he recovers his senses a little from the irrationality which the daemons produce, he gets a glimpse of the truth.”<sup>41</sup> Thus logic is a weapon Origen uses to identify and refute the inconsistencies of the non-scriptural philosophers. As an example, let us consider Origen’s discussion of avian augury.

The discernment of the future from the flight of birds (augury) or their entrails (haruspicy) was a commonplace of the Greco-Roman world.<sup>42</sup> Celsus argued that Christians should respect this because (1) human beings and animals are not distinct in being able to commune with God, and (2) knowledge of the future, such as many birds have displayed, is divine.<sup>43</sup> The conflation of human being with animal being is one Origen rejects out of hand because he understands mankind to be the unique bearer of the image of God, which is displayed in the *rational* soul man alone possesses. Rationality is not (as after the Enlightenment) a bare capacity for autonomous thought; it is the sum total of our faculty for intelligence concerning divine and earthly things that makes us human. Mankind is susceptible to the temptation of demons because he is rational and can alter his course of action from good to evil.<sup>44</sup> Animals are irrational and do what they do, not by reason—whether for good or evil—but by instinct.<sup>45</sup> Their actions are a witness to the wisdom of the Logos, who has imprinted those instincts upon their being, but human actions that glorify God witness rather to the salvation of the Logos, who has enlightened men with the true rationality of Christian teaching. This is an argument combining careful philosophical definition, biblical reasoning, and biological observation.

Interestingly, Origen does not argue that it is *impossible* that certain pagan stories of birds foretelling the future occurred. He does not think it impossible for any animal to tell what will occur in whatever way it communicates. Should an animal be able to tell the future, that would, however, crucially not be evidence of divine favor or inspiration. Knowledge of the future could be accumulated solely from experience of similar conditions, as a sailor has knowledge of the weather and the sea far surpassing the landsman. If birds are as close to God as Celsus reasons and know his will much better than mankind, then they are surely wiser than the most revered Greek philosophers. “It would accordingly be logical of Celsus, since he thinks birds superior to men, to use birds as teachers and none of the Greek

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<sup>41</sup> CC VIII.63.

<sup>42</sup> At the outset of Rome’s history, Naevius shows Anchises knows “how to watch for his bird in the right area of the sky” (frag. 25.1). Cicero discusses the origin of augury and haruspicy (which he calls the *Etrusca disciplina*) in *De divinatione* 1.3.

<sup>43</sup> CC IV.88.

<sup>44</sup> CC IV.97.

<sup>45</sup> CC IV.98.

philosophers.”<sup>46</sup> In addition, the inspiration of demons is particularly to be found in animals that Origen considers intrinsically wicked or shameful, such as wolves, foxes, crows, and eagles, whom the demons employ to shame the men who hearken to the leadings of these irrational beasts.<sup>47</sup> Here again a consistent use of logic, anthropology, biology, and Scripture combine to form an argument against Celsus.

#### IV. The Structure of Origen’s Argument

Those arguments against Celsus flow one after the other for eight books. There is no discernible structure to the arguments that would classify some into one kind, some into another. For example, when Origen begins the seventh book in the formulaic way in which he has begun all the others, he promises especially to take up the question of prophecy in this book.<sup>48</sup> He does handle the nature of prophecy at some length there, but he deals with individual scriptural prophecies and the reliability of Scripture’s prophetic oracles in many other places as well. In most instances, Origen makes no pretense of having any particular focus in a specific book, so that the distinction between books would seem to be largely a matter of his exhaustion or the space available in a given manuscript. One hears his tiredness when he apologizes for the great length of each book or for the fact that this or that discussion has proceeded long enough or that he does not have time at present to give a particular subject the attention it needs.

There is something nearly perfunctory about his references to his own works, sending the reader elsewhere in the library to find the answers to Celsus’s questions that Origen provided years ago. It is as if *Contra Celsum* is meant as a handbook for the inquirer, something to hold in the right hand as Celsus’s *The True Doctrine* is open in the left. In order to make the inquirer’s task of shoring up his faith as easy as possible, Origen slavishly follows the meandering arrangement of Celsus’s original treatise. His only abbreviations are when he believes Celsus says something utterly irrelevant to Christianity, the Scriptures, or any topic remotely connected to those. Otherwise, he reproduces Celsus’s text at such length that modern editors can produce respectable critical editions employing Origen as the sole available witness.

Origen’s intention is to lay low any challenge from Celsus. This arranges his topics, his arguments, and his use of Scripture around an apologetic, edificatory purpose. The church’s doctrines are assailed; they must be defended. There is a moment in Book VIII when Origen would plainly like to discuss his understanding

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<sup>46</sup> CC IV.89.

<sup>47</sup> CC IV.93, 97.

<sup>48</sup> CC VII.1–2.

of the restoration of all things in some detail but cannot because addressing Celsus's particular objections, lines of argument, and slanderous accusations is more pressing.<sup>49</sup> This diversion from one's own sense of what may be truly profound for the sake of what is immediately assailing the church is perhaps more felicitous than he knew.

### V. Origen within the Church's Mission

Scripture as philosophy is a way Origen proclaims the gospel to a world familiar with philosophy. It is not a capitulation to the supremacy of philosophy over theology because Origen understands what we now call theology as simply that philosophy drawn from the prophets and apostles. Origen's most frequent, practically ubiquitous, method is the quotation and interpretation of canonical Scripture, specifically rejecting any citations Celsus uses against Christians from outside those Scriptures. Jesus as a philosopher and his people as his disciples is an image near enough to Scripture that it accords well with the picture Origen paints of the church as the sole philosophical school in which all kinds of men find enlightenment and healing for their souls and a teacher who has no gap between what he teaches and who he is. This Hellenization of the gospel, for the sake of Greeks, anchors itself firmly in the gospel and the Scriptures.

Logically, any error found in Origen or attributable later to anyone following his writings closely could originate in the understanding that any philosophical truth will somehow find its own source in Scripture. This means that for Origen, especially in the cases of Socrates and Plato, a doctrine such as the restoration of all things may have some source in Scripture if it is in fact true. As any truth of Plato could have first been a truth proclaimed by Moses and prophets, so might that one, too. That presupposition could affect Origen's understanding of the materiality of the resurrection, a charge less often made, or, of course, his eschatology.

Practically, the fullness of speculation in which Origen indulges in other places about *apokatastasis* is inadmissible in this, his final great work. This is not a trivial matter of time or space failing him to explain everything he thought. Disciples will do almost whatever they like with their master's words, as anyone familiar with the theological-cum-political strife after Luther's death will know, and one cannot defend one's own reputation after his death. There is also the difficulty of Origen's words that were intended provisionally or as commentary that could later be revised, but instead were taken as carved in stone forever. What may sound necessary for a specific place and time or may be a theologian's speculation within his own school

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<sup>49</sup> CC VIII.72. Similar reticence and the sense that only a few will understand eschatology at VI.20.

neither sounds the same nor can be further elucidated in the heat of public debate. When pressed to their logical limit, certain of his propositions could easily be understood as erroneous, if they were not already *in nuce* or *in extenso* in his own time, as some charged then and now. Since Origen was tortured for his faith but died a year after his release from imprisonment and did not receive the crown of martyrdom, his reputation and words could be a plaything in later years. His disciple Pamphilus devoted efforts equal to any detractor's in defending the memory of his teacher:

A great many other traditions about Origen have been passed on orally by the older men of our day, but I think I will omit them, as irrelevant to the present work. All that it is important to know about him can be gathered from the *Defense of Origen* written by myself and that holy martyr of our time, Pamphilus—a joint effort, a labor of love undertaken as an answer to carping critics.<sup>50</sup>

So whose side should be taken? The passion on both sides is evident, but it is possible to understand Origen's significance best when we let his work remain within its own time. He was not available either to praise or to refute Arius, nor could he have known what would be done with his words. No figure in the church's history lives outside the mission in which the church is engaged. For that mission, Origen found it useful to employ terminology and ideas that were not ultimately suitable for the confession of the truth. Of that there can be no doubt. Universalism mars *Peri Archon* more obviously than in *Contra Celsum* because the systematic structure of the former permitted frequent speculation about eschatology, where Origen unmoored himself from biblical data. He presumed that God's punishment of sin was remedial and medicinal rather than punitive.<sup>51</sup> The punishment of the wicked he analyzed under the metaphor of God's being the "physician of souls." Since God was reconciling the world to himself through the blood atonement of Jesus (2 Cor 5:20), divine wrath *cannot be* contained solely or even primarily under a rubric of mere discipline or medicine. Divine wrath that is only medicinal and not punitive would not have demanded the death of Jesus. Origen's eschatology makes light of the gravity of sin and thus the biblically explicit notion of everlasting punishment for the wicked.<sup>52</sup>

As the church evaluates its own history, it may avoid undue praise and undue blame by understanding its theologians as fitted for certain tasks at certain times.

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<sup>50</sup> Eusebius, *HE* VI.33.

<sup>51</sup> *Peri Archon* II.X.6–7.

<sup>52</sup> Matt 3:12; 25:41; Mark 9:48; John 5:29; 2 Thess 1:8; Heb 10:27; 2 Pet 3:7; Jude 1:7; Rev 20:14–15; 21:8.

There is a providence in Origen's final major work being in a genre not of his choosing and on a book he plainly disliked immensely, not respecting the interlocutor whom he found finally intellectually incoherent. We need not follow Jerome in massive praise at one time and great blame at another. Undue praise and undue blame of any figure in church history may be symptoms of idolatry, attributing too much good or evil agency to finally only human actors. Rowan Williams commented that, "It has been well said of Origen that in him the 'disciple of Jesus' coexists very uneasily with the Platonic speculative philosopher."<sup>53</sup> And rather than reading that as an eschatological sentence upon one man's life, we should recall that the missiological thrust to become "all things to all men" is a transformation neither entirely comfortable for the one who is transformed for mission nor easily accomplished without the slightest theological peril. All communication of the gospel entails the possibility of some error in transmission. Origen was part of the church's proclamation of the gospel for the Greek-speaking world and was used mightily for that purpose. Yet in every time and place the message and the mission remain the Lord's.

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<sup>53</sup> Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1979), 39.



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## Passion and Persecution in the Gospels

Peter J. Scaer

The four Gospels are each distinct. John is a breed apart, as are Johannine scholars. While the man, lion, and ox walk the earth, the eagle soars high above. The question arises, is John's a solo flight? If we were to play the desert island game, Matthew would win the prize. The first Gospel alone offers us all the essentials: the virgin birth and resurrection, the Lord's Prayer in full, the Words of Institution, as well as the trinitarian name spelled out for baptismal posterity. Luke strikes this reader as supplemental, beautifully illustrating what our Lord teaches, propelling us into the life of the church, where Christ's work continues. Mark has seldom received much love. As Papias notes, Mark wrote accurately, though not in order.<sup>1</sup> Scholars tend to think that Luke and Matthew made use of Mark, but then, as Helmut Koester notes, "There is no certain quotation from Mark before Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria."<sup>2</sup> But Mark's lion is a dark horse; its strange landscape rewards the reader who does not rush past the quirky and odd phrases that reveal and mask greater mysteries.<sup>3</sup>

The joy and difficulty of John's Gospel is that it can be a sphinx. John is the most sacramental, or not sacramental at all. It's the simplest linguistically, but as rich and dense as Mackinac fudge. There is something distinctly eastern about it, difficult to outline, a swirl that takes you deeper and higher. It's also the most personal of the Gospels. There are not as many crowds, or even large classrooms. John takes us behind closed doors, to hidden rooms and intimate conversations. Soliloquies and dialogues are the day.

Not only in the telling, but in the stories themselves, John sets himself apart. John includes no exorcisms. He has miracles, but only seven, and calls them signs. The Synoptics tell us that Christ raises some from the dead, and yet the raising of Lazarus is nowhere in sight. The one and only miracle common to all four

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<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, "The Writings of Papias" in *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3.39.15.

<sup>2</sup> Helmut Koester, "History and Development of Mark's Gospel," in Bruce Corley, ed. *Colloquy on New Testament Studies: A Time for Reappraisal and Fresh Approaches* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 37.

<sup>3</sup> For a wonderful work on Mark's reception in the early church, see C. Clifton Black, *Mark: Images of an Apostolic Interpreter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

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Gospels is the feeding of the five thousand, which might tell us something about its significance.

Where do the Gospels come most closely into line? The passion narrative. In all four Gospels, we find the betrayal of Judas, an arrest, the denial of Peter, a trial, mockery, and crucifixion under Pontius Pilate. This hardly means that the passion narratives are interchangeable or easily harmonized. In Matthew and Mark, Christ is the forsaken one, whose drinking of the cup is both stark and profound. In Luke, Jesus appears as one ready and willing, acting according to the will of his Father and in accordance with the Scriptures. He teaches how to die, and there is a Greco-Roman flavor to what appears a noble death.<sup>4</sup> John is another matter altogether. Here we see the Messiah in full divinity, one who lays down his life and takes it back up, the one whose very presence causes others to fall, and whose death itself is an exaltation. So it is, each Gospel comes to a climax in the cross, but in a way symphonic, each playing its part in the Lamb's song.

And the Gospels share something else. In all four, the suffering of Christ serves as a preview for what his disciples must endure. As Christ must die according to the words of Scripture, so also the disciples must face persecution in fulfillment of Christ's word. In this study, I will look briefly at the passion narratives as a kind of template for Christian persecution. In what way does the cross of Christ shape the lives of those who follow in his footsteps?

### **I. Passion and Persecution in the Gospel of Matthew**

Martin Kähler famously said that the Gospels are passion narratives with long introductions.<sup>5</sup> One might say that Matthew's passion story begins with the nativity. In a dream, Joseph is told to name the child Jesus, which means "He will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21).<sup>6</sup> So simple a proclamation leads us to the meal of the atonement, where we receive the blood that was shed "for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:28). Ironically, the taunters are right: "He saved others; he cannot save himself" (Matt 27:42). This is the necessity of Christ's atoning death, the price of forgiveness, the cost of absolution.

Fittingly, the Gospel of Matthew begins with a sense of foreboding. At the birth of Jesus, "Herod is disturbed, and all of Jerusalem with him" (Matt 2:3). As Joel Green and John Carroll note, "Jerusalem—including the religious leaders and the

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<sup>4</sup> To see how Luke makes use of the noble death tradition, Greco-Roman rhetoric, and the story of Socrates, see Peter J. Scaer, *The Lukan Passion and the Praiseworthy Death* (Sheffield, United Kingdom: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 80.

<sup>6</sup> All Scripture quotations are the author's translation.

whole people—already at the onset of the story deeply etched in the readers' imagination a menacing place where the divinely named ruler of the people receives none of the honor due him and where, in fact, his life is endangered.”<sup>7</sup> This sense of dread drives the holy family into Egypt, and ends in the slaughter of the Holy Innocents. Clearly, the holy city is not so holy. Our Lord must go up to Jerusalem, and there he must die (Matt 16:21).

Jesus knew what was coming. When rejected at Nazareth, he wryly observes, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his household” (Matt 13:57). More than a prophet, he saw himself as the Son of the vineyard owner, the heir whom the evil tenants would kill that they might take the inheritance for themselves (21:39). In accordance with the Scriptures, he sees himself as the stone that the builders rejected (21:42).

From early on, Jesus' opponents build a case for his trial, a list of charges. For forgiveness, he is accused of blasphemy (Matt 9:3). For dining at the home of Matthew, he is censured for eating with tax collectors and sinners (9:11). For empowering a mute man to speak, he is accused of casting out demons by the power of the prince of demons (9:34). When he heals a man on the Sabbath, the Pharisees judge it blasphemous and conspire about how to destroy him (12:14). Of course, the charges have more to do with jealousy than justice.

Yet at a deeper level, justice is served. He is forsaken, that we might be brought into the divine embrace. As we see in the Lord's Prayer, sin is a debt owed to God, and paid by Christ on our behalf. This is the Son of Man who came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for all (Matt 20:28).

But then, what of his disciples? Are we too involved in the passion? In the suffering? The slaughter of the Holy Innocents is not simply a one-off, a case of mistaken identity. Instead, it is foreshadowing. Those who are associated with the Messiah will pay a heavy price. Raymond Brown calls this “the double necessity for the Son of Man to suffer and for his disciples to take up the cross to follow him.”<sup>8</sup>

It is instructive to note that almost immediately after calling his first disciples (Matt 4:18–22), Jesus offers poetic words of proclamation: Blessed are the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek and merciful, the pure in heart and the peacemakers (5:3–9). But the lofty beauty of the Beatitudes crashes into harsher realities: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake” (v. 10). Pointedly, the third person plural is quickly replaced with the second: “Blessed are *you* when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you

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<sup>7</sup> John T. Carroll and Joel B. Green, *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 40.

<sup>8</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Death of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), I.27.

falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (5:11–12).

Our Lord adds, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (5:44). Oh, and be under no illusion that this love will be requited. The life of discipleship will not be easy; he sends out his messengers as sheep in the midst of wolves (10:16). In a strikingly sweeping word of warning, our Lord says, “Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to the courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles” (10:17–18).

But this persecution begins closer to home, and it will touch every Christian, for it will cut through the heart of earthly families: “Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death” (10:21). In case we missed it, our Lord goes further: “A person’s enemies will be those of his own household” (10:36). Discipleship has consequences, both now and in eternity: “Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (10:38–39).

When and where does this persecution take place? The first warnings, offered up in the missionary discourse (Matt 9:35–11:1), seem to concentrate on the lives of the apostles and the early church. But this early persecution will set the pattern until Christ returns. Servants who hand out invitations to the wedding feast will be “seized, treated shamefully, and killed” (22:6). This is not simply a matter of persecution in Jerusalem, nor is it a case of Romaphobia. What happened to Christ in Jerusalem will happen to his ambassadors in every nation.

In the temptation scene, we see how both the Gospel and persecution will extend throughout the nations. Satan takes Jesus to a high mountain, offering up “all the kingdoms of the world and their glory” (Matt 4:8). Christ’s kingdom will indeed spread to all nations, but not according to Satan’s easy promise. Christ also leads his disciples to a mountain, telling them to go to all nations (Matt 28:18–20). People will hear, but others will reject. “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake” (24:9). As such, Matthew may be the most universal Gospel, thinking of the big picture for the years to come. Neither Jerusalem nor Rome is ultimate. As Joel Willitts puts it, “It is a story that encompasses *all* the kingdoms and nations of the world.”<sup>9</sup> As

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<sup>9</sup> John Willitts, “Matthew,” in *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies*, ed. Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 97.

Matthew envisions a gospel for all nations, he sees that persecution will accompany Christ's disciples wherever they go.

## II. Passion and Persecution in Mark

The passion narrative of Mark matches that of Matthew very closely. Both Matthew and Mark present Jesus' death as a payment for sin. The Son of Man has come not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for the many (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45). Mark understandably omits Matthew's apocalyptic description of the earth shaking, the rocks splitting, and the saints rising. But Mark's telling of the Mount of Olives scene is quite similar to Matthew. Likewise, both Gospels include but one word from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34). As Raymond Brown notes, "These two gospels present a Jesus who is abandoned by his followers and has to face his hour alone, thus enduring the cross in a particularly agonizing way."<sup>10</sup>

Even as Christ must suffer, so also his followers. Indeed, Joel Marcus observes what he calls "a preoccupation with persecution in the very structure" of Mark's Gospel.<sup>11</sup> In the parable of the sower, Jesus speaks of "tribulation and persecution" (Mark 4:17; Matt 13:21). In his Olivet discourse, Christ again warns that his disciples will be delivered over to councils and beaten in synagogues, which will result in a witness to governors and kings (Mark 13:9). Likewise, he tells his disciples that they will be betrayed by their family members and hated by all for his name's sake (Mark 13:12–13). The disciples' persecution is closely linked to Christ's own passion. Jesus must go to the cross (Mark 8:31–33), and so also his disciples must be willing to lose their lives for his sake (Mark 8:35).

Yet, there may be one key difference between Matthew and Mark's portrayal of persecution in their Gospels. For Mark, persecution is not merely predicted as a future event, but is already felt as a present reality. Consider the story of the rich young man, found in all three Synoptic Gospels. In Jesus' response to a question by Peter, Matthew and Luke speak of blessings for those who follow Christ. Mark alone adds, as if it were the most natural thing, that these blessings would come "along with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:30). Persecution is not so much prophesied as taken for granted.

Again, while Matthew offers a broader perspective, according to which persecution will come from all nations, Mark seems to be written to a group that is facing persecution more particularly in Rome. As James Voelz notes, evidence

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<sup>10</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 26.

<sup>11</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 28.

would point to “Christians in Rome who were concerned about maintaining the faith in the face of impending death,” in the late 50’s or early 60’s in Rome.<sup>12</sup>

Martin Hengel, followed by many others, has observed the Roman character of the second Gospel. As Hengel notes, Roman provenance is supported not only by ecclesiastical tradition, but “by the astonishing number of Latinisms, which are unique in Greek narrative prose.”<sup>13</sup> In Mark, a Roman centurion is called simply a “centurion,” rather than a “hekatontarchēs.” Matthew’s audience would not need an explanation concerning the Pharisees’ washing of cups, pots, copper vessels, and couches (Mark 7:4). But Mark’s Roman audience would.

Brendan Byrne, following Hengel, notes that Mark’s apocalyptic warnings in the thirteenth chapter could well fit “the atrocities perpetrated against Christians in Rome in the year 64 C.E.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Tacitus describes Christians as “hated for their abominations,” and speaks of Christians becoming informants against their fellow Christians,<sup>15</sup> matching closely Christ’s warning that family members would betray one another, and that Christians would be hated by all (Mark 13:12–13).

Mark’s Gospel may point specifically to the martyrdom of Peter. As Hengel notes, Mark is concerned with something more than “a generalized invitation to be ready for suffering.”<sup>16</sup> Consider Peter’s confession. In Matthew, Jesus uses the occasion to speak of the necessity of his own suffering. In Mark’s account of Peter’s confession, the spotlight is turned on the disciples, who themselves must take up the cross (Mark 8:34). Such words would be especially fitting in the case of Peter, who would face his own crucifixion. Thus, the evangelist would seem to be crafting his story in sober recognition of Peter’s martyrdom during the Neronian persecution.

Indeed, Roman persecution may be hinted at in the story of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness. In Matthew, Jesus is led by the Spirit (Matt 4:1). In Luke, Jesus is full of the Spirit, thus anticipating the Pentecost church (Luke 4:1). Mark’s story is unnerving. Jarringly, we are told that the Spirit threw Jesus out (*ἐξβάλλει*) in the desert, where he was with the wild beasts (Mark 1:12–13). Some see this as a fulfillment of Isaiah’s messianic vision of David’s Son upon whom the Spirit rests. In the new world, “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie

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<sup>12</sup> James Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 79.

<sup>13</sup> See Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels*, trans. John Bowden (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2000), 78.

<sup>14</sup> Brendan Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark’s Gospel* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2008), xviii.

<sup>15</sup> Tacitus *Annales*, 15.44.

<sup>16</sup> Hengel, *The Four Gospels*, 79.

down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them” (Isa 11:6).<sup>17</sup>

But Mark’s wild beasts are neither tame nor housebroken. The one in whom the Spirit entered at Baptism is violently cast out into the desert, in much the same way that Adam was cast out of the garden, or Jesus will cast out the demons. And indeed, there may well be a connection between the beasts and the demons. As Brendan Byrne puts it, “The wilderness is the habitat of wild and dangerous animals, as well as evil spirits.”<sup>18</sup> Now is the time of danger and conflict, with Satan nipping at his heels. Joel Marcus wonders whether the Gospel of Mark could be written in response to Neronian persecution, but then asks, “Would we not expect it to focus more, as Daniel and Revelation do, on a bestial, anti-God figure?”<sup>19</sup> The desert story may well be the answer to Marcus’s query. Here are the beasts, who in their ferocity are decidedly anti-Christ. Ched Myers sees the temptation scene as a trial or contest, in which each side has its supporters: “Jesus has help from the angels while surviving among wild beasts.”<sup>20</sup> If this is true, then the Markan beasts may be of the same genus, if not species, as those found in Revelation 11:7 and 13:11.

The Antichrist, as we know, appears as a son of light. When the fight is fierce, bystanders find it difficult to tell good from evil, one combatant from another. So also in Mark’s Gospel. Jesus’ own family is confused. Thinking that he is out of his mind, they try to seize him (Mark 3:21). This leads to the charge that Jesus is possessed by Beelzebub, and that he casts out (ἐκβάλλει) demons by the prince of demons. Jesus then rises to the charge, asking “How can Satan cast out Satan?” (Mark 3:23). He then proceeds to compare himself to a strong man who has come to defeat another strong man. These mysterious stories tell us that Christ is engaged in an apocalyptic battle with Satan, one that began with forty days of desert warfare.

The temptation story also anticipates Ignatius’s martyrdom in Rome. To the Ephesians, Ignatius speaks of his impending martyrdom in the Roman Coliseum as “fighting with the wild beasts” (Ephesians I.2). To the Romans, Ignatius says, “Let there come on me fire, and cross and struggles with wild beasts, cutting, and tearing asunder, racking of bones, mangling of limbs, crushing of my whole body, cruel tortures of the devil, may I but attain to Jesus Christ!” (Romans V.3). Thus, Ignatius knows that Satan keeps good company with the wild beast. Yet, Ignatius also knew that in being thrown to the beasts, he was approaching God. “And why have I given myself to death, to fire, to the sword, to wild beasts? Because near the sword is near

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<sup>17</sup> See Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 168–171, as well as Charles Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> Brendan Byrne, *A Costly Freedom*, 35.

<sup>19</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 33.

<sup>20</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 130.

to God, with the wild beasts is with God” (Smyrnaeans IV.2). The Romans were masters of the arena, unleashing the beasts and setting the fires. As M. Eugene Boring observes, the knowledge that Jesus had faced demonic forces in the guise of beasts would have been of great comfort to early Christians who were “condemned to the beasts” in Nero’s arena.<sup>21</sup> These were not the friendly beasts of Daniel, but their jaws opened up the path to communion with God.

The other place where Mark’s vision of a persecuted church comes through is in the boat stories. In all four Gospels, the boat serves as a picture of the church, especially having to do with evangelism. In Matthew, Christ calls his first disciples to be fishers of men (Matt 4:19). In Luke, this story is punctuated with the miraculous draught of fish, a picture of the apostolic ministry in which they will be “catching men alive” (Luke 5:9–10). In John, the miraculous catch of fish is saved for a climactic ending (John 21:1–14). But Mark takes the motif further. Indeed, the boat is mentioned more in Mark than in any Gospel. It is a place of danger as well as Christ’s presence. Christ invites all disciples aboard, saying, “Let us go to the other side” (Mark 4:35).

Consider Christ’s calming of the storm (Mark 4:35–41). The boat fills with water. Jesus, sleeping in the stern, seems not to care. As Joel Marcus notes, this scene may well prefigure the coming tribulation “with the storm of civil war and persecution breaking upon them from all sides.”<sup>22</sup> In response, the disciples cry out, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” (v. 38). The cry of the first disciples would become the cry of the early church. Mark writes his Gospel with his congregation well in mind. It is noteworthy that Jesus rebukes his disciples for being cowardly and faithless, saying, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” (v. 40). This question, both a rebuke and a comfort, is matched by a warning found in the Book of Revelation. The one who conquers will receive a spring of living water, but not so the one who is “cowardly and faithless,” whose future is marked by a lake that burns with fire and sulfur (Rev 21:8).

Consider also the story of Jesus walking on the water. The disciples are forced to go it alone, while Jesus ascends a high mountain to pray. In a sense, the disciples are taking part in a training exercise for life in a church where Christ is no longer visibly present. We are told that Christ watched his disciples, as if to monitor their progress: “And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them” (Mark 6:48). The Markan phrase “making headway painfully” is the language of persecution, also found in the Book of Revelation. In Revelation 9:5, the locusts are given authority “to torment them for five months, but not to kill them,

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<sup>21</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster Knox, 2006), 48.

<sup>22</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 337.

and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone.” So also, Revelation depicts the church as a woman giving birth: “She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony [that is, torture] of giving birth” (Rev 12:2). Again, Marcus notes that this tortuous rowing “would remind the Markan community of the eschatological affliction and bewilderment they themselves were experiencing in the wake of persecutions.”<sup>23</sup> So indeed, there may be more in common between Mark and the Roman persecution described in Revelation than has been previously thought. Persecution is not something to prepare for, but a present reality to be endured.

### III. Passion and Persecution in Luke

Luke’s passion narrative depicts Jesus as one who willingly sets his face toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). Jesus enters the Mount of Olives fully in control of himself. There is no mention of sorrow or being at a loss. He expresses readiness to die, and has in fact prepared himself for the cross. Not simply a victim, Jesus shows courage. And at his death he is declared a righteous man, in the same language used to describe Socrates in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* (4.8.2) and Plato’s *Phaedo* (118). For good reason, scholars have seen parallels between Luke’s depiction of Jesus’ death and the Greco-Roman noble death tradition.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Christ’s death becomes a model for Christians to follow. We see this clearly in the martyrdom of Stephen, who, as F. F. Bruce puts it, “had learned his lesson in the school of Him who, as He was being fixed to the cross, prayed, ‘Father, forgive them; they know not what they do’ (Luke 23:34).”<sup>25</sup>

Like Mark, the Gospel of Luke is written with the Roman Empire in mind. Christ is born during the days of Caesar Augustus, and his birth in Bethlehem is the result of a decree from Rome. Likewise, John the Baptist’s ministry is placed “in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea” (Luke 3:1). In a certain sense, when Luke and Acts are viewed together, the entire work has a Roman trajectory, answering the question of how a Jewish religion came upon the world stage.<sup>26</sup> One might go so far as to say that the entirety of Luke’s Gospel anticipates Paul’s epic voyage to Rome. Luke-Acts follows in the train of the

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<sup>23</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 431.

<sup>24</sup> For more on the noble death tradition, see David Seeley, *The Noble Death: Graeco-Roman Martyrology and Paul’s Concept of Salvation*, Library of New Testament Studies 28, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989).

<sup>25</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 172.

<sup>26</sup> For a helpful exposition of this view, see Gregory Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephos, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography*, SNT 64 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992).

*Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aeneid*, in what Marianne Palmer Bonz calls “A Foundational Epic for the Early Christian Church.”<sup>27</sup>

As such, Jerusalem is not the final destination, but a springboard to Rome. As our Lord says, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all the nations *beginning* from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46–47). The apostles are called then to be witnesses “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The earth’s end is evidently not Spain, as we might guess from Paul’s epistle to the Romans. In the spirit of the *Aeneid*, the Book of Acts turns into an epic tale, with mention of pagan gods Zeus and Hermes, shipwrecks, and miracles. Near the story’s end, Luke offers a kind of understated yet majestic summary, “And so we came to Rome” (Acts 28:14).

But Luke’s Rome looks nothing like Mark’s. To be sure, there is a competition between Christ and Rome, but it is asymmetrical. As C. Kavin Rowe puts it, “Luke narrates the movement of the Christian mission into the gentile world as a collision with culture-constructing aspects of that world,” and yet, “Luke narrates the threat of the Christian mission in such a way as to eliminate the possibility of conceiving it as in direct competition with the Roman government.”<sup>28</sup> Christ has come to bring the true and lasting peace, but not in competition with Caesar Augustus’s Pax Romana. Christ’s kingdom is not of this world. Christ heals a soldier’s ear, even as he commands to give unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s (Luke 20:20–26; 22:50–51).

The Roman government is involved in Christ’s death, but it is not motivated by great malice or evil intent. As Pilate himself says, “I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him” (Luke 23:14–15). Christ may have been crucified under Pontius Pilate, but not because of any malice on the governor’s part.

In Luke-Acts, the Romans appear open to the Way of Christ. As Dean Pinter notes, “In Acts 10, the Roman centurion is open to the apostle Peter. Asiarchs can be friendly to Paul (Acts 19:31), and even a proconsul like Sergius Paulus can believe in the gospel (Acts 13:12).”<sup>29</sup>

Paul’s imprisonment seems to have more to do with his desire to spread the gospel than with anything to do with Roman animosity. Claudius Lysias, a tribune,

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<sup>27</sup> Marianne Palmer Bonz, *The Past as Legacy: Luke-Acts and Ancient Epic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 25.

<sup>28</sup> C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 91.

<sup>29</sup> Dean Pinter, “The Gospel of Luke and the Roman Empire,” in *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies*, ed. Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 113.

wrote to Felix, “I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment” (Acts 23:29). After Paul had appeared before Agrippa, we are told, “Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, ‘This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.’ And Agrippa said to Festus, ‘This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar’” (Acts 26:30–32).

As Paul said to his fellow Jews in Rome, “When they [the Romans] had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case” (Acts 28:18). Remarkably, though Acts ends with Paul under house arrest, he continued to welcome visitors and proclaim the gospel: “He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:30–31).

Thus, the Book of Acts records a more hopeful time, a period before Roman persecution began in earnest. As such, Luke-Acts is notable for public and bold witness in the public square, with the hope that hearers might be converted, enemies won over. So, the apostles prayed, “And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness” (Acts 4:29). And indeed, having prayed, “they continued to speak the word of God with boldness” (4:31). Barnabas reported that Paul preached “boldly” (Acts 9:28). Likewise, Paul and Barnabas spoke boldly at Iconium (Acts 14:3) and Paul spoke boldly in Ephesus (Acts 19:8).

Nevertheless, Luke, while optimistic, was not blind to the price that Christians would pay, especially as it touched on family relationships. Matthew warns that a person’s enemies will be of his own household (Matt 10:36). The Gospel of Luke heightens this tension: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). All three of the Synoptics tell us that Christ will pit parents against children. Luke, however, personalizes it, saying, “*You* will be handed over/betrayed by parents and brothers and relatives and friends.” And again, “They will put to death some of *you*” (Luke 21:16). So what shall we do? In Matthew, we are told that the one who endures to the end will be saved (Matt 24:13). Likewise, Mark (Mark 13:13). But Luke’s Gospel again personalizes it, “By your endurance, you will gain [acquire or buy] your souls” (Luke 21:19).

#### IV. Passion and Persecution in John

John and Matthew are attributed to the church's foundational apostles. Both struggle with the fact that the Messiah was rejected by his own people. Yet their passion narratives represent opposite ends of the spectrum. Matthew tells us that upon death, Jesus' soul was troubled, sorrowful even unto death, so much so that he fell upon his face to pray (Matt 26:37–39). John likewise records the words of Jesus "Now is my soul troubled." But quickly Jesus answers his own question, "And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name" (John 12:27–28). John omits any such agony in the garden. Instead, the Messiah appears as the great "I am." He remains standing; his enemies fall to the ground (John 18:6).

Throughout the fourth Gospel, Jesus views his death as glorification, and the cross as an exaltation. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (John 3:14). As William Weinrich puts it, "the crucifixion is not the first step on the way to glory nor in any way a transition to glory," but is instead the very exaltation of the Son of Man.<sup>30</sup> The cross then becomes the focal point, even magnet of humanity: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32).

Not only does Christ view his death as glorification, but he preaches this boldly. As Heinrich Schlier notes, in John's Gospel "parresia" (*παρρησία*) is distinctly linked with the work of Jesus and has a place in the Johannine dialectic of the revelation of Jesus. A mark of Jesus as Revealer is that he works publicly.<sup>31</sup> Thus, upon his arrest, Jesus says, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in the synagogues and temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret" (John 18:20). When the crowds notice that the Jewish leaders seek to kill Jesus, they say, "And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him!" (John 7:26). Again, concerning Lazarus's death, John says that "Jesus told them plainly" (John 11:14), that is openly (*παρρησία*) and without fear or hiding. Indeed, this bold Christ makes a whip of cords, and knows how to use it (John 2:13–22).

And yet, this outward boldness is only half of the story. The Gospel of John evidences a kind of interiority. The gospel spreads in inner rooms, beyond locked doors, away from the world's prying eyes. Indeed, while telling a cosmic story, John can give the reader a feeling of claustrophobia; the characters appear agoraphobic.

Christ's interactions are often on a personal level. In Samaria, Jesus speaks alone to a woman at the well. Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, comes to Jesus alone by night

<sup>30</sup> William Weinrich, John 1:1–7:1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 405.

<sup>31</sup> Heinrich Schlier, "παρουσία, παρρησιάζομαι," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964–1976), 5:879.

(John 3:2). Was Nicodemus acting in fear or prudence, or a healthy combination of both? Either way, as Herman Ridderbos notes, the fact that “he wanted to speak with Jesus without being noticed is obvious.”<sup>32</sup> Or consider the story of the man born blind. When his parents were approached concerning their son’s healing, they replied, “Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” Then John adds in a parenthetical remark, “(His parents said these things, because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be the Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue)” (John 9:21–22). Perhaps, this is more fear than prudence. The leaders then came to the man born blind and told him to give glory to God, but condemn Jesus as a sinner. But the man refused, and we are told, “They cast him out” (9:34). After that, Jesus came to speak to him, one on one.

All four Gospels teach that while persecution is inevitable, it is not to be sought out. In Matthew, disciples were called to be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves (Matt 10:16). Our Lord adds, “When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next” (Matt 10:23). In the Gospel of Luke, the people of Nazareth nearly pushed Jesus over a cliff, only to be frustrated when he mysteriously passed through their midst (Luke 4:30).

So also in the Gospel of John, we see Jesus acting in a way nothing less than shrewd and evasive. The Feast of Booths is a prime and mysterious example. The brothers of Jesus beg him to make his ministry more public, saying, “‘For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.’ For not even his brothers believed in him” (John 7:4–5). Jesus responds, “You go up to the feast. I am not going up to the feast, for my time has not fully come” (John 7:8). Only two verses later, however, we read, “But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private” (John 7:10). This is part of a pattern that Jerome Neyrey calls a “sociology of secrecy.”<sup>33</sup> If this were a football game, we might call it the Statue of Liberty, a fake punt, or the Jerusalem shuffle. A game of spies.

Yes, Jesus spoke boldly and in the open, except when he did not. When Jesus claimed, “Before Abraham was, I am,” the people rose to pick up stones to throw at him, but “Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple” (John 8:58–59). Again, he told his disciples to become sons of light, but “when Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them” (12:36). Indeed, even his own disciples wondered why Jesus did not speak more openly to the world. “Judas, (not Iscariot)

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<sup>32</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 123.

<sup>33</sup> Jerome Neyrey, “The Sociology of Secrecy and the Fourth Gospel,” in *What is John? Volume II: Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 79–109.

said to him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?’” (14:22).

And indeed, the followers of Jesus often kept themselves hidden. Sometimes, this was faith destroying. So we are told, “Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God” (John 12:42–43). But then we happen upon a more prudential fear: “After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission” (John 19:38). Joseph of Arimathea demonstrated his faith, while maintaining secrecy.

One gets the feeling that our Lord does much of his teaching while in hiding. In the Last Supper, which takes place over five full chapters, our Lord speaks about the world as an ominous place. The world will hate Christ’s disciples, as they hated Jesus. “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you,” he adds (John 15:20). The disciples seem to heed the Lord’s words of caution. When the risen Christ appears to his disciples, “the doors were locked for fear of the Jews” (20:19). A week later, the Lord appears to Thomas (20:26) The evangelist describes the closed room, but Jesus does not admonish the disciples for locking the doors. Perhaps, this is a reflection of the church persecuted in Jerusalem, where prudence was the order of the day. The scene may be a preview of the early church, especially during its infancy in Jerusalem. When Peter, having been released from prison, tried to join the worshipping community at Mary’s house, he could not do so, for the door of the gateway was locked (Acts 12:12–16). And for good reason. As Stephen was put to death, “There arose a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles” (Acts 8:1).

There are many good reasons to think that John was written at an earlier time period, in Jerusalem itself. While Mark and Luke think of Rome, John can’t seem to get out of Jerusalem. Jesus enters Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2), Dedication (10:22), and Passover (12:12). We are told that many from the Sanhedrin believed in him (John 12:42). And many times, we are told often about the “fear of the Jews” especially as it is concentrated in Jerusalem. As Weinrich notes, “John’s Gospel informs us that the ministry of Jesus may well have centered in and around Jerusalem and not so much in Galilee as the Synoptics suggest.”<sup>34</sup> If the Gospel were indeed written in Jerusalem, and at an early date, that would help to explain the claustrophobic nature of its depiction of persecution, as well as its

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<sup>34</sup> Weinrich, *John 1:1–7:1*, 27.

intensity. As such, the Gospel of John may well present persecution at its earliest and most intense.

Finally, John is the only Gospel to prophesy explicitly the suffering of one person in particular. The risen Lord says to Peter, "Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go" (John 21:18). John then tells us that this death has meaning. "This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God" (21:19). A remarkable statement. Jesus had said, "I do not receive my glory from people" (5:41). And he told his disciples to seek glory only from God (5:44). But this is never a self-seeking glory. The Son glorifies the Father, the Father the Son, and now in his death, Peter will join in the mutual trinitarian self-giving, bringing glory to God through his death.

### **V. Preparing for Persecution: A Few Concluding Thoughts**

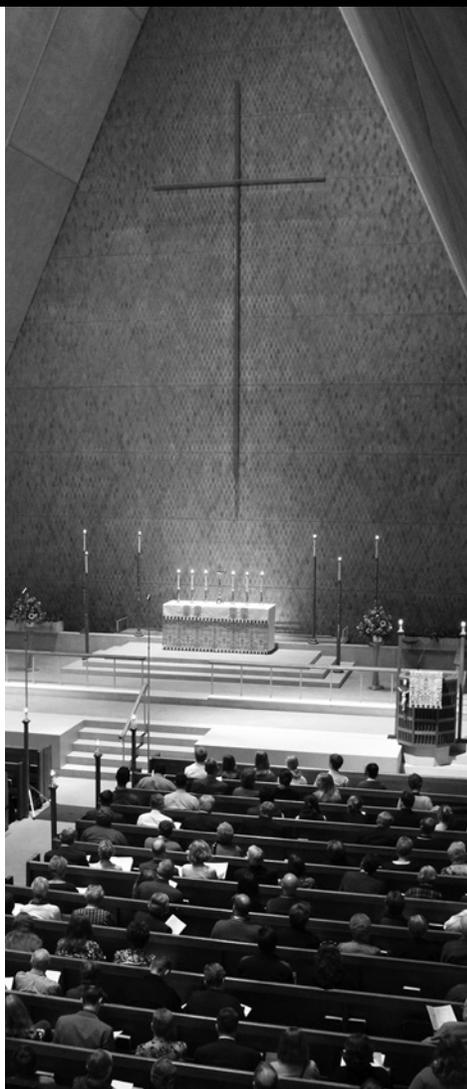
While much has been done on the passion of Christ, we must think more deeply about how that passion is related to suffering, and more specifically, the persecution of Christians. The Gospels offer plenty of warnings to prepare. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. Our Lord never sugarcoats the Christian life. He tells us the cost up front. Do not say Christ did not warn you. What, then, are the repercussions of following him? Persecution. Suffering. Persecution will mean rejection. At times, we must take a stand, though it can be smarter, at times, to run away (Matt 10). Christ's message will divide households, a phenomenon that is on the rise in our own land even now. The height of persecution may include great pain, a feeling of abandonment, and even death, as we see in Mark's Gospel.

Perhaps, though, the juxtaposition of Luke and John may be the most intriguing. For now, there is still time to preach in the public square. To speak boldly. Luke exhibits the hopefulness of such an approach. In doing so, we pray for the wisdom of serpents. But the times may soon change; John's Gospel may become our model. Consider the church in the twentieth century under communism, today in Islamic lands and China, and perhaps soon in our own nation. How we navigate these waters will be tricky. This may become a church behind closed doors. It will take courage and shrewdness, but it cannot be avoided. The way of the cross is the way of salvation, no matter what particular choices we make. But in the four Gospels, at least, we have the words of the Lord that will help to guide us along the way through persecution, and in the age to come, eternal life.

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# Reclaiming Moral Reasoning: Wisdom as the Scriptural Conception of Natural Law

Gifford A. Grobien

Although new technologies and circumstances mean that there are always new ethical questions being raised, there remains tentativeness, especially among Lutherans, to commit robust theological reflection to ethics because of concerns of distracting from theology's first work. Ethics is often dismissed by delegating it to the realm of civil righteousness. On the other hand, when we do consider ethics through a theological lens, Lutherans are often the first to point out that no command is binding unless it is scriptural. When asked if smoking marijuana is acceptable if it is legalized, some might point out that there is no law against it in the Bible. We might get a similar response with other contemporary concerns such as in vitro fertilization (IVF), organ donation, or genetic enhancement. Scripture is clearly authoritative for us as Christians, but in what way is it authoritative? And to what extent is reason brought into the process of doing moral theology?

## I. Use of Scripture in Moral Theology

The violation of God's moral commands in Scripture is wicked. But, in fact, the moral world of the Bible—just like any moral world—is much more comprehensive. Besides commands and laws, other kinds of passages indicate assumptions, context, traditions, expectations, and examples of moral life. The most obvious kinds of moral texts are those which present principles, themes, values, or ideals, such as love, justice, mercy, peaceableness, or preference for the oppressed. These ideals may be presented explicitly, such as in New Testament exhortations to love, humility, and so forth. Yet they may in other cases be presented more comprehensively but implicitly in historical events.<sup>1</sup> An account of God's loving, reconciling work, the Bible suggests morality that reflects God's own character of love, reconciliation, and mercy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edward LeRoy Long, "The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics: A Look at Basic Options," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 19, no. 2 (April 1, 1965): 154–155.

<sup>2</sup> Gareth Jones, "The Authority of Scripture and Christian Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Robin Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 24.

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The moral assumptions of the Bible, then, are comprehensively understood through multiple genres of texts, such as law, eschatology, history, instruction, parables, wisdom, examples of moral action, etc.<sup>3</sup> Such a spectrum indicates the need for careful, ministerial, reflective exegesis, not a facile read which suffers under sweeping errors of both the positive and negative type: on the one hand, turning circumstantial advice into a broad command or, on the other hand, overlooking the comprehensive moral implications of exemplary behavior. In other words, a textual genre needs to be read for what it is, and the moral implications of it properly judged and embraced in one's life. Universal divine commands should not be marginalized or subjectified; the scope of St. Paul's health advice to Timothy should be understood in the particularity of circumstance.

This suggests that regardless of the genre of the text, both the question of content and of application are raised. What is the morality presented in a Bible passage, and how is this to be lived out here and now?<sup>4</sup> Who is to be compared to whom in a biblical example of virtuous action?<sup>5</sup> What concrete action does a biblical example determine should be taken in today's circumstances? How does a religious ethic expand its scope to broader life?<sup>6</sup>

Richard Hays suggests three tasks in the interpretation of Scripture that have a comprehensive moral theology in view. The first task is the "descriptive" task: to give a full explanation of the people, statements, actions, and circumstances in the text, using the full scope of interpretive tools: the rule of faith, vocabulary, grammar, syntax, structure, and figures of speech. The descriptive task describes in detail the meaning of the text, but it does so without premature or imported assumptions, especially in attempts to harmonize with other texts.<sup>7</sup>

The second task, the "synthetic" task, seeks "coherence" between various texts on a moral question. Rationalization or harmonization of specific texts is not the goal, but rather a comprehensive presentation of moral themes across texts.<sup>8</sup> As an example, consider the directive of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 to the Gentiles

<sup>3</sup> James M. Gustafson, "Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics," *Interpretation* 24 (1970): 444; John W. Rogerson, "The Old Testament and Christian Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Robin Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 35–37. See also Richard B. Hays, "Scripture-Shaped Community: The Problem of Method in New Testament Ethics," *Interpretation* 44, no. 1 (January 1990): 43: "Careful exegesis heightens our awareness of the theological diversity within Scripture and of our historical distance from the original communities" receiving the texts.

<sup>4</sup> Gustafson, "Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics," 439–440.

<sup>5</sup> Gustafson, "Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics," 442–443.

<sup>6</sup> James M. Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics: Prospects for Rapprochement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 29.

<sup>7</sup> Hays, "Scripture-Shaped Community," 44.

<sup>8</sup> Hays, "Scripture-Shaped Community," 45.

to abstain from what was sacrificed to idols, from blood, from food that had been strangled, and from sexual immorality. The first impetus of the interpreter should not be to make this text harmonize with other New Testament injunctions abolishing the ceremonial law, even if he eventually arrives at this conclusion. Rather, the work in this second, “synthetic” task is to work out from the text possible moral themes at play. Such themes could include love of the weaker brother, or there could be moral-theological implications underlying these directives. The possible spectrum of moral themes needs consideration, through which a coherence of moral understanding begins to take shape.

Incidentally, these first two tasks correspond closely to Robert Preus’s first two principles of exegesis laid out in his essay, “The Hermeneutics of the Formula of Concord.” There Preus calls for exegesis according to the rule of *sensus literalis*—that is, to say what a passage says, without rationalizing or harmonizing—and according to the rule of *scriptura scripturum interpretat*, which calls not for strict harmonization, but submission to the unity of Scripture by recognizing the relation of passages and books to one another, and their thematic coherence.<sup>9</sup>

As moral themes manifest, we move to Hays’s third task, what he calls the “hermeneutical” task. By this, he means the particular understanding of texts for the present church. In other words, how do today’s churches act on the moral themes discovered in the descriptive and synthetic tasks? Here Hays calls for a reasoned judgment about how to act.<sup>10</sup> But how do we go about making this reasoned judgment?

Charles Cosgrove has argued for what he calls a rule of purpose: “The purpose (or justification) behind a biblical moral rule carries greater weight than the rule itself.”<sup>11</sup> When one comes across a moral principle, or even a broader moral value, the underlying purpose gives the principle or value authority. The purpose is not just an interpretation of a rule, but the identification of its rationale and observing its appropriateness for various particular cases.<sup>12</sup>

What justification is there in setting aside the rule in favor of its purpose?<sup>13</sup> If the command is appropriate to our context, then the rule itself will still apply in accordance with its purpose. But if the rule itself no longer applies, the purpose can still give insight into moral rationale. For example, even if we are not bound

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Preus, “The Hermeneutics of the Formula of Concord” in *No Other Gospel: Essays in Commemoration of the 400th Anniversary of the Formula of Concord 1580–1980*, ed. Arnold J. Koelpin (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1980), 309–335.

<sup>10</sup> Hays, “Scripture-Shaped Community,” 45.

<sup>11</sup> Charles H. Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate: Five Hermeneutical Rules* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 13.

<sup>12</sup> Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate*, 25.

to allow the poor to glean our fields, details of the Mosaic laws about the poor give us insight into the rationale of caring for the poor. Specific examples of law, even if irrelevant to our context, tell us about the higher purpose of the law.<sup>14</sup>

We can also understand this as analogical moral reasoning. *Rules* or commands assume *paradigm cases* which fit certain circumstances and are grounded in *principles* embedded in the *moral world* of the text.<sup>15</sup> We can compare paradigm or authoritative cases with contemporary cases, identify governing principles, themes, or values in the authoritative cases, and reason how this value can be achieved in current circumstances through moral action.<sup>16</sup>

Moral rules, therefore, are always in view of application, of practice. They never exist in theory, then to be applied to situations.<sup>17</sup> This means further that moral action cannot always be determined by a simple, explicit reading of the Bible. Rather, we must know principles and purposes presented by biblical texts, and we must further understand our own circumstances to recognize when biblical principles and values are at play. This ability to know and act well in accordance with circumstances is traditionally called “prudence.” Prudence, further, is knowledge and skill that comes not only from the Bible, but also from natural law: “For when the nations, having no Torah, do by nature the things of the Torah, not having Torah are the Torah to themselves, who demonstrate the works of the law written on their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their various/alternating/reciprocal thoughts accusing or defending themselves” (cf. Rom 2:14–15).<sup>18</sup> Both the law and its application are written on the heart. The law is, by nature, human. It is my contention, further, that the natural law includes this ability to make reasoned judgments about morality in accordance with biblical values. It is the very ability to recognize purpose and principle in a world of commands, examples, stories, and parables, and the ability to direct moral action in the midst of competing moral authorities.

As soon as we raise the concept of the natural law, however, some will react dismissively, negatively, and perhaps even viscerally. The “natural law” seems outmoded in a world of difference, of community, and of self-expression. It seems self-contradictory if we consider that some people’s “nature” moves them to embrace an identity contrary to traditional biblical morality. Nevertheless, let us

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<sup>14</sup> Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate*, 33.

<sup>15</sup> Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate*, 55.

<sup>17</sup> Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate*, 67.

<sup>18</sup> Translation my own. All other Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

explore together what the natural law is, biblically, to discern what kind of partner it is with the Scriptures as an authority for moral theology.

## II. Background on the Natural Law

When most people today hear the phrase “natural law” or “law of nature,” they are likely to think of what we call scientific or physical laws, according to which predictable phenomena occur if certain conditions apply. In fact, when we realize that the concept of “natural law” has very little to do with modern “laws of nature,” the former becomes more palatable.

### Classical Understanding of the Natural Law

The first difference to point out is that in premodern understandings, “law” referred to moral norms governing civil relations. “Law” by its very definition was something that appealed to reason and will.<sup>19</sup>

Nature, or *physis*, by contrast, was usually understood to be *not* governed by law. Nature referred to full development and assumes purposeful movement toward this maturity. Such natural movement is endowed by the creative source or power underlying nature.<sup>20</sup> Nature, as such, did not engage in civil relations, and therefore was not subject to law, as an exercise of reason and will. Nature always moved toward its goal, while laws were changeable, particular, and conventional, serving the commonwealth.<sup>21</sup>

The nature of man complicated the issue. Human persons have the same nature, human nature, according to which they move toward some perfect form of development or ideal. Yet laws and individual decisions differ widely across people. What is different about the nature of man that it does not move predictably and inexorably in the same way in all people?

The answer is in the unique character of human nature. Human nature includes reason and will. It is part of the human nature to be free and to act contingently. In the human nature itself, then, we see the need to work out the relation

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<sup>19</sup> Catherine Wilson, “From Limits to Laws: The Construction of the Nomological Image of Nature in Early Modern Philosophy,” in *Natural Law and Laws of Nature in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Michael Stolleis (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2008), 14–15.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Pope, “Reason and Natural Law,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics*, ed. Gilbert Meilaender and William Werpehowski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, August 9, 2007), 150.

<sup>21</sup> Wilson, “From Limits to Laws,” 14–15, 18–20.

between the concepts of “nature” and “law.”<sup>22</sup> To assist, let us consider the natural law as critically received in the church.

### Natural Law in Romans and Early Christianity

Paul’s reference to the natural law in Romans 2:14–15 is a clear comparison (even if largely as a rhetorical device) to the Hebrew Torah. “For when the nations, having no Torah, do by nature the things of the Torah, not having Torah are the Torah to themselves, these demonstrate the works of the law written on their hearts.”<sup>23</sup>

Among the Hebrews themselves, we see a different understanding of the natural law from the classical Greeks and Romans. In a way, reference to the natural law is not prominent, because they have the revealed Torah. The Torah, in this sense, is the law that is needed for the Hebrew. Yet is there any parallel to a Gentile conception of the natural law? The Talmud records the first century BC rabbi Hillel as summarizing the Torah with the Golden Rule.<sup>24</sup> The Golden Rule also appears in a variable form in Leviticus 19:18 (“Love your neighbor as yourself”), in the midst of God’s call to Israel to be holy as he is holy. Jesus himself affirms this in Matthew 7:12: “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” What, then, might the “Torah” of the Gentiles referred to by Paul be? Clearly not the observation of ceremonies, seasons, or even the particularity of sacrifices. Rather, it points to a natural equity or justice. And what is most naturally sensible is that a person not do what he does not want done to himself.<sup>25</sup>

### Natural Law in the High and Late Medieval Period

In the Middle Ages, Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas shifted the emphasis, perhaps influenced by their Aristotelian focus, from a relational or “interpersonal” conception of the natural law—expressed by the Golden Rule—to that of the pursuit

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<sup>22</sup> Merio Scattola, *Das Naturrecht vor dem Naturrecht* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), 16–17. This indicates the significance of the virtue of prudence for Aristotle. It is by prudence that a person recognizes the rightness of an act and carries it out (Scattola, *Das Naturrecht*, 19–21). The right of law, its content is undetermined apart from experience, because the recognition of right comes in the solving of problems and the exercise of a person’s will to act in accordance with this resolution, that is, *synthekei*. The “content” can vary depending on circumstances (Scattola, *Das Naturrecht*, 14–15).

<sup>23</sup> Translation my own.

<sup>24</sup> Svend Andersen, “The Golden Rule: An Anthropological Universal?,” in *What Is Human?: Theological Encounters with Anthropology*, ed. Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dietrich, and Bo Holm (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 171–172.

<sup>25</sup> Andersen, “The Golden Rule,” 171–172.

of the good.<sup>26</sup> They also pick up on Paul's comment that the work of the law is "written on their hearts" (Rom 2:15).

For Thomas, this writing on the heart refers to the image of God and, with respect to law, particularly the intellect. The intellect is an intellectual light which illuminates the truth of eternal reason. By acting reasonably, a person participates in divine reason—to act reasonably is itself an action that corresponds to or agrees with divine reason. Such a man is able to make judgments about truth and demonstrate the truth.<sup>27</sup> The distinctive, unique, and natural characteristic of humanity is reason. To fulfill human nature, then, includes exercising reason well and acting according to it. In this sense, the term "natural law" is perfectly coherent: *law* itself, that is to say, divine reason, is part of the perfection of human *nature*. The law, when it is presented to a person through reason, is the natural purpose of man. The natural law for humans is to act in accordance with reason moving toward maturity, or good. For human beings, what is natural is not automatic, nor is it predictable or physically mechanistic. Freedom of the will allows for choice, meaning that the "natural" must be recognized and pursued voluntarily. Nevertheless, the natural conforms to the good of right reason.<sup>28</sup>

Natural law norms, therefore, direct toward the human *telos*. Reason presents to us the good of man in view of his nature, that is, as one in the image of God who is moving back to God, and norms direct us to act in accordance with the virtues which order one's nature toward this *telos*.<sup>29</sup> While intent and object of the act can be distinguished conceptually, they are integral in the action itself. The act chosen is for the purpose of the intent, and is bound up with it. The end of the act is also, therefore, not just the natural end of power or function, but the will bound up with the natural act.<sup>30</sup> Thus, those things which are not rationally ordered simply are not morally objective. The subjective is not absent the objective, but pursues the apparent good, which is objectively true when it corresponds with the objectively good.<sup>31</sup>

### Natural Law in Luther

While Luther received many of the concepts of medieval natural law thinking, his relational anthropology led him to distinct emphases. For Luther, natural law cannot find its origin in the nature of man, even speculations about Adam's

<sup>26</sup> Andersen, "The Golden Rule," 173; cf. Shabb 31a.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason: A Thomist View of Moral Autonomy*, trans. Gerald Malsbary, 1st ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 262–263.

<sup>28</sup> Pope, "Reason and Natural Law," 151.

<sup>29</sup> Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, 332.

<sup>30</sup> Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, 430–431.

<sup>31</sup> Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, 436–437.

righteous nature before the fall. Rather, because human nature reflects the image of God, the natural law is based on the nature of God. This nature is to love, that is, to give of himself continually. He gives regardless of the condition of the recipient; he gives himself as Father, Son, Holy Spirit.<sup>32</sup>

Likewise, the Christian view is to perceive another's need in his circumstances, and to work for those needs.<sup>33</sup> True love of others does not simply compare others to one's own wants. Instead, to love others is to perceive God's desire for them in their circumstances. The love of others, then, is to put ourselves into another's situation and desire the best for him in that situation, not what is based on our own preferences apart from the divine perspective.<sup>34</sup>

Luther recognizes that reason is the source of all law written in the heart, such that non-Christians can follow the natural law to some extent.<sup>35</sup> Practical reason can work out principles in accordance with the law of love, so that a person can accomplish the natural law outwardly, even if he does not love from the heart. In addition, wise men act with moderation or equity.<sup>36</sup> Positive law is contingent, but can never anticipate every contingency, nor does it consider different personal circumstances. Thus it must necessarily be moderated by equity.<sup>37</sup>

In spite of these emphases on principles, such as love, beneficent reciprocity, and equity, Luther acknowledges that the natural law is a set of precepts, those of the divine law, written on the heart.<sup>38</sup> He represents continuity with the medieval understanding, while offering additional insights in line with his theological concerns.

### Development in the Natural Law in the Modern Era

The rise of voluntarism in the early modern period led to adjustments in natural law thinking. Voluntarism emphasized God's role as lawgiver according to his will, supporting the importance of the will of secular rulers in establishing legal authority.

<sup>32</sup> Antti Raunio, "Natural Law in the Lutheran Tradition," in *Christianity and Natural Law: An Introduction*, ed. Norman Doe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 80. Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [Schriften]*, 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), vol. 1: 502; 4: 269 (hereafter WA).

<sup>33</sup> Andersen, "The Golden Rule," 173–174. For example, see Luther's treatise *The Freedom of a Christian* (AE 31:364–66).

<sup>34</sup> Raunio, "Natural Law in the Lutheran Tradition," 81.

<sup>35</sup> Luther, *Von weltlicher Oberkeit, wie weit man ihr Gehorsam schuldig sei* (1523), WA 11:279–280.

<sup>36</sup> Luther, *An die Pfarrherrn, wider den Wucher zu predigen* (1549), WA 51:344, 13–14; see also WA 11:279, 16–25.

<sup>37</sup> For examples of this in Luther, see WA 20:147, 36–148, 13; 37:134, 3–4; 8:664, 22–39; 11:272, 13–24; 14:554, 32–555, 19; 44:704, 30–39; Raunio, "Natural Law in the Lutheran Tradition," 81–82.

<sup>38</sup> Andersen, "The Golden Rule," 178.

Machiavelli's seminal works on statecraft argued for policies aimed at desired political behavior, a more socio-pragmatic philosophy rather than the humanistic pursuit of flourishing and the common good of antiquity and scholasticism.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, developments in science were also having their effect. Premodern hypotheses about the empirical, natural world made no widespread claims about physical reality or physical causes. Natural philosophers—scientists—in the early modern era began to give broader accounts of the causes of natural phenomena observed.<sup>40</sup>

These early modern scientists sought to distance themselves from ancient empirical theories, and, as such, sought new terminologies to describe and explain their hypotheses. The introduction into science of the terminology of “law” appears to be an invention to contrast modern science from Aristotelian conceptions of causes, appetites, and powers particular to genera. Nature was no longer understood according to various kinds of creatures, but according to an atomist view of matter underlying all various kinds. The term “law” explained what appeared to be consistent, predictable natural phenomena. Yet, in a certain sense, the rise of the concept is puzzling as inanimate objects, or even animals, could not be said to obey laws as judgments of reason, the traditional meaning of “law.” Furthermore, law, while reasonable, was also understood to be contingent. That is, it was variable and inconsistent, and the term *lex* hardly carried the force of universal or immutable.<sup>41</sup>

These developments in political and natural philosophy had repercussions for the theory of natural law. First, the sociological emphasis on political pragmatism and the authority of a prince's will undermined the traditional understanding of law as an expression of reason in line with a theological or moral conception of the good. Law served the ruler's purpose of political organization and control. Second, the transfer of the term “law” to the realm of science gradually led people to think of laws of nature as determined scientific phenomenon quite distinct from the exercise of reason and will. Thus within the theory of the natural law itself, after 1650, what is natural begins to be distinguished from what is reasonable. Early modern thinkers marginalized reason and turned attention to other causes, such as principles in human nature (inclinations or psychology) or cosmic forces. The articulation of natural mathematical laws in the Scientific Revolution suggested similar laws for human society. Reason is now removed from the natural law, per se,

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<sup>39</sup> Lorraine Daston and Michael Stolleis, “Introduction,” in *Natural Law and Laws of Nature in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2008), 2–3; Michael Stolleis, “The Legitimation of Law through God, Tradition, Will, Nature and Constitution” in *Natural Law and Laws of Nature in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2008), 48–50.

<sup>40</sup> Daston and Stolleis, “Introduction,” 11.

<sup>41</sup> Daston and Stolleis, “Introduction,” 3.

to become a specifically human quality which helps human beings to recognize the movement of laws of nature in the human experience. Natural law is not written on the mind or heart. Instead, it finds expression through inclination, instinct, passion, or psychological experience.<sup>42</sup>

By the eighteenth century, while God may still be considered the creator of the natural design, there is no more an understanding that he has revealed reasonable principles. There are no natural law principles by which we can know the will of God and what leads to happiness. Rather, a person is to look at his nature and use reason instrumentally to pursue what is pleasurable.<sup>43</sup> Natural law is no longer what is reasonable, but what is possible according to human powers and instincts. Nature, then, no longer is understood to have purpose, as it did in the classical natural law understanding. “Natural” movements are genetic or biological—instinctive, rather than reasonable. The only purpose is what gives pleasure.

Thus there is a sequence of transition in the use of the term “law”: first, scientists discover “regularities” in natural science; second, the term “lex” is used increasingly in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to name these regularities; third, various concepts of law developed in science due to the new use of the term; and fourth, natural science begins to understand “nature” as a holding binding, necessary authority, which is conflated with law, increasingly over against moral choices of free reason.<sup>44</sup> Finally, natural law now firmly refers to empirical, demonstrable hypotheses in the realm of natural science, not reasonable, moral laws.<sup>45</sup>

Yet even in modernity and postmodernity, there is an appeal to some kind of value or right that is due everyone: fairness, justice, tolerance, autonomy. More than this, there is a recognition that there is something universal to human nature that should be respected: agency and freedom, which we can link to the more traditional terms of reason and will. Furthermore, such a human morality is one of justice. A vestige of the natural law remains—the need for justice for human beings, even if this notion of justice is stunted or malformed.

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<sup>42</sup> Daston and Stolleis, “Introduction,” 10–11; Stolleis, “Legitimation of Law,” 51–53; Jan Schröder, “The Concept of (Natural) Law in the Doctrine of Law and Natural Law of the Early Modern Era,” in *Natural Law and Laws of Nature in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2008), 64–66. See also Timothy J. Hochstrasser, *Natural Law Theories in the Early Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 80–89.

<sup>43</sup> Schröder, “The Concept of (Natural) Law,” 67.

<sup>44</sup> Sophie Roux, “Controversies on Nature as Universal Legality (1680–1710),” in *Natural Law and Laws of Nature in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Michael Stolleis (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2008), 200.

<sup>45</sup> Stolleis, “Legitimation of Law,” 54.

### III. Universal Conceptions of the Natural

We also get a glimpse of the natural law another way: although we are inclined to evil through sin, we still react against manifest and widespread evil. Mass murder, corrupt business dealings, even infidelity and ruinous slander still strike most people as wrong, even if we have gradually been conditioned to accept some of these things, or do not act systematically to stop them.<sup>46</sup> Another example of the natural law is the appeal to universal human rights, human dignity, or even human autonomy.<sup>47</sup> Regardless of how these notions have strayed from earlier Christian conceptions, they still indicate appeals to that which is not only fundamentally, but also universally human.<sup>48</sup>

Here we begin to see the gap between the concept of the natural law and its implementation. It is not difficult conceptually to recognize a universality of basic ideals, such as subsistence of natural life, family and social order, and so forth. It is much more difficult to agree on the practice of these ideals. Even basic precepts rarely have universal agreement. You shall not kill, unless you are the government punishing a violent criminal. Or unless the utility of bringing a fetus to term is outweighed by the utility of terminating the pregnancy. Beyond any ideals of basic goods or universal principles, we must always ask who is acting, what is being done, on whom or about which the action is being taken, when, where, why, how, and by what means. Circumstances play a significant role in qualifying the action in order to determine how reasonable it is.

In fact, there is no such thing as a precept devoid of circumstances. In this sense, there are no universal precepts. Moral direction and description always includes circumstances, “You shall have no other gods—before the Lord” (cf. Exod 20:3). The commandment is qualified by the one to whom worship is directed. “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord” (cf. Exod 20:7). A particular kind of use—misuse—is forbidden, but not all uses in general. “You shall sanctify the holy day” (cf. Exod 20:8). Is the holy day the Sabbath? Is it Sunday? Is it the rest we find in Christ? “[P]ractical reasoning, unlike speculative reasoning, deals with individual and contingent matters, . . . its judgments are not characterized by absolute necessity.”<sup>49</sup> Practical judgment is particular rather than general.

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<sup>46</sup> Pope, “Reason and Natural Law,” 162.

<sup>47</sup> David Novak, “The Judaic Foundation of Rights,” in *Jewish Justice: The Contested Limits of Nature, Law, and Covenant* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 165–167.

<sup>48</sup> David Novak, “Natural Law, Human Dignity, and the Protection of Human Property,” in *Jewish Justice: The Contested Limits of Nature, Law, and Covenant* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 45–46.

<sup>49</sup> Pope, “Reason and Natural Law,” 151.

In fact, then, all moral action is dealing with particularization, action qualified by circumstances. *So for something to be of the natural law does not mean it is universal.* This misconception that the natural law is a comprehensive scheme of universal principles—like unto a complicated code of laws—that has been determined by physical function is the greatest misunderstanding and greatest barrier to an appreciation and use of the natural law today. Rather, while we can say that the natural law includes a set of precepts, these precepts are always acted on according to circumstances.

If vague concepts of human rights and dignity are all that remain of the natural law, is it, then, the moralist's will-o'-the-wisp? If moral action is always particular, how can we grasp the universal nature yet particular expression of natural law? Perhaps we have been pursuing this wrongly. Perhaps we are in need of divine wisdom. Perhaps we are in need of revelation to inform the dim spark of the natural law. Does submitting to revelation make the natural law somehow less natural? By no means! The natural law and divine revelation are not somehow at odds with each other, or two different sources of knowledge which should be kept separate, but they work mutually to heighten a person's awareness of goodness, love, the conviction of sin, and the mercy of God both for us and as exemplary for our lives toward others.

#### **IV. Wisdom as the Bible's Concept of the Natural Law**

Some might say that the natural law is not prevalent or significant in the Scriptures, with the brief references to the power and divinity of God being plain in creation (Romans 1), and the Torah written on the heart (Romans 2). But in view of our discussion about the natural law being a reasonable judgment to act well, I suggest that the natural law is much more prevalent in Scripture, specifically in the wisdom literature.

In fact, one could make the argument that the inclusion of wisdom literature ever so gently implies the insufficiency of the law of Moses, at least as given as a code of precepts. Further wisdom and judgment are needed to follow the law of Moses in various circumstances. Consider Solomon's prayer at Gibeon:

And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil. (1 Kgs 3:7-9)

This, in spite of the fact that the Lord commanded, through Moses, that each king, upon coronation, write his own copy of the Law and study it daily (Deut 17:18–20). This also in spite of David’s dying counsel to Solomon that he know, keep, and walk in the ways of the law of Moses (1 Kgs 2:1–4). Despite his intimate knowledge of the law of Moses, Solomon needed something else. He needed skill at making judgments. He needed a wise and discerning heart.<sup>50</sup>

Psalm 37:30–31 says, “The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice. The Torah of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slip.”<sup>51</sup> God’s people are called upon to imitate his righteousness and justice. Justice and righteousness are expressions of holiness (“The Lord of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness” [Is 5:16]), holiness which God’s people are called to exemplify. “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev 19:2). “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48).

In order to exemplify this holiness and perfection, in order to carry out justice and righteousness, people must understand not only the “what” of the commandment, but also the “why,” the purpose. The prudential reason, the logic of the commandment, must be intelligible.<sup>52</sup> An action that is unintelligible or illogical stands simply as a fact and can never be imitated again in the contingencies of life. Only the purpose of God’s *mishpat* can be imitated; that is, it can be carried out again and again in changing circumstances.<sup>53</sup>

Commands are particular precepts issuing from justice itself, or “the Law.” Justice as the reason for the commandments serves the final purpose of creation and also the human invitation to participate in the rule over creation. Such justice is not a procedural justice stemming from adherence to commandments, but the foundation of the commandments. *Mishpat* underlies *mitzvah*. Such grounding is necessary for commandments that are not arbitrary.<sup>54</sup>

In the Bible, this underlying justice of God is not a Greek philosophical conception of divinity or of will, but it is God’s wisdom, his חֹכְמָה (chokhmah). His wisdom is his creative intelligence by which he brings all things into orderly being.<sup>55</sup> “When he established the heavens, I was there; . . . when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, . . . I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight,

<sup>50</sup> For a fuller development of this argument, see Bruce K. Waltke, “Righteousness in Proverbs,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 70 (2008): 230–231.

<sup>51</sup> Translation my own.

<sup>52</sup> David Novak, “Divine Justice/Divine Command,” in *Jewish Justice: The Contested Limits of Nature, Law, and Covenant* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 130–131.

<sup>53</sup> Novak, “Divine Justice/Divine Command,” 133.

<sup>54</sup> Novak, “Divine Justice/Divine Command,” 125–126.

<sup>55</sup> Novak, “Divine Justice/Divine Command,” 127.

rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man” (Prov 8:27–31). Wisdom then is personified as with God prior to and during the creation, not merely as an attribute, but as a “principle inherent in the very fabric” of creation. Or, as the *logos*, the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24).<sup>56</sup> By this *logos*, all things were made, and apart from him nothing was made that was made.

God’s wisdom, then, underlies and gives form and purpose to all creation. Furthermore, the wisdom literature asserts, God’s wisdom itself can be discovered and learned by careful attention to the works of God. Remember this claim from Romans 1:19–20: “What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.” But perhaps what is overlooked in this is the claim about wisdom that Paul makes in the verses immediately following: “Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools” (Rom 1:21–22). God’s attributes are not apparent simply for philosophical speculation, but as an appeal to repentance and true worship. True worship, in turn, is the beginning of wisdom: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” repeats the Bible (cf. Job 28:28; Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Eccl 12:13).

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but such fear bears further fruit in the increase of wisdom. Proverbs 2 expands that through wisdom the Lord protects a person’s integrity; guides him in righteousness, justice, equity, and every good path; teaches him discretion; protects him from deceit and men who would tempt to wickedness; and delivers him from sexual temptation. In fact, this is not wisdom for human betterment in a humanistic sense, but under the assumption that God intends for the human good. Wisdom comes, first of all, from the fear of the Lord. Because of God’s personal involvement in order, this search for order is really the search for life. Wisdom seeks after life and shuns death (Prov 10:17).<sup>57</sup>

How is this search for wisdom undertaken? Both by hearing the wisdom of those who have gone before, and by observing the order and goodness intended for creation and still discernable, to some extent, in it. Wisdom assumes an order in creation discernible by reason, discovered in one’s experience of the natural or social existence. This order, furthermore, has its origin in God. God, as creator, is experienced in creation. Even the world of animals (Prov 30:15–31) or astronomy

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<sup>56</sup> Bruce C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 329.

<sup>57</sup> Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down*, 324–325.

(Psalm 19) gives insight into understanding humanity.<sup>58</sup> The seemingly weak and leaderless ants provide for themselves through diligence, an observation that could teach one to avoid sloth (Prov 6:6–11; 30:25). Or there is the “stately stride” of the lion, rooster, and he-goat, which prepare and warn the stately king whose army is with him (Prov 30:29–31).

In the order of creation, then, there is always a concern for justice. Behind this order is chaos, which is expression of sin.<sup>59</sup> There is also instruction in wisdom, such as that contained in the Proverbs. Rather than theoretical principles, this instruction is grounded in real-life situations to make them easier to understand. The repetition of similar proverbs reinforces wisdom through different images. Both of these characteristics are exemplified in these proverbs in close proximity to each other in Proverbs 26, making vivid the connection between lying, hatred, and social disintegration: “Whoever hates disguises himself with his lips and harbors deceit in his heart. . . . A lying tongue hates its victims, and a flattering mouth works ruin” (Prov 26:24, 28). This kind of proverbial instruction does not give answers to every question of justice, but it stimulates the mind to think in just ways through repeated example and reflection. By so doing, a person who fears the Lord becomes prudent and is able to make wise judgments in all circumstances: “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes” (Prov 26:4–5). Which is it? Only wisdom can determine, considering the particular circumstances.

“Propriety” or prudence, the right word and deed in the appropriate circumstance, is the underlying thematic method.<sup>60</sup> Wisdom, then, fills in when commandments or precepts do not address a question. The concept of wisdom also helps us to understand why specific precepts sometimes apply and sometimes do not, or even why some precepts in the Bible change, such as Jesus’ overturning the laws of restitution and uncleanness.<sup>61</sup>

Wisdom is “[t]he reasoned search for specific ways to ensure personal well-being in everyday life, to make sense of extreme adversity and vexing anomalies, and to transmit this hard-earned knowledge so that successive generations will embody it.”<sup>62</sup> The claims of wisdom, then, are not to exalt human capacity above the divine, or to offer assurances about God’s action, but through keen awareness of the human experience to offer courage in appropriate action, whether the prudential, the

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<sup>58</sup> Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down*, 324, 326–327.

<sup>59</sup> Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down*, 327.

<sup>60</sup> James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, rev. and enl. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 11.

<sup>61</sup> Gordon McConville, “Biblical Law and Human Formation,” *Political Theology* 14, no. 5 (2013): 634.

<sup>62</sup> Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 3.

faithful, the religious, and so forth. Something of the truth can be observed in creation, even when this creation is corrupted. The experience of corruption itself can suggest to the one seeking wisdom where to find hope.<sup>63</sup> Wisdom is an art that can be learned, but it begins with a heart willing to listen and submit.<sup>64</sup>

### V. The Failure of the Natural Law and Need for Fear of the Lord

The truth of wisdom permeates creation and the human experience, encouraging optimism. Yet wisdom also recognizes limits to human control over events. These limits come from deficiencies in human wisdom, expressed either in wickedness or in the providence of God overturning human plans. No man apart from our Lord is perfectly wise, no matter the extent to which he pursues wisdom. This is another way of saying that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. The infection of original sin undermines fantasies about a life without flaws in perfect harmony with the natural law. Man does not always seek the good, does not always act in justice and equity to others, does not always love the neighbor as himself. Just as much as the natural law cannot be empirically predicted according to natural conditions, and just as much as the natural law is not mere instinct or natural inclination, but a reasoned judgment for goodness, righteousness, and love, so the natural law also fails in men in many cases.

Beyond the wickedness of man, the Lord also determines the course of events in such a way that our actions cannot guarantee the good life that we imagine for ourselves, or even for others. "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand" (Prov 19:21; cf. also Prov 27:1; 28:26; 16:9; 21:30–31; 16:1–2; 20:24; 19:14).<sup>65</sup> A human being, apart from our Lord, simply does not have the capacity to act with a wisdom that considers goodness for all people, even just all the people of his society. Only the Lord discerns the heart. "Let the evil of the wicked come to an end, and may you establish the righteous—you who test the minds and hearts, O righteous God!" (Ps 7:9). "The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the Lord tests hearts" (Prov 17:3). In his observance and testing of hearts, the Lord knows what experiences to send the way of men, whether success or failure, happiness or tragedy.

Yet the natural law tradition, and the wisdom tradition especially, is not ignorant of providence and unpredictability. Prolonged experience suggests skepticism at attaining perfection, such that the lament of what should be but has been lost has become part of wisdom. "It is the glory of God to conceal things, but

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<sup>63</sup> Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 199.

<sup>64</sup> Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 24.

<sup>65</sup> Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 10.

the glory of kings is to search things out” (Prov 25:2). Even though the pursuit of wisdom had something to do with perceiving the goodness and truth in nature, such goodness is difficult to penetrate. Biblical wisdom is not only occupied with the pursuit of success through prudential speech and behavior, but it also submits to the exercise of divine freedom and human catastrophe even when claims to justice are on the side of men. This is the purpose of the extensive writings in Job and Ecclesiastes. In Job, God, not Job, becomes the one on trial to defend the failure of his creation and his judgment against the wicked and for the upright. God testifies that retributive justice is not the purpose of his creation. God limits and controls chaos, and acts according to the good by particular intervention.<sup>66</sup> God’s purpose, in fact, is to exercise dominion and mercifully restore his wayward creation through his Son, so that Satan no longer has ground for accusation.

The Ecclesiastical preacher, likewise, observes that virtue and vice are not rewarded or punished, but that a man’s duty is to enjoy with thanksgiving the gifts of God, and to hope for restoration in eternal life.<sup>67</sup>

There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler: folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves. He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall. He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them. (Eccl 10:5–9)

In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good. Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity. Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. (Eccl 11:6–9)

Divine providence, and the actions of others, mean that a purely temporal, predictable, retributive justice does not exist. This is not a moral relativism, but a recognition that God’s justice is more fundamental and comprehensive. Divine providence, judgment, and mercy are at the root of human life.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down*, 343–345.

<sup>67</sup> Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down*, 345–346.

<sup>68</sup> Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down*, 339–341.

Job 28 goes on to say that wisdom is hidden from the living, and that God alone has it. To access wisdom depends on religion and prayer.<sup>69</sup> The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and also, it turns out, the end of it. For while wisdom can bring, to some extent, goodness and happiness in this light, true wisdom is to trust that the judgment of God is coming, and to submit to this judgment with piety and hope. True wisdom, then, does not necessitate certain results of goodness and happiness, but the character of faith and piety.<sup>70</sup> We strive to participate in the goodness of God by pursuing justice and mercy as wisely as possible, without placing our ultimate hope in our own wisdom.

### VI. Natural Law and Biblical Ethics

Our long reflection suggests that commands and wisdom are given together to serve the spiritual purpose of establishing the spiritual, eternal kingdom of Christ. The Law is given in the context of covenant, the narrative and work of salvation, to establish the people of God for their vocation of exercising, modeling, and establishing righteousness (*tzedakah*). Correlatively, wisdom permeates the creation, calling out to men to perceive her and walk in her ways. The vestige of wisdom in man stumbles along the way of recognizing wisdom. Yet as pursued with humility and blessed with divine gifts, the pursuit of wisdom can manifest in righteousness and goodness, especially the good of the neighbor.<sup>71</sup>

In this way of wisdom, the natural law is a rich resource for moral theology, even if the art of right judgment and prudential action is difficult, takes years of learning, and necessitates fear of the Lord. As Scripture's purpose is to proclaim salvation in Christ, it is not a comprehensive moral guide. "Ethical action," on the other hand, "is a response to the mighty acts of God in redeeming mankind through the death and resurrection of Christ, but the kinds of moral action that are appropriate to the good news are specified in prescriptive terms." This "prescriptive understanding of moral obligation is essential to the experience of repentance upon which the gospel depends for its promise of grace."<sup>72</sup> It is not the New Perspective, in that adherence to the "law" keeps one in the covenant; rather, pursuit of holiness is expected of Christians, and missing the mark moves us quickly and directly to repentance and forgiveness. Prescriptions, or commands, work together with deliberation for justice. These scriptural commands most often are within a covenant context, or particular revelations to individuals. In one sense, this means that these commands do not apply to us. Yet the covenantal context of biblical law

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<sup>69</sup> Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 46.

<sup>70</sup> Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 7–8.

<sup>71</sup> McConville, "Biblical Law and Human Formation," 631.

<sup>72</sup> McConville, "Biblical Law and Human Formation," 637.

does not set it in opposition to a natural conception of law. Rather, for the Gentile, the natural law itself establishes a covenant between God and man (Romans 2).

Thus Scripture teaches us to reason morally using the natural law, not a structure of biblical laws.<sup>73</sup> Scripture and the natural law are complementary authorities for moral action. The application of contextually promulgated law must always be discerned in view of justice and mercy. In the end, true and faithful execution of the law requires the view of love for neighbor rather than opposition to him.<sup>74</sup>

We see this modeled already in Luther's own explanations of the Ten Commandments. The explanations are not just of the natural law—that is, not just what society needs to survive—but they go beyond this to include positive and constructive actions to benefit the neighbor, something extra that is informed by fear of the Lord and the Holy Spirit. A Christian is strengthened to do these things because of the grace of Christ, which ensures that he will lack nothing. This is the instruction of the “law of Christ” (Gal 6:2).<sup>75</sup> Yet this also indicates that biblical law is normative only when it agrees with the natural law; it is binding only for its circumstances.<sup>76</sup> The wisdom revealed in the law, however, informs our judgments in other, similar circumstances in our own experiences.

The natural law also needs to be understood as Christian law, in the sense that Christ is both the perfect man and the perfecter of men. We are to grow into his fullness. The natural law, finally, is not complete only in what fallen reason discerns, but when we “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Eph 4:15–16). The true image of God—that image in which man was originally created, and to which he is restored—is the Son (Col 1:15–17). All things were created by and for Christ. As Christ is the perfection of the human nature, he is not anomalous to a “natural” purpose for man, but the prototype of it (John 1; Eph 1; 1 Cor 8:6).<sup>77</sup> Thus the Bible informs us of God's nature and his relations to the world. Faith and life are grounded in the hope of Christ, so that his destiny becomes paradigmatic for ours, and his life a kind of example.<sup>78</sup> The restoration of moral reasoning is not complete in goals or principles, but in the

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<sup>73</sup> Gary M. Simpson, “‘Written on Their Hearts’: Thinking with Luther about Scripture, Natural Law, and the Moral Life,” *Word & World* 30, no. 4 (2010): 420.

<sup>74</sup> McConville, “Biblical Law and Human Formation,” 632–633.

<sup>75</sup> Gilbert Meilaender, “The Decalogue as the Law of Christ,” *Pro Ecclesia* 27, no. 3 (2018): 346.

<sup>76</sup> Simpson, “‘Written on Their Hearts,’” 424.

<sup>77</sup> Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics*, 103.

<sup>78</sup> Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics*, 99.

perfection of human life in the perfect man, Jesus, who perfects our understanding and our life in himself.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> John Macquarrie, "Rethinking Natural Law," in *Natural Law and Theology*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, Readings in Moral Theology 7 (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 227.

## Anthropology: A Brief Discourse

David P. Scaer

The most important evidential doctrine for Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus. Without this, everything we confess in the Creed evaporates into non-sustainable speculation. Equally important is that Christ's resurrection is the certainty of our own, a theme that has to be emphasized in our preaching, especially at funerals. That being said, mourners, Christian or not, will ask the question of where the deceased are right after death, and their anxiety is not simply relieved by saying we should focus on the resurrection. Simply by pointing to the resurrection, pastors are not relieved of providing an answer of where the dead are now, especially since the Scriptures address this issue in several places.

Providing two different answers to the condition of the soul between death and the resurrection are two different schools of thought. Dualism follows traditional Christian thinking that after the death of the body the soul lives. Monism argues that in death the soul has no conscious awareness and awakes at the resurrection without an awareness of time having passed. Some non-Christians may hold that the soul is no more than an extension or function of the brain or intellect and are not bothered about where the soul is at death.<sup>1</sup>

This essay gives a brief overview of what Christians and Lutherans have believed about man, how we originated, and how we are composed now. It does not propose to offer anything strikingly new but only to reinforce long-held beliefs. Dependent on what we believe about the relationship of the body and soul to each other is the question of what happened to Christ at his death. All four gospels and Paul speak about this burial, a fact which is essential to his being raised from the dead. But what about his soul? Separation of the soul from the body is a result of sin. In his death, Christ continues in the state of humiliation awaiting his resurrection in which, like us, body and soul will be reunited into a perfection beyond what Adam knew in Eden.

We reject John Calvin's view that in going to hell Christ continued to suffer further punishment for our sins; rather, he rested in the glory of paradise. Some

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<sup>1</sup> A fuller discussion of these differences with a defense of the biblical view of an intermediate time period in which the soul lives with Christ is provided by John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989).

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readers may remember that a similar controversy over the state of the soul after death broke out at the St. Louis seminary in the late 1950s and into the 1960s, when a professor of historical theology misunderstood Oscar Cullmann's *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?*<sup>2</sup> to argue that the soul did not exist after death. For all of the differences between Plato and the New Testament on the resurrection of the body, there is, as Cullmann held, an approximation of the two beliefs that the soul continues to live on after death in what he calls "another time-consciousness."<sup>3</sup>

### I. Introduction

In Christian dogmatics, the section or locus on the doctrine of man is called anthropology, a word derived from the Greek words *ἄνθρωπος* and *λόγος*, literally the study of man. Anthropology is not merely the study of individuals or peoples, but man as a collective unity. This unity focuses first on the historical Adam, in whom the entire humanity was created and from whom it has its decent. Through him, it fell into sin and under God's condemnation. Now this unity finds its focus in Jesus Christ, who replaces the first Adam as the one in whom the human race is reconstituted. The collective sense of the singular nouns "mankind" and "humankind" has theological significance. These two nouns embrace all who will ever have lived, but not in collecting them as separate individuals, but as their being derived from and included in the one man, Adam. This collective sense of mankind is foundational for the biblical doctrines of universality of sin, redemption, and justification (Rom 5:12–21).

Christian anthropology looks forward to what mankind will become in Jesus Christ, just as it looks backward to what it was in Adam. Just as in Adam no distinction is made in regard to the common possession of sin, so in Christ there is no distinction in regard to the common possession of salvation. Christian theology does not discourage non-theological secular anthropologies and does not discredit the distinctions of their findings. Mankind is a unity vis-à-vis God, sin, and redemption, but people differ from one another in many respects. Such distinctions have validity only within the realm of human experience, and the theories based on these distinctions are not final. As they are not given by revelation, their conclusions do not and cannot inform Christian anthropology; they may, however, corroborate biblical concepts and be useful in themselves.

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<sup>2</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), 56–57.

<sup>3</sup> Cullman, *Immortality of the Soul*, 57.

In a scientific or scholarly sense, the term “anthropology” is reserved for the study of mankind’s origin, development, races, customs, and beliefs. This anthropology is not the only science devoted to the study of man. History traces the political and military rise and fall of individual men, peoples, nations, and races. Biology classifies him according to his physical components in relation to animals. Medicine is the study and cure of bodily diseases. Sociology is the study of the nature, origin, and development of human society and community life. Psychology explains man’s actions by studying his inner personal being as he is in himself. Psychiatry is the study and cure of mental diseases. Even the study of literature is basically anthropological, because in writing human beings project themselves and reflect on what and who they are. The whole science and practice of education in conveying knowledge operates with particular theories of learning and mankind. All human sciences have anthropological implications, because they are in some sense the study of man. These different approaches to man contribute to the sphere of man’s knowledge and improving his lot, even though they may not operate within biblical categories. Christians may make appropriate use of these disciplines, but only insofar as the biblical anthropology is not denied or contradicted.

Man should be studied not only as he is in himself, in regard to his world and environment, but more important in regard to the God who created him and with whom he was destined to live. By loving God and the neighbor, man begins to experience his original state and finds the real reason for his existence. Without this dimension, man is less than what God intended him to be. This relationship comes about by believing that in Jesus God has established out of the fallen human race a redeemed and restored community. While the secular anthropologies proceed with no definition of God or religion, except as they might be fixtures of culture, theological anthropology must define man in relationship to God.

Anthropology stands in antipodal relationship to the doctrine of God, that is, theology in the narrow sense, which together make up the two poles of theological discussion. The term “theology” properly suggests that the study of God is theology’s first and perhaps only goal; however, it is man who does theology to explain his relationship to God and to the world. Man is included in the definition of theology, because if God is the revealer, man is the intended and only recipient of revelation. Theology is *anthropological*, in the sense that theology is how man understands who God is and what he has done.

Theology is never the study of God in the abstract, but of God as he is the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of mankind. Anthropology is also the presupposition for other loci in dogmatics. The doctrine of sin as an inheritance from Adam and as part of the human existence depends upon a prior understanding

of man's origin and nature. Our anthropology shapes our Christology. In his conception by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, the Son of God became a human being. A malformed doctrine of man leads to a false understanding of Christ's person or work. Such questions concerning the justification of the sinner before God, his renewal in sanctification, the life after death, the accountability before God in a judgment, and the final resurrection are all interrelated to and dependent on anthropology.

Man by nature lives his life autonomously, as if he were dependent only on himself and his environment. In spite of this inclination to live without God, man has a built-in need for him and a penchant for creating religion. Christian anthropology must fill the vacuum present in every man by virtue of his being created by God and by his own reality that this God is no longer part of his existence.

## II. The Old Testament Foundation for Anthropology

The remainder of the Old Testament is a commentary on Genesis 1–3. Fundamental anthropological principles set forth there come to reality in the rest of the biblical account. It is the history of man's plight in sin and his belief in the God who promises to extricate him from it. This belief is inextricably connected with faith in the promise of a Redeemer who will be also a man, but unlike the first man will be able not only to resist but to overcome the temptation of the serpent and thus relieve all mankind from the curse and restore it to its original condition in possession of the image of God (Gen 3:15).

From this connection between anthropology and the promise of redemption stems Israel's hope in the Messiah, and with it the New Testament understanding of Jesus as that Messiah (Christ). The Messiah will be the ideal man originally intended by God and in whom God will reconstitute mankind. The events of Genesis 4—with the birth of Cain and his murder of his brother, Abel—are important for anthropology as these represent the characteristic Old Testament dilemma of man's hope for his redemption and the reality that he remains estranged from God by sin, a reality that is confirmed to him by death. Eve brings her son Cain into the world with the hope that he will relieve her predicament. Whether Genesis 4:1 is translated "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord,"<sup>4</sup> or Luther's equally viable translation, "I have gotten a man of the Lord,"<sup>5</sup> these words expressed her confidence that God had rescued her from the fall and its consequences.

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<sup>4</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, and 1971 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 1–5* (1536): vol. 1, pp. 241, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols.

Modern commentators still recognize the viability of Luther's understanding that Eve saw her offspring as the Son of God and allow the translation, "I have gained a man, [who is] the Lord."<sup>6</sup> Eve expressed for herself and all future generations the universal desire that sin's curse placed on mankind would be alleviated by divine intervention through a man with a special relation to God. Cain's murder of his brother, Abel, and his subsequent banishment from the community (Gen 4:2-16), which the Genesis author places immediately after Cain's birth, indicate that the promised deliverance would remain in the future. In waiting for the promise's fulfillment, Eve and all mankind would experience not only death, but death by violence. No one is immune. The last chapters of Genesis recount the deaths of Jacob (49:33) and Joseph (50:26). Man in this life will find no relief from the consequences of his rejection of God. The reign of sin and death would not be so pervasive to make it impossible for some in their fallen condition to recognize God and call upon him for deliverance.

The Old Testament is the history of those who still believe in the divine promises of man's restoration by God. This history gives special attention to such figures as Noah, Abraham, Moses, and then to the entire nation of Israel, which collectively by God's choice become his people. After the world's destruction by the flood, Noah and his wife become surrogates for Adam and Eve in God's reestablishing the human race. Abraham and Sarah with the birth of their son, Isaac, play a similar role in God's setting aside their descendants as his favored people. Through Abraham, God is again reestablishing the human race as his own people (Gen 12:3). The Israelites in their election by God, their worship of him, and their commitment to his word become a faint recollection of man in his original state of innocence and a promise of what he someday will become. Man banished from paradise looks forward to a return. Canaan, the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey, is given to Israel as their paradise in which they, like the first parents, are to listen to God and live for him. Moses stands in the line of Noah and Abraham as a type of Adam in establishing Israel as God's people and anticipates Christ, who is the new Adam. Though mortal, Moses is a reminder in his vigor of what man would have been without sin (Deut 34:7).

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31-55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957-86); vols. 56-82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009-), hereafter AE.

See also Luther's German translation of Genesis 4:1, "Ich habe den Mann, den Herrn," Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Deutsche Bibel*, 12 vols. in 15 (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1906-), hereafter abbreviated WA DB. Note, however, that Eve is making a statement of unbelief, not belief. She is asserting her creative abilities alongside of God's as his equal, which is how things all began in Genesis 3.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 101-102.

The historical books (e.g., Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles) trace this tension between the reality of sin and the promise of restoration of God's people as a whole. Though the priestly and royal leaders are representative types of the coming deliverer, the focus is on Israel as a chosen people. These books relate the few successes and many failures of Israel to accept God's promises to be his people. Again and again the promises are rejected, and God punishes the people by establishing two kingdoms, Judah in the south and Israel in the north. Kings are deposed, and foreign nations invade the land. Finally, Israel is taken into Assyrian captivity and then Judah into Babylonian captivity.

The poetic books of Job, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and Psalms reflect the internal turmoil of believers as individuals who are caught in a tension which cannot be resolved by themselves. Promise of future restoration is seemingly contradicted by the reign of ill fortune, sickness, and death. Job—a man who, more than his contemporaries, “was blameless and upright; one who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1)—is plagued with such unspeakable physical and spiritual evils that he succumbs to cursing the day on which he was born (Job 3:1–10). In the end, Job is vindicated, but he represents all people whose vision of a perfected humanity is beyond reality.

Ecclesiastes is the remembrances of a man who even though he has experienced everything offered by the world is brought to the edge of despair so that he toys with the idea that men are no different than animals (Eccl 3:19–21). Ecclesiastes and Job are alike in presenting a view of man in which the divine perspective of his being created in God's image is momentarily lost. For Job, non-existence would have been better than life, and thus God's creation of him is repudiated. At least for a moment, the author of Ecclesiastes considers his life apart from any awareness that God's image in him has made him distinct from the animals. There seems to be no life after death, and both men and animals face the same destiny in the grave. Both authors eventually find God as the ultimate answer to their lives. The cynical despair of the author of Ecclesiastes is finally overcome by belief that though his body returns to the earth, his soul returns to God who gave it (Eccl 12:7). Job has confidence that God will vindicate him in the resurrection (Job 19:25–27).

The value of the negative perspectives in Job and Ecclesiastes for Christian anthropology is that their perspectives present the universal predicament of all men, from which believers are not exempt. With their own resources, they are unaware that, by virtue of the image of God in them, they have a special relationship to him. They reinforce the Genesis account that God's image in man is so severely damaged, he is incapable of recognizing God as life's significant factor. Non-existence is better than existence, and man's origins are as cloudy as his destiny.

In a similar but not identical way, Proverbs addresses man within the limitations of this life. While not having the despair of Job and Ecclesiastes, Proverbs isolates that part of man's life which is directed not to God, but to his conduct in the world and lays down directives for it. The goal of Proverbs is not that in following these directives one will find a solution to the predicament of estrangement from God by redemption and restoration. Rather, one will find guidelines for life which will limit, but not exterminate, its problems and evils. Later, confessional Lutheran anthropology would develop these themes in slightly different ways. The concept of despair set forth in Job and Ecclesiastes is parallel to man's existence under the law, where he has no hope of redemption. The almost humanistic anthropology of Proverbs, with its call to discipline and prudence (Prov 1:3-4), parallels the Lutheran anthropology that man in this world is capable of outward morality with its own rewards, but this does not provide the ultimate answer to man's imprisonment in sin and death.

The Psalms speak of the predicament of man's estrangement from God and hold out the promise of God's redemption of the individual. Thus in Psalm 22, the writer who experiences God's abandonment of him at last finds God's help (v. 24) and is given a place of prominence among all men (vv. 29-31). A messianic psalm, it resembles Job and gives a vivid picture of the Christian in the world who for the moment does not experience God's creative care. Psalm 51 is the picture of a man who is confronted by sin and restored by God. Similarly, Psalm 130 connects man's personal redemption from the predicament of sin with God's restoration of Israel.

As individualistic and personal as the Psalms are in describing the plight of individuals, at the same time they see men as corporately under the reign of sin and death and who receive their corporate deliverance from God. Two psalms allude to the Genesis paradise. Psalm 1 is a picture of the ideal man. God does not speak directly to him, as he did to Adam, but he speaks to him through words of the written revelation which he believes. "His delight is in the law of the LORD [the Pentateuch], and on his law he meditates day and night" (v. 2). By listening to God, he is able to survive the judgment (vv. 4-6), since he is like the tree planted by living waters. The allusion here is to the tree of life in Eden, the paradise of the four ever-flowing rivers, a theme picked up in Revelation 21 and 22. Psalm 8 is a picture of the ideal believer reinstated into Adam's position. God, whose praise is chanted in heaven and whose glories are seen in the celestial bodies, has made man just a little lower than God himself. This man has dominion over the earth and all its creatures.

Psalms 1 and 8 were taken by Luther as references to the Messiah, but this does not detract from their informing anthropology in describing the original man Adam as he was in the original state of innocence and also the perfection of man in the person of Jesus Christ. At the same time, these psalms hold out the promise

of restoration and perfection which will become someday the possession of those who are in Christ. Since man cannot reach by himself the goal of perfection, the Old Testament describes man waiting for the future restoration, but under the reality of his bondage under the curse of Genesis 3.

While the historical books relate the successes and failures of Israel to be God's people and the poetic books reflect on that inner tension in believers, the prophetic books contain God's call to Israel to return to him with the threat of deportation should they fail. In Israel's perpetual failure to live up to God's expectations for them as the redeemed and restored people, God sends them prophets to return them to their allegiance as his people.

The prophets are caught between the glories of their own prophecies and the reality that they are ignored and not believed. Hosea forecasts the destruction of the north. Isaiah and Jeremiah promise not only the exile of Judah but their political restoration after captivity in Babylonia. Daniel and Ezekiel, written from Babylonia, also promise Judah's restoration as God's people. The promise of national survival and restoration is the occasion for these prophets to project the theme of resurrection, which alone can reverse death's threat. Isaiah reflects the Genesis 3 imagery: "But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy" (Isaiah 26:19).<sup>7</sup> Ezekiel attaches Judah's return from Babylon with the promise of a future resurrection (37:12–14). The prophets narrow the focus from Israel as a nation to a remnant who ultimately is the promised deliverer. They also expand the promises made to include other peoples (Isa 60:1–7).

The full restoration that is promised is accomplished only when the Messiah comes, who lives up to God's expectations for the first Adam and Israel. The identification of Jesus as the new man and the new Adam is made by Paul (1 Cor 15:45) and is the message of the New Testament. In this sense, Christology informs Christian anthropology, since the person of Jesus is the picture of God's intentions for Adam and what now he intends for all men.

### **III. The New Testament Foundation for Anthropology**

The New Testament revelation is that God's ideal man has come in his Son, Jesus Christ, who now restores mankind to its original position of fellowship with God. Such Old Testament themes as God's creation of all men in the persons of Adam and Eve and their participation and condemnation in Adam's fall (1 Tim 2:13–14) are repeated. Man's life with God after death and resurrection from the dead is heightened.

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<sup>7</sup> Translation my own.

The Old Testament spoke of personal survival after death as being gathered to one's fathers. Its anthropology centered rather on God's reconstituting the human race in Israel with the promise of the Messiah as the ideal man. In a similar sense, the New Testament sees man not as he is in himself, but as he stands in relation to God and his new creation of mankind in Jesus Christ. The one who recognizes Jesus as the one in whom God is restoring mankind shares in that restoration, but the one who fails in this is confirmed in his own and Adam's sin (John 11:24–26).

The New Testament presupposes the Genesis 1–3 accounts of man's creation and fall for its anthropology. All peoples, in spite of their ethnic diversities, have their origin in one person (Acts 17:26), an obvious allusion to the common descent from Adam. He is the common father, and every human being through descent from him shares in the possession of his sinful nature and its guilt. This common participation in Adam's sin is the presupposition of God's justification of all men in the person of Jesus Christ (Rom 5:12, 15). In Christ, the sin of Adam is reversed, and from God's perspective its effect is universal. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:22). Mankind thus is not only interrelated biologically, but shares in a common condemnation by being participants in Adam's sin: "In him [Adam] they were sinning" (see Rom 5:12).<sup>8</sup> For their participation in his sin and for their own, they are condemned to death.

Whereas in Romans 5:15–16 Jesus Christ is put in the place of Adam as the man who brings justification to all men, a specific identification of Jesus *as* Adam is made in 1 Corinthians 15:45: "Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit." In both Romans and 1 Corinthians, Paul pictures a new creation of mankind in Jesus Christ, who, like the first Adam, stands at the head of the new humanity. Unlike the first Adam, who brought condemnation and death, Christ brings justification, life, and the resurrection. The old humanity is not annihilated and replaced, but renewed and restored by Christ's coming. Whereas Israel in the Old Testament was the focus of God's restored humanity, the church as it is in Christ occupies this position in the New Testament. The church is God's new humanity reconstructed in Christ. As Adam was the source of the old humanity, Christ is the source of the new. Adam had a spiritual side to his existence. Christ, on the other hand, has a life which gives spiritual existence to others (1 Cor 15:45–46). This restoration is completed at the resurrection of the dead, when the perishable becomes imperishable and the mortal becomes immortal (1 Cor 15:51–54).

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<sup>8</sup> Translation my own. This concept is simply not brought out in most English translations, which often render it "because all sinned."

The concept of man made in God's image, which sets him apart in Genesis from the animals, becomes a theme in Paul's description of Christ's relationship to God and then that of all Christians. Colossians 1:15 speaks of Christ as "the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation," in, through, and for whom all things were created. The first Adam is made *in* the image of God. Christ, the second Adam, *is* the image of God. Christ is assigned creative powers which never belonged to Adam. He takes Adam's place as the firstborn of all creation, the one for whom all things were created. Christ, like Adam, is the co-creator as the viceroy for God over the creation, but because of participation in God he is also the Creator. He is man raised to his highest potential.

Paul's description of the resurrected body has a more detailed discussion of God's image in man (1 Cor 15:42–50). The image of the man from heaven (i.e., Jesus Christ) is superimposed over the image of the man of dust, a reference to God's image in Adam, who was made from the ground. The ones with the new image share in the resurrection of Christ, who is the last or the second Adam, just as those who have the image through Adam share in his death.

While Christians share in the restoration of the image of God through Christ by faith, an image which is now being renewed and which will reach its perfection in the resurrection, all men still in some sense possess God's image. No human being is completely devoid of any divine resemblance. Cursing any man is an affront to God, because all men are made in God's image (Jas 3:9; see also Gen 9:6). Every person, even the one who has not recognized who Jesus is, has not lost his value to God as his creature who can still respond to the invitation to believe. Precisely because all men have the image of God, they are able to respond to God's law, as even Adam did after the fall. The preaching of the law by John the Baptist to prepare for Christ's coming presupposes that man is a sinner and is able to understand himself as such.

The Baptist's designation of his hearers as a "brood of vipers" (Matt 3:7) alludes to the Genesis account where man succumbs to the temptation of the serpent (3:1–7). Those who do not, out of sincerity, heed the call to repent are like their first parents listening to the voice of Satan (John 8:44). The picture of man apart from what he can and will become in Christ, the one given by Paul in Romans and 1 Corinthians, shows him as under Satan's control and destined only to sin against God and his fellow human beings. Man's heart is the source of all sin: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander" (Matt 15:19). The Jews sin against Jesus because they are of their father, the devil. Man by himself and without God is called flesh and blood, and in this condition he can never find God (Matt 16:17) or inherit his kingdom (1 Cor

15:50). When he finds God, he can still, because of this residual weakness, deny the God who rescued him (Matt 26:33–35).

In addition, man is susceptible to the allurements of the world and the direct involvement of Satan in his life. With God's help, man is capable of persevering and of overcoming the evil residue from the first Adam remaining in him. The parable of the sower describes man in sin and his inability to respond to God's activity through Christ (Matt 13:18–23). To the one who perseveres is given the crown of life, which involves the resurrection with God's image being fully restored (Rev 2:9–11). Christians as God's new humanity are made after the man of heaven. 2 Peter 1:4 adds a unique dimension in speaking not of a restoration of what was lost in the fall, but of the Christians' participation in the divine nature itself: "that through these [his great and precious promises] you may, . . . become partakers of the divine nature." Through the incarnation of God, God's participation in humanity, mankind in turn becomes a participant in the Deity. Thus the man in Christ is given not only more than Adam lost and the higher honor, which would have been his had he not sinned, but he is also made, in some sense, to share in the glories intended only for God's own experience. Humanity has been enhanced by God becoming flesh (John 1:14) so that it is raised to share in what was originally intended only for God (Eph 2:6). Humanity is exalted in Christ.

If man can share in the restoration of the new humanity in Christ, he continues sharing in the fallen heritage of Adam. Though the Christian, as he is a new image in Christ, has the assurance of final victory over Satan, sin, and death, he continues to be part of the realities of this life. Thus the disciples are susceptible to denying Jesus (Mark 14:30). Paul understands himself as the chief of sinners, a wretched man who is more plagued with his sin than impressed by his selection as an apostle by Christ (1 Tim 1:15–16). In assuming the restored image in Christ, the Christian does not totally rid himself of the corrupted image inherited from Adam. He participates in the physical life, which is concerned with this world and is still destined to death. At the same time, he participates in the spiritual life to be restored in the resurrection (1 Cor 15:42–50). Only death will resolve this internal conflict by the destruction of the corrupted image of Adam, and only the resurrection restores man to the position for which God originally intended him. Until then, he not only cannot rid himself of the threat, but he may at times be overcome by it.

The New Testament affirms Genesis 1–3 in seeing Adam as God's first creation, as the head of the primitive human community, and thus as responsible for sin's predicament. Though Eve is listed as the one who sinned first and not Adam, there is no suggestion that her failure is the cause of the world's sin (1 Tim 2:13–14). In recognizing Jesus as the man in which God establishes his church as new humanity, the New Testament focuses the image of God as it appeared first in Adam

on Christ. The relationship between the male and the female set down in the creation is not annulled, but confirmed. Such images as Christ as the new Adam and as the church's bridegroom (Matt 25:1-13; Eph 5:21-33) are based upon the prior understanding that man is created as male and female. Christ's relationship to the church is patterned after Adam's relationship to Eve as the one who gave his life and protects her. The lives of husbands and wives in the church as God's new humanity are in turn patterned after Christ's love for his church (Eph 5:28-30). The lives of husband and wife are not patterned directly after the primordial pair, but after Christ and the church.

Through Christ and the church, the original relationship between the first man and his wife is reflected in Christian marriage. The antagonism created between Adam and Eve by sin is overcome by those who are included by God in the church as the new humanity. Both male and female in Christ assume not only a posture of belief in relation to God whose voice they now hear, but their original and thus proper relationship to each other is restored. This model established in the creation (Genesis 2) and aggravated by the fall into sin (Genesis 3) not only is reinstated for husbands and wives in the church, but also lays the foundation for Paul's argument that only men and not women may assume the pastoral office (1 Tim 2:11-14). The questions of man's being created in the image of God as male and female and of who may serve as pastors are for Paul interrelated.

The New Testament is more specific than the Old Testament in addressing such questions as the condition and the survival of the soul after death and the resurrection of the body. These questions are interrelated to the one of man as consisting of body and soul. While it is true that the Old Testament sees man more as he is part of the community of Israel rather than as an individual, the concept of the individual believer as he contemplates his fate under sin and death is not missing there. As shown, Job, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes have the individual as their focus, who meditates on his creation, his place in the universe, and his fate and survival after death. In turn, the New Testament interest is in the individual; however, his fate is not seen individually, but as he is part of the church as God's redeemed people.

The church becomes the redeemed humanity in Christ, replacing the humanity which is fallen in Adam and, more important, continuing the promises associated with Israel, beginning with Abraham (Matt 3:9; Gal 3:5-9). The Old Testament speaks of death as sleeping with the fathers. David says that he will join his dead infant son in death (2 Sam 12:23). Christ raises these realities to a higher dimension. Paul, like the Old Testament, can speak of death as sleeping, but he sees this sleeping as a communion with Christ (1 Thess 4:14). At death, Jesus promises the thief a place with him in paradise, and he commends his own spirit to his Father (Luke 23:43,

46). Under the altar of God are kept those souls slain for the word of God (Rev 6:9). Paul in confronting death speaks of departing and being with Christ, which is for him a far better thing (Phil 1:23). Though the details of the afterlife are not spelled out to satisfy curiosity, the New Testament is clear in stating that after death man's spirit or soul lives on. Believers are said to be in paradise, in Abraham's bosom, under the altar of God, and most significantly, with Christ.

Paul speaks of the body as the earthly tent which must be taken off for the heavenly one (2 Cor 5:1-4). The concept of the spirit, or soul, after death focuses on the creation of man as body and soul; together, they constitute his nature. Ecclesiastes 12:7 says, "The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." This provides a commentary on Genesis 2 and 3, that in death man's body and soul return to their origins. This anticipates the same view of man as body and soul found throughout the New Testament. Christ's body is buried, but his soul is with God. Similarly, Stephen commends his soul to Jesus, and the faithful take his body for burial (Acts 7:59-60; 8:2). The spirit of Jairus's daughter returned to her when Jesus raised her from the dead (Luke 8:55). In both cases, the dead are said to be sleeping (Luke 8:52; Acts 7:60), a term used also by Paul to describe the intermediate state (1 Thess 4:14). The dead are described as resting (Rev 6:11). These expressions, sleeping and resting, approximate the Old Testament phrase "being gathered to the fathers." These phrases do not suggest annihilation, but an intermediate state, then raised to a higher one by the resurrection.

In the New Testament, the words "soul" ( $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ ) and "spirit" ( $\pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$ ) are used interchangeably for man's personal life which determines the character of his life on earth and which survives death. Both survive death and can refer to man *without* his body. Each word has a specific use, though both refer to the non-corporeal part of man. As man concentrates on himself in this world, the word "soul" is used. Jesus' soul is troubled to the point of death (Matt 26:38). As the saints under God's throne are concerned about their suffering brothers still on earth, they are called souls (Rev 6:9-11). As man contemplates God, he is called a "spirit." Both Jesus and Stephen give their spirits up in death to God.

In the Book of Hebrews, God is called the "Father of spirits" because he is surrounded by the cloud of believing witnesses who have overcome death (12:9). The unbelieving population at Noah's time, waiting for the final condemnation, are called spirits and not souls as they listen to Christ's proclamation of his resurrection victory (1 Pet 3:19-20). The soul, which may be used to refer to man apart from this bodily existence, may be used to refer to him as he is *both* body and spirit. Thus Noah's family, saved from the flood by the ark, are called souls. Another term for this incorporeal part of man is "heart," but it is not used as the part of man which survives, but rather as the source of sin within man (Matt 15:18) which must be

converted (Matt 22:37). Loving God with heart, soul, and mind involve not three different parts of the man's incorporeal or spiritual side, but one's entire self. The corporeal part, which disintegrates at death and is resurrected, is called body, flesh, dust, bones, and tent. Body and soul comprise one human being, but are distinguished from each other and subject to the judgment: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28).

The New Testament Greek words for soul and spirit can be used in their adjectival forms to refer to kinds of people. Used in this sense, they refer not to man's constitutional nature as body and soul. The man who is concerned with the things of this life is so dominated by the "soul" [ $\psi\upsilon\chi\acute{\eta}$ ] functions of his incorporeal nature that he is called a  $\psi\upsilon\chi\iota\kappa\acute{o}\varsigma$  person. Difficult to translate, most versions simply use "fleshly." The "spiritual" man is the one who thinks about the things of God. The same terminology is used in describing the body, which is buried and raised in the resurrection (1 Cor 15:44). The NIV's "natural" and "spiritual" body presents the same problems as does the RSV's "physical" and "spiritual" body. These words describe man's disposition as believer and unbeliever and do not address specifically how he, as a man, is composed of body and soul (spirit). Whether a man is spiritual (dominated by the Holy Spirit) or fleshly or natural (dominated by the sinful desires of his soul), every man consists of both a body and a soul (spirit). While the New Testament teaches the soul's survival after death, it does not look upon this as man's ideal and final form. For Paul, the life after death is superior to life in this world, but man does not reach his full perfection until the resurrection, when God's image is restored in man.

#### **IV. Anthropology: The Confessional Witness**

##### **The Ecumenical Creeds**

The three ecumenical creeds with their emphasis on Christ, especially with their definition of his relationship to the Father, do not specifically address man's origin and nature. No distinction was made between the God who created the heavens and the earth and the God whose Son took on flesh in Jesus Christ to redeem the world. Marcion and the Gnostics made this distinction in dividing the Old Testament from the New by seeing the processes of creation and redemption as flowing not from different motives within God, but different gods. The God whom the Christians saw as their Redeemer was the same God who had created the earth, and in this creation they were included. The confession that he was the "almighty, maker of heaven and earth" contained the awareness that not only believers, but all men, owed their existence to him.

The Nicene Creed sets forth an embryonic anthropology in seeing man and his need for salvation as the reason for the Son of God's incarnation and death: "who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven," who for us, too, was crucified under Pontius Pilate. Though the question of man's need for God's salvation is implicit, the church which confesses the Nicene Creed presupposes man's depravity. Man's relationship to God would be more carefully defined in the sixteenth-century Lutheran Confessions. This would be their unique contribution, not developed by the early creeds with their concentration on God.

Man's constitutional nature as a body and soul, an issue over which there is more controversy in modern times, is affirmed briefly in the Athanasian Creed. Here the union of God and man in Christ is compared to the soul and body comprising one man or person. "For just as the reasonable soul and flesh are one man, so God and man are one Christ" (Athanasian Creed 35).<sup>9</sup> Without a specific locus on anthropology, the creeds presuppose a specific view of man in the doctrine of the Son of God's incarnation. Since mankind needs Christ's incarnation and atonement, it is implicit that human nature is sinful and incapable of its own redemption and restoration. Man is seen as dichotomous, consisting of body and soul (spirit) and not trichotomous, consisting of body, soul, and spirit. Christ's humanity and divinity are parallel to the body and soul in a human being. In his humanity, Christ is described as a "perfect man, with reasonable soul and human flesh" (Athanasian Creed 30).

The Nicene Creed affirms that the Son of God "became man" (Latin: *homo factus est*), but it does not delineate his human nature as body and soul, though this must be presupposed. The *homo factus*, becoming man, means that he participated in everything belonging to the human nature, but always with the understanding that he was without sin. All three creeds speak of the resurrection of the body. While the creeds do not dichotomously juxtapose the body to the soul, the ancient church understood man as body and soul.

If the positive Lutheran contribution to dogmatic theology was soteriology in its articulation of the doctrine of justification by faith, the converse was a radically negative understanding of man in the condition of original sin. Unless man was pictured as completely helpless, the doctrine of God's justification of the sinner purely out of his grace would be compromised. The Lutheran Confessions are not interested in an anthropology detached from the doctrine of God, but rather addresses the doctrine of man in his present sinful relationship first with God and second with other men and the rest of the creation. This does not mean that the

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<sup>9</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all references to the Lutheran Confessions are from Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).

Confessions are uninterested in defining man as he was originally created as sinless. Their definition of original sin and the issue of whether human nature was in itself sinful required that they provide a definition of man in the sinless perfection from which he fell and to which he would be restored by Christ's redemption.

### **Augsburg Confession and the Apology**

Without even touching the issue of man's creation by God or his constitution as consisting of body and soul, the Augsburg Confession affirms that all men are born in sin (AC II 1). This inborn sin is simply not the lack of faith or a proper fear of God, the medieval view classically formulated by Thomas Aquinas, but an active disposition to do evil, called concupiscence, present at conception. Thus each person comes to the world already condemned for his sin—and without God's saving activity through the Spirit and Baptism, he would be destined for eternal damnation. The Augsburg Confession identifies the Pelagians as falsely holding that man is born morally neutral and thus able to perform certain good works. "Rejected in this connection are the Pelagians and others who deny original sin is sin, for they hold that natural man is made righteous by his own powers, thus disparaging the sufferings and merit of Christ" (AC II 3 [German]). The Latin rendering sees man's fallen condition vis-à-vis the doctrine of justification. Here the Pelagians are condemned for "contending that man can be *justified* before God by his own strength or reason" (AC II 3 [Latin]).<sup>10</sup>

The scholastic theology of the Roman Catholic opponents was not a repristination of historical Pelagianism. For the Scholastics, man was not born morally neutral as Pelagius held. They however did not deny to the unconverted the ability to perform certain meritorious works. Original sin is an inclination to evil, but by itself did not bring condemnation (Ap II 3). The Formula of Concord would explicitly call the Roman Catholics "Semi-Pelagians" for their view "that man by virtue of his own powers could make a beginning of conversion, but could not complete it without the grace of the Holy Spirit" (FC Ep II 10). In contrast to the Roman position, the Lutheran understanding of man's total depravity was necessary for man's justification by God alone without any human contribution (AC IV).

The Roman Catholics in the Confutation took exception to the Augsburg Confession's assertion that the lack of faith was original guilt or sin. This response allowed Melancthon in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession to be even more forthright in setting forth Luther's doctrine that human beings are born not in a condition of moral neutrality, but in one of positive, active hatred of God. The Apology responded to the Pontifical Confutation's argument that the Lutherans had

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<sup>10</sup> Emphasis my own.

with this definition confused actual and original sin (II 1). Original sin exists not in the body, as the Roman Catholics held (Ap II 7), but in man's soul or inner being as an active force for evil. Following Augustine's definition of concupiscence, the term used in AC II (Latin) to describe man in the state of sin, the Apology says that it "is not merely a corruption of the physical constitution, but the evil inclination of man's higher capacities to carnal things" (Ap II 25).

This corresponds to Paul's "fleshly man," the one whose soul is preoccupied with worldly things. Man is described as "ignoring God, despising him, lacking fear and trust in him, hating his judgment and fleeing it, being angry with him, despairing of his grace, trusting in temporal things" (Ap II 8). Not only did he lose his "balanced physical constitution," but original sin has brought "such faults as ignorance of God, contempt of God, lack of the fear of God and of trust in him, inability to love him" (Ap II 14). Since the Apology defined man in such negative terms, it had to make brief reference to man's original righteous condition of man as one involving "perfect health and, in all respects, pure blood, unimpaired powers of the body."<sup>11</sup> The strong negative Lutheran judgment of man's abilities in relation to God did not produce a similar verdict on his abilities to participate in the ordinary affairs of this world. Luther's influential *The Bondage of the Will* with its devastating criticism of man's ability to do any good, and which found its opposing correspondent in Erasmus's *The Freedom of the Will*, did not prevent the Augsburg Confession and the Apology in attributing to man a free will in the things of this world. "Our churches teach that man's will has some liberty for the attainment of civil righteousness and for the choice of things subject to reason" (AC XVIII 1 [Latin]). This is followed up by the disclaimer that man's will and reason are unable "to accomplish anything in those things which pertain to God" (AC XVIII 4).

Thus neither the Augsburg Confession nor the Apology are fatalistic about man's life in this world, as if he were entirely without any choices. Quite to the contrary! The decisions about working, eating, drinking, visiting, building, marrying, activities which are common to all, are determined by the free will and not by God.<sup>12</sup> This does not mean that the Confessions at this point do not see God's providence involved in the ordinary lives of all men, as God is confessed as "creator and preserver of all things visible and invisible" (AC I 3–4 [German]). Man's free will in matters pertaining to this world does not suggest that God is no longer Lord of creation and that man is given free reign. Freedom in secular matters is limited

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions 1529–1537*, trans. Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House 1972), 129–133.

<sup>12</sup> Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 1:24–25.

by God's ultimate intentions for the world. The use of man's free will in secular matters pertains to man as he is a sinner and not as he is a Christian.

Thus non-Christians may make laws and govern themselves and thus attain a civil righteousness, but not a righteousness for salvation. This distinction made in man—that he is helpless before God, dependent on his righteousness, and still free in the things of this world—cannot be understood in dualistic terms, so that the Christian in effect becomes two persons. He is not divided into two separate creatures: one whose will in matters of faith and religion is controlled by the outside forces of Satan and God and other whose will in earthly matters is completely his own. The one justified by grace through faith reflects his new nature in the good that he does to others in both secular and religious matters (AC XX).

The Augsburg Confession and the Apology see the Christian with two dimensions to his life. His relationships to God and to other men are nevertheless distinct from each other. This distinction in relationships allows Christians, in spite of the acknowledgment of their own moral inadequacy, the ability “to render decisions and pass sentence according to imperial and other existing laws” (AC XVI 2 [German]) and to accept the decisions of non-Christians, who otherwise have little or no awareness of moral deficiency in matters pertaining to salvation. The one person who struggles with God over his own sinfulness and accepts Christ's righteousness is able to participate in society as a fully contributing member. Even the man who has no saving knowledge of God can with the use of his reason have an external knowledge of God and exercise his free will in making moral decisions, but in his knowledge of the true God and his ability to perform those things acceptable to God, he remains helpless.

Luther's two kingdom doctrine is related to the confessional anthropology of man's helplessness before God in regard to righteousness and his ability to exercise his free will in the things of this world. In the kingdom of the right hand, God deals with the proclamation of salvation. Here man understands himself as a sinner who receives God's grace in Christ apart from any merit or his reason. In the kingdom of the left hand, God also acts, but his intentions are hidden not only from the unbeliever but from the believer. Within the kingdom of the left hand, man exercises his free will as a participant in society making decisions pertaining to this world. The Lutherans saw the confusion of these two spheres at the root of the Roman Catholic misunderstanding that man could contribute to his salvation. Salvation as an act of God alone without human participation necessarily implied and required a virtually complete different anthropology from Roman Catholicism, which saw cooperation between the divine and human as both necessary and possible.

## The Small and Large Catechisms

Luther's explanation of the Apostles' Creed in the Small Catechism implies a definite anthropology. The Reformer in his doctrine on God goes from the ancient church's understanding of him as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to the God who is the Christian's personal Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier: "God has created me"; "[Christ] has redeemed me"; and "the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel" (SC II 1, 4, 6). Luther makes the deduction that the first object of God's creative activity is the believer himself. He acknowledges that God is first *his own personal* maker and then that he is the maker of heaven and earth. The second article is even more radically personal, as the Christian sees himself alone as the object of Christ's saving activity. This is true, but less pronounced in the third article. The Christian stands in the spotlight of the Spirit's sanctifying activity, which embraces the entire Christian church. Man is seen on a continuum from his creation by God, through his redemption by Jesus, and finally to his conversion by the Spirit. His existence is derived from the God whom he knows as Father, Son, and Spirit.

Even a slightly detailed analysis of Luther's explanations reveals his fuller understanding of man. Man consists of a body and a soul, and this body will be raised up by the Spirit on the last day. All that man is and possesses as body and soul come from God. Rather than emphasizing free will in earthly matters as the Augsburg Confession and the Apology do, Luther in the Small Catechism stresses man's total dependency on God, from whom he receives all his possessions as gifts: "He provides me daily and abundantly with all the necessities of life." Man is never left alone in the world to fend for himself but is protected by God from all evil. For God's creation and preservation of his life, man is duty "bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey him" (SC II 2). The Small Catechism resembles the Augsburg Confession and the Apology in seeing man as standing lost and condemned before God and completely dependent on him for salvation and conversion (SC II 2, 3).

The intimate relationship between God and the individual, prominent in Luther's explanation of the Creed, so that he looks at God as his own, is expanded in his explanation of the Lord's Prayer to include others. Here no longer is the individual believer approaching God's throne, but the entire church comes "as beloved children approach their dear father" (SC III 2). Man who has found God to be his maker, now, through Christ, sees him as a Father within a fellowship embracing all who confess the same God. The Christian no longer sees himself as a solitary creation of God but as part of a community with other Christians. The instruction of the Small Catechism on "How Plain People Are to Be Taught to Confess" (SC V 15) shows Luther's awareness of the abiding force of sin in Christians.

In the Large Catechism, Luther expands on some points. Man is not simply one of God's creatures, but the one creature which God through the rest of the creation serves. "Besides, he makes all creation help provide the comforts and necessities of life—sun, moon, stars in the heavens; day and night" (LC II 14). In spite of his depravity, man remains at the center of God's creating and saving activities. In spite of Luther's insistence that outside of Christ no saving knowledge of God exists, he does not deny all knowledge of God. Those "who are outside the Christian church, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites, even though they believe in and worship only the one, true God, nevertheless do not know what his attitude toward them is" (LC II 66).

### **The Smalcald Articles**

Rather than giving any positive description of man, the Smalcald Articles reaffirm the Augsburg Confession and the Apology in denying man a free will in doing good and refraining from evil. By himself, man is incapable of keeping the Ten Commandments.

### **The Formula of Concord**

The doctrine of man in the earlier Lutheran Confessions was partially shaped by Luther's controversy with Erasmus, a Renaissance humanist who emphasized the freedom of man's will. Another factor was the medieval Scholastic view that man could by his own power begin to love God. For both Erasmus and the Scholastics, man was not totally depraved and could make a contribution to his own salvation. Erasmus's views, opposed as they were to Luther's, found adherents among Luther's followers after his death. Formula of Concord I and II addressed a misunderstanding of Luther's views and the introduction of humanistic views into Lutheran anthropology.

Original sin had been the topic of Augsburg Confession II and Apology II. It was the first issue of dispute between the Roman Catholics and Lutherans, since the first article on God affirmed only what both parties already accepted as true. They were divided on the issues of anthropology and sin. The anthropological controversy was not without its implications for the doctrine of God, as the article on justification demonstrated differing views there, irrespective of his triune essence. Any suggestion that man could contribute to his salvation, the Roman position, implied that God was not the only cause of man's salvation, a position intolerable to the Lutherans. Thus the Confessions saw that their anthropology was related to their understanding of God.

A certain Matthias Flacius Illyricus, who was recognized as a staunch defender of the Lutheran faith and a scholar in his own right, had in his zealotry to maintain the sinful character of man held that the human nature was itself sinful. Whether Flacius intended such a radical verdict in virtually equating the human nature with sin is debatable, but if his position was left unanswered it would have produced dangerous consequences for the Lutheran understanding of “the chief articles of our Christian faith namely, creation, redemption, sanctification, and the resurrection of our flesh” (FC Ep I 3). Man could not be so evil that his salvation was impossible.<sup>13</sup> This occasion also provided the authors of the Formula the opportunity to clarify the Lutheran position on the doctrine of man. To the writers of the Formula, it appeared that Flacius had come too close to the Manichaean error, “that original sin is strictly and without any distinction corrupted man’s substance, nature, and essence, so that no distinction should be made even in the mind, between man’s nature itself after the Fall and original sin, and that the two cannot be differentiated in the mind” (FC Ep I 19).

The Formula did not back away from Luther’s understanding of the total corruption of the human nature from conception, so “that even if no evil thought would ever arise in the heart of corrupted man, no idle word were spoken or no wicked act or deed took place, nevertheless man’s nature is corrupted through original sin” (FC Ep I 21).<sup>14</sup> The controversy did allow the Formula of Concord to confirm the Lutheran understanding that the human nature was created good and remained God’s creature after the fall. “Even after the fall our nature is and remains a creature of God” (FC Ep I 2).

Sin did not belong to the essence (Latin: *substantia*) of man, but was an accident (*accidens*). Calling sin an accident, a term borrowed from Aristotelian philosophy, meant that man could be man without sin and still be man. This was the case with man in his creation, after the resurrection, and most surely of Christ, who was a true man and born without original sin and could not sin. Associating the human nature with sin so closely as to identify one with the other would have left only two alternatives, both of which were unacceptable: asserting God’s creation of evil, which the Formula of Concord does not allow (FC Ep I 6), or denying his role as man’s creator. To the latter, the Formula of Concord responds, “God not only created the body and soul of Adam and Eve before the Fall, but also our bodies and souls after the Fall, even though they are corrupted” (FC Ep I 4). Even more strongly, the Solid Declaration states: “Therefore the corrupted man cannot be identified

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<sup>13</sup> Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 29.

<sup>14</sup> Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 29.

unqualifiedly with sin itself, for in that case God would be the creator of sin” (FC SD I 38).

A false anthropology which virtually equates sin and human nature would have grave consequences for Christology and eschatology. Such an equation would have made a real incarnation and resurrection impossible. In taking a human nature, necessarily involving participation in sin, to himself, the Son of God would have been born with sin as other human beings. This position would be intolerable for the Lutherans. The Lutheran argumentation based on Christology that the human nature could exist without sin and still be human shows how intricately their Christology and anthropology were bound to each other. In other places, the Confessions hold that Christ is made sin for us, following St. Paul, but this is God imputing sin to him, not that he was actually born with original sin. This equation would have grave consequences for the doctrine of the resurrection to the point that it would have to be denied. In the resurrection, God destroys sin and does not rehabilitate it, as Flacius’s false teaching would allow (FC Ep I 6). The framers of the Formula of Concord saw in Flacius’s teaching a form of Manichaeism which if taken to its logical conclusions would have denied God as creator of the material world and with it the resurrection.

The positive side of this controversy was the Lutheran opportunity to emphasize that man was originally created good because of his creation by the good God. The fall into sin did not annul this. Christ’s redemptive work flowed from the same good motivation which moved God to create the world. Though man’s existence was permeated thoroughly by sin, this sin was essentially an alien element in his nature, an accident, as the Formula of Concord calls it. The divine redemption was an attempt not only to give man a glory which he had never known before, but also to restore a condition to him which was his by right of his being created by God. Man would be resurrected with a body and without sin. He would not only be no less human, he would be human in the sense intended by God. In reconfirming their belief in the goodness of man’s creation by God in the face of the possibility that their position was being falsely set forth in virtually Manichaean terms by Flacius (FC SD I 26–27), the Lutherans reiterated their position on original sin as total depravity, the issue of division with the Roman Catholics from the beginning of the Reformation.

If, on one hand, the Lutherans had to assert the goodness of the divine creation, they also had to readdress the issue that man had the capability of contributing to his own salvation and conversion. Certain humanistic ideas about man’s lack of complete sinfulness, similar to what had become the official position of the Roman Church, had found a home among the Lutheran theologians through the influence of the Renaissance.

The Renaissance and the Reformation, though contemporary to each other and sharing certain scholars, were fundamentally divided over the place of God and man in the universe. A more optimistic anthropology was introduced by associates of Melanchthon, who was as much a child of the Renaissance as he was the Reformation. In spite of the dangers associated with the overstatement of Flacius in equating man's nature with sin, the Lutherans also held that their doctrine of original sin did not allow for human cooperation.

Though Melanchthon was associated with a type of synergistic position condemned by the Formula of Concord II, the Apology he authored is cited approvingly at length (FC SD II 8–14). Formula of Concord II sets forth the Lutheran anthropology under the title of the "Free Will," and it is directed against the humanistic anthropology introduced by Melanchthon's influence. Man's will is seen from four different perspectives: "(1) before the Fall, (2) after the Fall, (3) after regeneration, and (4) after the resurrection of the flesh" (FC Ep II 1). These divisions are significant. Rather than seeing anthropology in a single dimension, the Formula views it in four differing relationships to God. Man can never be defined apart from this relationship, as the Scholastics had done.<sup>15</sup> In the first state, before the fall, man can resist sin. In the second state, after the fall, he cannot do anything but sin and displease God. The third state was not as important an issue, since the will converted by the Holy Spirit can perform the works God desires. It became an issue to the extent that some held that man's conversion was so complete that he could refrain from sin and live a perfect life. The fourth state, coming after the resurrection, is not problematic, since all would agree that those resurrected in Christ are incapable of sinning. The real problem is whether in the second state, in which man stands helpless before God, he can make a contribution to his conversion.

This article on the free will is a converse of the one on original sin. While the article on original sin (FC I) insists that sin and the human nature cannot be equated, the one on free will (FC II) holds that no prior activity in man can contribute to his conversion. Much of the argumentation of the inability of the free will to prepare itself for conversion was set forth in the articles on original sin in the Augsburg Confession, Apology, and Formula of Concord I. Man's non-resisting will, along with the Spirit and the Word, was a cause of man's salvation, a position attributed rightly or wrongly to Melanchthon. Condemned was the position which held that man's will is "able by its own natural powers to add something (though it be little and feeble) to help, to cooperate, to prepare itself for grace, to dispose itself, to apprehend and accept it, and to believe the Gospel" (FC Ep II 11). Stated in this

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<sup>15</sup> Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 132.

way, the condemned position was similar to the scholastic view which did not see man as totally depraved. The Formula of Concord's position was that the human will is capable of conversion by the word of God and the Holy Spirit, but it cannot be regarded as an instrument in its own conversion (FC Ep II 17–19). Though this article is addressed to the condition of man's will prior to conversion, it also denied to man by himself the ability to keep the law after his conversion (FC Ep II 12). At the same time, the Formula of Concord, citing Luther, could say that man has a free will over the things subject to him.<sup>16</sup>

The condition of man's total depravity and his need for God's grace is a characteristic doctrine of the Lutheran Confessions, as is the one on justification. Though the Confessions do not discuss the doctrine of man isolated from the questions of his sinfulness and need for justification, a number of points about man can be excised. Namely, man's origin is found in God's creation of Adam and Eve. The Confessions throughout presuppose the veracity of the Genesis account with the creation of Adam and Eve and the fall (FC Ep I 1, 3).

While the Confessions do not offer a Platonic view of man in which the soul is exalted at the expense of the body, they see the soul as the real seat of man's personality. Sin originates not in the body, but in the soul. The Lutherans and the Roman Catholics agreed that man consisted of body and soul, though they differed on the degree to which the soul was corrupted. For Lutherans, this was a thorough corruption; for the Roman Catholics following Aquinas, it was the absence of righteousness and the lack of submission of the soul's lower powers to the higher ones, a view taken over from ancient Greek philosophy. The Confessions do not address, specifically, man's constitutional nature as body and soul, but they presuppose it. That man consists of body and soul is fundamental for Lutheran–Roman Catholic dispute on man's fallen nature. The Roman Catholic view, that the soul by itself before conversion is capable of higher religious activities, presupposes the body and soul dichotomy as much as does the Lutheran position. This dichotomous anthropology is reinforced by the discussion of Christ's descent into hell and whether it happened according to the soul alone or the body and soul (FC IX). Without this necessary and prior distinction, the discussion is without value. Most telling is that in Luther's explanation of the first article of the Creed, the Christian confesses that God has given him both body and soul. Even after the fall, the body and soul are said to be created by God (FC Ep I 2).

The issue of sexuality and the existence of man as male and female became a Reformation issue because of the celibacy laws of the Roman Catholic Church, which forbade marriage to priests, nuns, and monks who had taken vows. Not only

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<sup>16</sup> Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 24.

do the Confessions protest these monastic requirements, but they set forth the relation of the sexes to each other in a positive way. In the Small Catechism, Luther distinguishes between the duties of husbands and wives (SC IX 6–7). The issue of sexuality surfaced prominently in the Augsburg Confession in the matter of the marriage of the priests (AC XXII) and then in the matter of whether monastic vows required lifelong celibacy (AC XXVII). While not deprecating the importance of vows, the vow of celibacy had no force since it contradicted God's law given in creation (AC XXVII 22–23). Marriage cannot be abrogated by celibacy, since as a natural ordinance, it belongs to man by natural right (Ap XXIII 9). The desire of one sex for the other is seen as natural and proper, having been ordained by God. Not only are God's laws in nature contravened, where men and women are not permitted to marry, but unnatural and sinful behavior between the sexes arises.

The fundamental Lutheran distinction between the law and the gospel as the proper proclamation of God's word (FC VI and VII) presupposes a certain understanding of man as a creature of God who is able to respond to the law. The law's first use, directed to man in sin, is to be used not only on unbelievers, but believers also. The sinful nature, which the Formula of Concord calls the old Adam, inheres in the intellect, will, and all human powers in such a way that the law must be preached to keep the sinful nature in bounds (FC Ep VII 4). Man is unable to respond to the gospel by himself, but all men are able to understand the threats of the law and to adjust their behavior in such a way to fulfill its external demands. The Confessional understanding of man does not address the question of man as he is in body and soul to the extent that a contemporary dogmatics would require. Their interest is in man as a sinner now justified freely by God's grace through faith. In this, they reflect and develop the biblical concepts of man's creation in God's image, the fall, and the restoration.

### V. A Historical Survey of Anthropology

The biblical view of man as created in God's image differed from the views of the Egyptians and the Babylonians, who saw people as subservient to kings as the gods' representatives. In the Babylonian creation epic, man is created from the blood of a slain god, so the gods would not have to serve themselves. Individual worth depended on relation to the ruling class as the gods' representatives.

In the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament, the body and soul were seen as separate entities, a view developed from Plato, though his was not the only view. The soul [ψυχή], the center of man's existence, was divided into three ontological parts: reason, passion, and desire. Man must work to ensure that reason remained dominant over the soul's lower parts. This division of the soul into powers or parts

made early inroads into Christian anthropology and later the scholasticism which Luther rejected. For Plato, the soul, especially as it is reason, belongs to the transcendental world, and thus it is preexistent to the body and survives it. The soul's immortality stands in contrast to the body, with which the soul is in temporary union. Death was seen as an escape from the body.<sup>17</sup> Paul's emphasis on the bodily resurrection, taken over from the Old Testament and connected with Christ's, was presented as a defense against this commonly held philosophical view of immortality of the soul, which did not allow for a resurrection (Acts 17:32; 1 Cor 15). This sharp, dualistic division of body from soul starkly differed from the biblical view of the union of man as a dichotomy of body and soul. Scriptures, like Platonic philosophy, knew of the soul's existence outside of the body (1 Cor 5:3–5), but the ideal man is a unity of body and soul. The body envelops the soul, just as the soul envelops the body. This Greek philosophical view, contrasting the body as man's inferior part and the soul as his superior part, was developed in Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism and was prominent in the post-apostolic period. The church's anthropological definitions could not escape these influences. Gnosticism, which may have been as early as the New Testament, saw the material creation as evil and assigned a lower deity as its cause. A Christian form of Gnosticism viewed itself as the true religion. The dualism of man as body and soul was seen as a reflection of a greater cosmic dualism between opposing deities, with the evil one assigned to the creation of matter and the good one to the creation of the spiritual world. "Yet within Gr.-speaking Gnosticism the terminology of the popular philosophical doctrine for the soul is used in anthropology, so that the pairs light/darkness, good/evil, spirit/matter and soul/body correspond to one another."<sup>18</sup>

With Gnosticism's denial of Christ's incarnation and resurrection, man's real life was seen in the soul. Death released man to a happier destiny with no promise of bodily resurrection. Gnosticism had three categories to which all people were assigned. At the lower level were sinners, who were completely fleshly, without hope of reclamation. In the middle were the common people who strenuously had to combat bodily evils by refraining from fleshly sins. The enlightened, the highest level, were sufficiently freed from the body to make it insignificant and to allow them freedom to satisfy their carnal desires without damage to their spiritual lives. Gnosticism developed a modified form of trichotomy for the enlightened. The ordinary people had only a body and soul. The higher class of men were given a

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<sup>17</sup> Albert Dihle, "A. ψυχή in the Greek World" in "ψυχή, ψυχικός, etc." in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964–1976), 612–614.

<sup>18</sup> Dihle, "E. Gnosticism," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 656–658.

spirit.<sup>19</sup> The Valentinian form of Gnosticism virtually ascribed to man two souls, a ψυχή which had value only in relationship to the πνεῦμα.

The distinction between male and female was of no theological significance, and God was referred to in both masculine and feminine terms. Though the church successfully resisted Gnosticism's blatant dualism, Neo-Platonism, which had similar origins, influenced post-apostolic Christian thought. Origen of Alexandria in the third century followed Plato in teaching not only the soul's immortality, but also its preexistence. The importance of Greek philosophical influence can be seen in the title of Tertullian's *De Anima (On the Soul)*, written in the third century and considered the church's first anthropology. Here Tertullian set forth biblical themes with Stoic terms. Like Irenaeus of Lyon before him, he saw the soul as an ethereal substance.

The high place given the soul in the anthropology of these early church fathers did not mean they considered man's bodily existence worthless or inferior. They did not adopt the dualistic worldview of Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, or Manichaeism, which saw the spiritual, non-corporeal world as good and the material as evil. Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria, in placing high value on the soul, opposed the Gnostic devaluation of the body as dualism and taught the dichotomous view of man as body and soul. This became standard for traditional Christianity.

The church fathers' definition of the image of God would also set the boundaries for later dogmatical study on anthropology. Clement, Origen, Tertullian, and Lactantius saw the image of God as seated in the soul in which the body participated. At this time, a distinction, important up through the Scholastic period and the Reformation, was made between the "image" and "likeness" of God in man. The language of the distinction between image and likeness was taken from Genesis 1:27, but the distinction itself was an adaptation of Plato's division of the soul into a nobler part in which reason was operative and a lower part for emotions and desires.

Taken over into Christian anthropology, there was a shift of terms, but vestiges of at least a bipartite division in the soul remained. In the fall, the likeness or similarity to God, a gift of grace, is lost, but not the image in which reason resides. Reason may malfunction, but as part of God's image in man it cannot be eradicated, and thus it is immortal. This distinction of likeness from image is traceable to Irenaeus and Augustine and was standardized for traditional Roman Catholic theology through Aquinas. Man retains the image in a damaged condition with its use of reason and will, but loses the divine likeness given to him by grace and

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<sup>19</sup> Eduard Schweizer, "D. Development to the Pneumatic Self in Gnosticism" in "πνεῦμα, πνευματικός" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 392–396.

assuring him of immortality. This division between man's still-present lower powers and the lost higher powers, restorable through sacramental grace, allows for Roman Catholicism to have both natural and revealed theologies. It is basic for their view that some with an extra endowment of grace and the right use of their natural powers can become saints. Since the fall of man was not so complete that he lost the image or damaged it beyond self-repair, he can with the use of reason perform works acceptable to God. Man using his natural moral capacities can even earn salvation. For the Scholastics following Aquinas, it was not so much that man by sin had broken a relationship with God, but that the soul's powers were no longer operating harmoniously with each other.<sup>20</sup> Thus Roman Catholic anthropology, with its retention of God's image with the use of reason and the free will in divine matters, sharply contrasted with Luther's anthropology of total depravity.<sup>21</sup>

There was no disagreement among early Christian fathers that man's body was taken from the ground, but Plato's view that the soul was preexistent provided the opportunity for Christians to ask about the origin of the soul. Three answers were provided. Origen, showing a strong Neo-Platonic influence, held to the preexistence of the souls before the act of conception, a view with few adherents. Tertullian's view of traducianism saw the soul as transmitted from the parents by procreation to the child, a view later favored by the majority of Lutherans. A position known as creationism (not to be confused with the creation of the world from nothing) offered by Clement held that God created an individual soul for each body. This view gained the ascendancy until the Reformation and is still favored by Roman Catholics and the Reformed.<sup>22</sup> Creationism distinguished between sensual and rational movements within the soul.

This distinction, derived from Plato, would later lead a few to see man as trichotomous: body, soul, and spirit. With trichotomy, the soul is seen as man's lower powers and the spirit as that part of man dwelling on divine and spiritual matters. This view was a variation of Gnosticism which attributed the spirit only to the enlightened. These differing views were important in understanding not only man but also original sin and its transmission.

Creationism has an almost insurmountable difficulty in explaining original sin's transmission, as God participates in creating sinless souls to enter sinful bodies.<sup>23</sup> Traducianism sees sin inherent in the soul and is passed on from the parents to the offspring by procreation. In Origen's view of preexistence, the soul

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<sup>20</sup> Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions*, 129–131.

<sup>21</sup> Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 1:29–35.

<sup>22</sup> See L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th and enlarged ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941), 201.

<sup>23</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 199–200.

becomes sinful by its entering a body contaminated by sin. After each soul's creation, God must attribute to it Adam's sin. These questions about the origins of the soul and sin in the individual have strangely surfaced in the matter of abortion in determining the beginning of human life. While traducianism sees the soul present at conception, creationism can allow for its introduction into the body at any time. Determining this time decides when the unborn can be seen as fully human. All three views—traducianism, creationism, and preexistence—saw man as body and soul. Their emphasis on the soul did not cause them to devalue the body or deny its resurrection. At the Fourth Council of Constantinople (869–870), the dichotomous view prevailed, but not to the exclusion of trichotomy, which was often favored by mysticism.

St. Augustine of Hippo in his debate with the British monk Pelagius in the fourth and fifth centuries was a significant factor in the development of anthropology by attaching its discussion to that of sin. In response to Pelagius, who held that man was born into the world with no moral tendencies and was free to choose between good or evil, Augustine provided the dogmatic definition for original sin as inherited from the parents. Sin had its origins in the fall and destroyed the harmonies both between the body and the soul and between God and man. Man was bereft of righteousness and enjoyment of divine blessedness. He could only sin. As the soul could not obey God, the body was no longer subservient to the soul. Concupiscence, defined as desire, including but not limited to sexual drives, remained as sin.

Through a special bestowal of grace (*gratia infusa*), which was freely given (*gratia gratuita, gratia gratis*) in the sacraments, man can overcome this deficiency. Augustine could not decide between traducianism and creationism, but in the end gravitated toward the latter. Though a modified form of Augustine's theology was endorsed by the Council of Orange and he was honored as a doctor of the church, a synthesis between Pelagianism and Augustinianism emerged in which nature (Pelagius) and grace (Augustine) defined anthropology until the Reformation. By nature, man could perform certain philosophical virtues, as set forth by Aristotle. These served as a foundation for theological virtues, which could only be given through sacramental grace. Man's reason could successfully strive against his lower inclinations and perform virtuous acts. During this period, the creationist theory of the soul's origin was prominent. This view allowed the soul to be infected but not totally corrupted by sin. Aquinas, with the distinction of earlier church fathers between the image and likeness, held that man in losing the image had lost God's grace given in paradise, but still had his image. With his reason and will, man could find God and perform acts acceptable to him.

If Luther's Reformation was characterized by his doctrine of justification freely by grace without works, it was at the same time a repudiation of any anthropology which saw any virtue in man. Original sin was not simply the absence of righteousness which could be repaired with the right use of reason, as held by the Scholastics, but an active, positive force in despising the things of God.<sup>24</sup> On one hand, Luther adopted a radical Augustinianism view in seeing man as totally bereft of God's righteousness, but distanced himself from the Augustinian view that grace was a substance (*gratia infusa*) given man through the sacraments. Grace was God's gracious attitude by which he declares the sinner righteous for Christ's sake. The unstated premise of the Augsburg Confession was that the Roman Catholic views of man and salvation by works border on Pelagianism, though they never held with Pelagius that man comes into the world as morally neutral. Original sin for Roman Catholicism is not sufficiently damning to merit hell until an actual sin has been committed. Their *limbo infantium*, the place in the afterlife reserved for the unbaptized children, results directly from their view of original sin as the absence of righteousness rather than active force. Luther had no use for philosophical Scholastic anthropology and relied only on the Bible for his. This was made clear in his *Bondage of the Will* and especially his *Disputation on Man*: "Philosophers and Aristotle are not able to understand or to define what the theological man is, but by the grace of God we are able to do it, because we have the Bible."<sup>25</sup> His doctrine of justification allowed for no autonomous virtue in man, free will, and intrinsic virtue in the soul pointing to its own immortality. Unlike the Scholastics, Luther returned to the biblical view in making no distinction between the image and likeness. His view that man had completely lost God's image was derived from his dislike for the Scholastic division between the image and the likeness which allowed man to retain the image with its damaged, but not irretrievable, abilities to do good works. He also saw man in relation to God and not as he is in himself. Original sin completely destroyed this relationship, and thus man was completely devoid of God's image.

Later Lutheran theologians followed Luther in seeing that this relationship was completely destroyed by sin, but recognized that this relationship did not exhaust the biblical meaning of the image. Later Lutheran theologians are more likely to speak of man's retention of God's image, but in such a shattered form with no possibility of self-restoration. Melancthon and Calvin held to original sin, but allowed for philosophical humanism in their anthropologies. This influence can be

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<sup>24</sup> See Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 30. "For Luther the concept of sin was constantly oriented toward God – not toward an impersonal law that is transgressed. It is oriented toward this law only insofar as this law is felt directly as God's will."

<sup>25</sup> Luther, *Disputation on Man* (1536), AE 34:142.

more clearly seen in Zwingli, who held original sin brought guilt but was not sin in itself. Melancthon, by making the free will a factor in conversion, showed that he had come under Platonic and Scholastic influences in seeing one part of the soul as morally superior to another. Thus he leaned in the direction of Pelagianism in seeing man as a contributory factor in conversion.

In response to what was seen as Melancthon's synergism, Flacius adopted a virtual Manichaeism in identifying the human nature as sin. Both positions were condemned by the Formula of Concord I (5, 27). In seeing sin as the soul's original condition, Lutherans favored traducianism. The Reformed, as the Roman Catholics, adopted creationism, but neither in refuting the other's position have found it heretical.

Reformed theology, by seeing the Christian's personal experience rather than word and sacraments as the guarantee of salvation, prepared the way for Pietism with its anthropocentric theology. Inner certainty and not the outward word was the assurance of salvation. With its concentration on personal awareness of salvation, Pietism permeated both Lutheran and Reformed thought in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It followed the Reformation in placing itself under the Bible for its authority and adhering to original sin; but by putting the emphasis on man's spiritual development and awareness, it offered an essentially different anthropology. In practice, man's personal awareness of salvation and the possibility of freedom from sin in his life introduced an anthropology foreign to the Lutheran emphasis on human depravity through original sin. Pietism, by shifting the emphasis to the individual, prepared the way for the Rationalism of the age of Enlightenment. The Enlightenment did not have Pietism's commitment to the Bible as authority or its understanding of original sin. Man was not burdened with inborn sin and had no need of God's special revelation.

Freedom was the key concept for anthropology.<sup>26</sup> Man was not only at the center of his world, but in control of it. Enlightened by the proper use of reason, he was capable by himself of the thoughts about God previously given through the apostles and prophets. He was morally self-sufficient.

The highly optimistic assessment of man in the Enlightenment was brought to an end by Immanuel Kant at the end of the eighteenth century. In his *Critique of the Pure Reason* and *Critique of the Practical Reason*, he first challenged Rationalism's view that man could live in harmony with nature and use it for his purposes in constructing a natural religion. Kant saw man as the source of his own

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<sup>26</sup> Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 34: "It is only logical when in the writings of the rationalistic dogmatists like Semler and Wegscheider the association of sin with the doctrine of freedom leads to a furious attack on the doctrine of original sin as maintained by the Reformation."

knowledge of God and morality, apart from any involvement in nature. The moral imperative, a key term for Kant, was built into each person. Both Rationalism and Kant had no need for a special divine revelation and saw man as religiously autonomous, though for the former these conclusions came from his use of reason in analyzing his world and for the latter out of an internal sense of morality and religion. The extreme subjectivism of Kant combined with the experience theology of late Pietism provided the basis for Friedrich Schleiermacher, whose influence stretched through the nineteenth century into the twentieth. His “theology of consciousness” (*Bewusstseinstheologie*) derived from the Pietism of his father, a Reformed minister who was rooted in the experience theology of the Reformed. Schleiermacher held that everyone had the inherent ability to develop his own religious sense about God out of his “feeling” (*Gefühl*). Man’s consciousness of God had to predominate over all other knowledge and action.<sup>27</sup> Rationalism, or the Enlightenment, with its concept of the undamaged reason, Kant with his view of the internal moral imperative within man, and Schleiermacher’s internalization of religion in the feeling and consciousness all have a strong correlation to Plato. For him, the preexistent soul has certain intellectual and moral capacities because of its participation in prior divine reality.

Schleiermacher’s theology was immediately influential. Its adherents at Erlangen attempted to revive classical Lutheranism, but they made “the regenerate ‘I,’” an idea adopted from Schleiermacher, as the ultimate source of Christian truth. It was also influential on the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel with his dialectical theology of the immanent spirit and on the Danish philosopher and theologian Soren Kierkegaard, regarded as the father of existentialism. Kierkegaard adopted the Reformation doctrine of justification, but without accepting its dogmatic presuppositions. Man is estranged from himself as a sinner with the sickness unto death. Only by living his life under a contradiction can he receive his authentic existence through Christianity, when he is willing to make the decision to be a Christian. While protesting Rationalism, he put man in the center. His views influenced the theologies of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Rudolf Bultmann through the philosopher Martin Heidegger. Barth, who began his career opposing Schleiermacher’s theology of consciousness, was dependent on the same philosophical roots in the Reformed theology of experience.

In spite of his explicit protest against the optimistic view of man held by the nineteenth-century liberal theology under Schleiermacher’s influence, Barth’s encounter theology placed man in the center of the revelatory process. Unless man

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<sup>27</sup> For an analysis and outline of the development of theological anthropology, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), 39–49.

participated as a receiver in the divinely given revelation, it was not valid. Though he claimed theology came from without, in the reality of the encounter with Christ, and not from within, as Schleiermacher and classical nineteenth-century liberalism after him held, Barth placed man in the center as the one who must have an existential encounter with God. Knowledge of God was relative, and man, able to make a decision, stood at the center of his universe. Since he finally came to hold to universalism, original sin which he saw as estrangement from God was not determinative for his anthropology.

Charles Darwin, not a philosopher or theologian, had a great impact on all scholarly disciplines including theology with his theory of evolution in *The Origin of Species* (1859). Since Darwin argued in *The Descent of Man* (1871) that man was not a special creation of God but a result of long evolutionary processes, such questions as to the nature of God's image in man and his constitutional nature as body and soul became moot. In the field of psychology, Sigmund Freud saw man not as a creature of God but as a collection of internal, undeveloped forces in his unconscious self and external ones in his environment from which the "self" emerged. In the unconscious or preconscious resides the conscience, shaped by such persons in authority as parents and teachers and the subject of psychoanalysis. Religion is only a projection of man's own internal situation, and thus any understanding of man being created by God or in his image is impossible.

Karl Marx's view of history, which promised man a glorious destiny in a classless society, influenced not only political and national leaders but also philosophers and theologians. Marx understood man economically as being exploited by capitalistic forces for their own good. Individuals must be subordinated to the group's welfare.

The views of Darwin, Freud, and Marx came to influence theological anthropologies of the modern world. The biblical categories of the image of God in man and his constitutional nature as body and soul had to be redefined. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Roman Catholic theologian, offered evolutionistic anthropology in theological terms in *The Phenomenon of Man* (written in 1937 but published only posthumously in 1955).<sup>28</sup> Mankind as a whole was evolving to perfection. In this evolution, Christ stands as a symbol of that destiny.

It may be too simplistic to attribute the failure of much contemporary biblical theology to understand man as body and soul to any one source, but the influence of Darwin and Freud cannot be discounted. Contemporary critics of a dichotomous view of man are more likely to attribute this belief to a foreign intrusion of Platonic philosophy into theology than an original understanding of the Scriptures.

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<sup>28</sup> For further information about Teilhard, see Robert North, *Teilhard and the Creation of the Soul* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1967).

As much as Christian anthropology must distance itself from the Platonic dualism between the body and soul, the similarity between Christianity and Platonism in at least distinguishing the body and the soul cannot be ignored.<sup>29</sup>

The German philosopher Ernst Bloch, influenced by Marx and Hegel, saw all of society moving together toward a glorious destiny. Jürgen Moltmann set forth Bloch's views in the biblical language of eschatology. No longer is the individual important, but humanity as a totality is in a state of becoming. Salvation for the individual comes in associating himself with the unfolding of history. This happens when man associates himself with the forsaken and the downtrodden in the world. Jesus in his suffering and death represents the true humanity. Man can realize the image of God within himself by transcending the present life and anticipating the future. What the future will bring takes the place of the traditional concepts of what God has already done in Jesus. The theology of hope itself evolved into the theology of liberation in which mankind, through sometimes violent means, brings about his glorious destiny.

The New Testament view that the church is God's newly established humanity in Christ has been replaced with the view that all of humanity is pushing forward to a glorious future within the dimensions of this earth. This view has adherents among South American Roman Catholic clerics, and its political goals are recognized as similar to those of Marxism. Part of the same milieu has arisen in the theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg, with whom the term "theology of history" is connected. Man is defined not by theology but by biology, sociology, history, and psychology. Man in union with Jesus Christ is able to shape his environment and in a sense control his destiny as he presses on to his goal in God. This is consummated in the resurrection of the dead. The otherworldly dimension of the New Testament, early church, and Reformation hope is missing here.

## VI. Practical Implications

Even without a consciously defined anthropology, each person understands himself and his relationship to others in a certain way. Christian anthropology sees man not only as God's creature, but as the one resembling him. Though man's communion with God is disrupted by sin, it has been reinstated in God's redemption of man in Christ.

This perspective is important for Christians, and it has particular significance for pastors. Our relationships with other people determine our views about them. Within a family, people are viewed as parents, children, or siblings. In the world,

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<sup>29</sup> See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, articles on πνεῦμα and ψυχή (vv. 6 and 9), where such thinking is prevalent.

they are viewed as sellers, buyers, employers, or employees. There is the division between the teacher and the students, between those governing and the governed. All these relationships are temporary (Gen 2:24). Since Christian anthropology is shaped by the redemption, the Christian looks at man not within these earthly relationships, but from the perspective of God (2 Cor 5:16). The Christian, especially the pastor, looks at others not from the perspective of what they can do for others, for the church, or even for God. He sees them as persons in whom God, because of his creation and redemption, has an investment. Sin as the intervening factor in man's existence can no longer be the solitary factor in assessing a person's worth. The redemption of mankind is a universal factor involving every human being, even though he or she may be ignorant of it or may have rejected it (2 Cor 5:19). Human nature's depravity is visible. Faith is required to believe in spite of what is seen and experienced. The individual has value not only to God but to others.

Thus the Christian following Christ's example embraces sinners in his fellowship. Jesus saw all men, regardless of their rejection of him, from the perspective of his atonement. He prays to God to forgive his tormentors, because he sees all men as already forgiven by his cross. He must affirm the very purpose of his redemptive death. Through God's revelation in Christ through the Scriptures, the Christian shares Jesus' view of others. This determines his behavior to others, even to those who are not of the household of faith. This anthropological perspective determines the character of Christian preaching.

The preacher understands his audience as those who have been created in God's image and lost it and have now been redeemed in Christ. The law and the gospel are directed to man in this contradictory relationship to God, wherein man is fully accountable for his sin but at the same time completely redeemed in Christ. Preaching makes man aware he is a sinner and God's redeemed child in whom his image is being restored. The contradiction in man does not lie in his being body and soul, but it lies in his nature as a sinner and a saint. As a sinner, man is without origin and destiny. His future is shrouded in hopelessness and anxiety over death. In Christ, he becomes aware of his divine creation and is destined to live with God forever.

Even though the Christian view of man with its doctrine of original sin is pessimistic about the potential of human nature, it is optimistic about what man can become in Christ and in a certain sense has already become. The incarnation demonstrates that the fallen human nature is not beyond redemption and can be put into a permanent relationship with God. The incarnation is the promise of what mankind can and does become in Christ. Just as the entire human race was present in Adam, so it is also present in Christ and thus accepted by God. This is objective justification.

According to human ethical standards, people can be judged to be morally good or evil, and this judgment can be made in degrees. In Christ, God accepts all and the categories of good and evil in *this* perspective are no longer valid. This does not mean that the Christian is amoral as he operates in this world, failing to distinguish between right and wrong. It does mean that God has solved man's basic sinfulness. In Christ, he has restored mankind.

Thus the Christian looks upon his fellow human beings as embraced by God's redemptive love in Christ and not only as sinners. Like Christ, he becomes *indiscriminate* in regard to race, ethnic background, language, religion, customs, and laws, but he also does not see some as being more sinful than others. All are sinners, but all are redeemed in Christ. The Good Samaritan becomes the model for Christian behavior because he makes no distinction in regard to race or religion in helping the stricken traveler. The priest and Levite make a distinction and show they understand neither God nor man, who is created in his image.

Secular anthropologies which have permeated modern thinking in the twentieth century have, in removing God as a factor in understanding human nature, necessarily avoided the question of the afterlife. This unanswered question has resulted in an inordinate interest in human health and prolonging human life through extraordinary means, to the point of extreme pain and discomfort of the sick and dying. Some find evidence for the afterlife in the experiences of those who have been revived after near death.

The validity of these experiences is uncertain and inconclusive. The ancient Greek philosophy in placing all of human existence in the soul may have downplayed the human tragedy of death, but it did emphasize correctly that life in this world was not ultimate. Christianity can never revert to the exalting of the soul, but in an age of materialism it does have an obligation to emphasize that man does have a life which continues after death and the body's decomposition. This life with God and Christ is superior to what can be experienced on earth. The biblical concept of man's life as a pilgrimage to a higher form of existence has a place in the center of Christian thought. As man looks forward to a higher life, first at death and finally at the resurrection, he is not relieved of his responsibilities on earth. These responsibilities do not come to him as a command of the law, but from his acquired self-understanding that the image of God, once lost, is now being restored in him to care for the created universe. The world, which is under the curse brought by man's sin, will also share in his redemption (Rom 8:19-24). Now man can live

and work in this world in the confidence that God will include him and the entire creation in the final consummation.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Readers may want to note that this essay was submitted to replace another one that was rejected, and was accepted by the editors of *Confessing the Gospel*. It was then rejected. For an account of how these things happened, see my *Surviving the Storms* (Fort Wayne: Luther Academy, 2018), 189.



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## Reclaiming the Easter Vigil and Reclaiming Our Real Story<sup>1</sup>

Randy K. Asbury

The church's essential purpose and mission in this fallen world is to tell a story, but not just any story. The church's true and only story narrates humanity's lapse from God, plunging the human race and all of creation into sin, all manner of corruption, and even death itself. And then it speaks the life-giving, life-changing news of God's rescue, redemption, and renewal through his Son, Jesus the Christ. The church is called to tell this biblical, historical narrative both to the world for the life of the world (proclamation) and back to God in praise and worship (liturgy). This storytelling is none other than the faithful receiving and proclaiming of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who by his death and resurrection forgives our sins and brings us into his life and salvation, now and into eternity.

In his article "How the World Lost Its Story," Robert W. Jenson explores how modernism has given way to postmodernism, specifically highlighting how the "realistic narratives" of modernism have given way to the different kinds of stories of postmodernism.<sup>2</sup> According to Jenson, modernism's "realistic narratives" could actually happen in the real world, whereas postmodernism's stories make sense only in and of themselves in their own fictional story worlds. In other words, it is impossible for them to occur in the real world. Jenson looks to novels of Jane Austen and James Baldwin, the histories of Gibbon, the local newspaper, and even soap operas as examples of "realistic narratives" that do or could really happen. For examples of postmodernism's stories that make sense exclusively within their fictional story worlds, we may consider the plethora of superhero or science fiction stories so popular on screens big and small.

Jenson's exploration of these divergent types of stories leads us to consider and return to the Scriptures as "[the] archetypal body of realistic narrative" and God himself as the "universal storyteller."<sup>3</sup> The experiment of the Enlightenment, Jenson argues, sought to maintain the realism of the world's story while simultaneously disconnecting humanity from God. "Modernity was defined by the attempt to live in a universal story without a universal storyteller."<sup>4</sup> Now, postmodernism has taken

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a reworked version of the author's presentation "This Is the Night: Introducing and Exploring the Easter Vigil," presented at the 2016 Good Shepherd Institute.

<sup>2</sup> Robert W. Jenson, "How the World Lost Its Story," *First Things*, March 2010, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2010/03/how-the-world-lost-its-story> (originally published October 1993; accessed October 24, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Jenson, "How the World Lost Its Story."

<sup>4</sup> Jenson, "How the World Lost Its Story."

the next step of disconnecting humanity from its story line—and from reality itself—through its unrealistic stories. As Jenson notes, “If there is no universal storyteller, then the universe can have no story line. Neither you nor I nor all of us together can so shape the world that it can make narrative sense; if God does not invent the world’s story, then it has none, then the world has no narrative that is its own. If there is no God, or indeed if there is some other God than the God of the Bible, there is no narratable world.”<sup>5</sup>

How is the church to tell her God-given, absolutely true story in a world that has no common, real story and no “universal storyteller”? Since we can no longer presume a narratable world able to receive the historical, biblical narrative, Jenson suggests “the church must herself *be* that world.”<sup>6</sup> Jenson appeals to the church of antiquity, both Old and New Testaments, as the storyteller who brings God’s very own story into the world of meaningless chaos, particularly through her liturgy.<sup>7</sup>

This brings us to our consideration of the Easter Vigil and reclaiming it in our time. Of the many liturgical services in a congregation’s annual journey through the church year, the Easter Vigil excels at narrating the whole of God’s true biblical and historical narrative. While this service may seem a novelty to many Christians in our day, it actually has rich, deep roots in the Old and New Testaments and in the early centuries of the Christian church. Since the narrative(s) of God redeeming his lost and condemned creatures through Jesus Christ is foundational to our salvation and our being Christian, the Easter Vigil leads us to ponder that overarching narrative and relive it as our very own. Not only does the Easter Vigil serve as the climax to the liturgical days of Holy Week and the Holy Three Days (Triduum), it also serves as the apex of the entire church year. From this summit service and its retelling of God’s real story of salvation through Jesus Christ, we see clearly the import of the preceding time in the church’s year (Advent through Good Friday), and we can look out over the coming liturgical landscape (Easter through Sunday of Fulfillment) to see that our “story” is filled with genuine hope and purpose. God first makes known his story of salvation in Christ, and the church, in turn, lives and tells that story for the life of the world. The Easter Vigil leads us to put that whole story together so that we may both live it and proclaim it.

### I. Whence Comes the Easter Vigil?

In *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, Fred Precht traces the Vigil back to the early fourth century.<sup>8</sup> Timothy Maschke traces the Easter Vigil back to Jewish-

<sup>5</sup> Jenson, “How the World Lost Its Story.”

<sup>6</sup> Jenson, “How the World Lost Its Story,” emphasis original.

<sup>7</sup> See Jenson, “How the World Lost Its Story.”

<sup>8</sup> Fred L. Precht, ed., *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* (St. Louis: Concordia

Christian customs of celebrating the Passover and recalling the accounts of God's deliverance at an evening service.<sup>9</sup> *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book* refers to the early centuries of the Christian church and defines "vigil" as keeping watch "through the night in expectation of Christ's return."<sup>10</sup>

We can see biblical roots of the Vigil service in the exodus of Israel from Egypt. As God stepped into human history to rescue and deliver his people, the Israelites were to gather at twilight, prepare and partake of the Passover meal, and await his mighty deliverance in the dark hours of night, when he would slay the firstborn of Egypt (Exodus 12). This evening Passover meal would also become "a statute forever" throughout their generations (Exod 12:17). The Passover was their very own deliverance, because "It was a night of watching by the Lord, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; so this same night is a night of watching kept to the Lord by all the people of Israel throughout their generations" (Exod 12:42).<sup>11</sup> Forty years later, when Moses prepared the Israelites to enter the Promised Land, the succeeding generation—who had not lived through the oppressive slavery in Egypt nor the exodus from that land—were also to celebrate the Passover as their own story. Moses told them: "Observe the month of Abib and keep the Passover to the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought *you* out of Egypt by night. And *you* shall offer the Passover sacrifice to the Lord your God, from the flock or the herd, at the place that the Lord will choose, to make his name dwell there" (Deut 16:1–2).<sup>12</sup> When Moses instructed God's people to observe the Feast of Weeks

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Publishing House, 1993), 169: "After A.D. 313 the Easter Vigil was the prime time for baptisms of adults who had been instructed during Lent. It also ushered in the resurrection celebration. The Vigil thus focused on the saving power of Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3–5). By 400 in Africa and Northern Italy there was also a solemn celebration of light, since all lamps were customarily extinguished on Holy Thursday evening. The modern adaptation of this ancient service remembers the Exodus from Egypt, celebrates the death and resurrection of Christ, includes the sacrament of Baptism, looks forward to Jesus' return, and may conclude with the Lord's Supper."

<sup>9</sup> Timothy Maschke, *Gathered Guests: A Guide to Worship in the Lutheran Church*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 309: "Although a relatively new service among Lutherans, the Easter Vigil has a long and revered tradition. Perhaps dating to early Jewish-Christian practices of an evening service in preparation for Passover, the Vigil recalls the many accounts of God's deliverance of His people."

<sup>10</sup> *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 529. It also adds, "A vigil in expectation of Christ's return at Easter became a common feature of the celebration of His crucifixion and resurrection."

<sup>11</sup> All quotations from the Scriptures, unless noted otherwise, are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>12</sup> Emphasis added.

(seven weeks after the Passover), he said, “You shall remember that *you* were a slave in Egypt; and you shall be careful to observe these statutes” (Deut 16:12).<sup>13</sup>

In the New Testament, all four Gospel writers explicitly connect our Lord’s final meal, his crucifixion, and his resurrection to the Old Testament Passover deliverance. The Synoptic Gospels all narrate Jesus’ institution of the Lord’s Supper in the context of the Passover meal, on the evening of “the first day of Unleavened Bread” (Matt 26:17–29; Mark 14:12–25; Luke 22:7–20). In John’s Gospel, the Feast of Passover marked the time “when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (John 13:1). When Pontius Pilate summoned the crowd to behold their king, the apostle John specifically notes that it was “the day of Preparation of the Passover” (John 19:14; cf. 19:31, 42), the day on which our Lord Jesus Christ, “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), was sacrificed on the cross. Later in the New Testament, the apostle Paul connects the Old Testament Passover story to first-century Christians as their own story. For example, 1 Corinthians 5:6–8, the traditional Epistle for celebrating the Resurrection of Our Lord, refers to “Christ, our Passover lamb” who “has been sacrificed” and exhorts believers to “celebrate the festival” as they “cleanse out the old leaven that [they] may be a new lump.” Thus God tells his Passover salvation story in order that his people may receive it, live it, and proclaim it.

Early Christian writers often viewed God’s once-for-all act of delivering his people from sin and death through the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as the ultimate Passover. We see this in earlier writers such as Justin (*Dialog with Trypho*), Melito of Sardis (*On the Pascha*), and Irenaeus (*Against the Heresies*), as well as in later church fathers both East and West, including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Hippolytus of Rome, Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan, Jerome, and Augustine of Hippo.<sup>14</sup>

In this context of the Passover story being the Christian’s story, we also see evidence of the Easter Vigil in early Christian writings. Chapter 20 of the *Apostolic Tradition* (perhaps third century) discusses those who are to receive Baptism at the end of Lent. First, the bishop would exorcise the candidates for Baptism. Then he would “sign them” with the cross on their foreheads, ears, nose, and heart. Then, in the Arabic, we receive this exhortation: “And let them spend the whole night

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<sup>13</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup> See Raniero Cantalamessa, *Easter in the Early Church: An Anthology of Jewish and Early Christian Texts*, trans. and ed. James M. Quigley and Joseph T. Lienhard (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993).

listening to readings and preaching.”<sup>15</sup> The *Canons of Hippolytus* (early fourth century) offers this parallel: “They are to spend all their night in the sacred Word and prayers.”<sup>16</sup> The *Testamentum Domini* (fourth/fifth century) gives this context: “In the forty days of Pascha, let the people abide in the temple, keeping vigil and praying, hearing the Scriptures and hymns of praise and the books of doctrine. But on the last Saturday let them come early in the night, and when the catechumens are being exorcised till Saturday midnight.”<sup>17</sup>

Egeria’s *Travels in the Holy Land* (late fourth/early fifth century) recounts her visit to the Holy Land circa 383 and provides a detailed description of Jerusalem’s observance of the Holy Three Days (Triduum). Egeria observed “normal services” at nine o’clock and midday on Holy Saturday, but then noted a ceasing of services at three o’clock “because they are preparing for the paschal vigil in the Great Church, the Martyrium.” She then compared the vigil in Jerusalem to that with which she and her readers were familiar in the Western church, saying that those in Jerusalem kept the Vigil “like us.” Egeria also noted one addition that occurred in the Jerusalem Vigil: “As soon as the ‘infants’<sup>18</sup> have been baptized and clothed, and left the font, they are led with the bishop straight to the Anastasis.”<sup>19</sup>

## II. Why the Easter Vigil Now?

Charting the centuries-long practice of celebrating the Easter Vigil, examining the Western church’s gradual moves of celebrating the service at earlier daytime hours on Holy Saturday—thus abandoning the keeping watch through the night—and exploring the general abandonment of the Easter Vigil until recent times are all beyond the scope of this paper. We do know that in the twentieth century, churches began to reclaim the Easter Vigil. Paul Bosch explains that the Vigil is an ancient order that is being newly reclaimed. Among Roman Catholics, that reclamation has taken place since World War II, when Pope Pius XII officially reinstated it. Anglicans, Lutherans, and others have been reclaiming the Vigil even more recently.<sup>20</sup> Edward T. Horn III in *The Christian Year* claims that the Easter Vigil fell

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<sup>15</sup> Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 106.

<sup>16</sup> Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition*, 107.

<sup>17</sup> Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition*, 107. The authors also comment on the frequent use of vigils in the early church: “Evidence for vigils other than at Easter may be sparse for the first three centuries of the Christian era, but it is not completely absent (see, e.g., Tertullian *Ad uxor.* 2.4; Pontius *De vita et passion Cypriani* 15; and canon 35 of the Council of Elvira). Later evidence indicates that vigils on other feasts (e.g. Pentecost and Epiphany), Sundays, at the tombs of martyrs, and on other occasions were common and widespread” (111).

<sup>18</sup> Latin: *infantes*, common term referring to the catechumens just baptized.

<sup>19</sup> Egeria, *Travels in the Holy Land*, 35–39; see Cantalamessa, *Easter in the Early Church*, 103.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Bosch, *Church Year Guide* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), 38–41.

out of use in Protestant circles “largely because of their aversion to the blessing of things, rather than for any serious doctrinal difficulties.”<sup>21</sup> Horn also sees some similarity between the Easter Vigil in the Western church and the Easter Eve custom of the Eastern church, thus attesting to the catholicity of the service.<sup>22</sup>

Reclaiming the Easter Vigil among Lutherans, however, must have a greater purpose than mere rediscovery and repristination of an ancient rite. Our twentieth- and now twenty-first-century reclamation of this ancient service is indeed a rediscovery of a precious jewel, dusting it off, and resetting it into the necklace of our liturgical life. We do this, however, in order to enhance our reception and telling of God’s story of saving us sinners and making us his people through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Reclaiming and celebrating the Easter Vigil dovetails quite well with the rationale given in the Lutheran Confessions for maintaining church ceremonies, specifically the Divine Service (“the Mass”). In Article XV of the Augsburg, we confess that “ceremonies and other practices that are profitable for tranquility and good order in the Church (in particular, holy days, festivals, and the like) ought to be observed.”<sup>23</sup> To this, we may add the statement from AC XXIV extolling the Mass: “Therefore, the Mass was instituted so that those who use the Sacrament should remember, in faith, the benefits they receive through Christ and how their anxious consciences are cheered and comforted. To remember Christ is to remember His benefits.”<sup>24</sup> As we will see below, the Easter Vigil service in general and the Service of Readings in particular amply lead us to remember Christ and his benefits—that is, to receive, learn, and tell his story.

The reformers went to great lengths to clarify and confess that we keep ancient traditions that do not seek to merit the forgiveness of sins. “No tradition was set up by the Holy Fathers for the purpose of meriting the forgiveness of sins, or righteousness. Rather, they were instituted for the sake of good order in the Church and for the sake of peace.”<sup>25</sup> Celebrating the Easter Vigil by no means merits

<sup>21</sup> Edward T. Horn III, *The Christian Year* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 127.

<sup>22</sup> Horn, *The Christian Year*, 129: “Some idea of the ancient practice may still be found in the Eastern churches. There the vigil is still observed with the last devotions of Lent—the people prostrating themselves before the tomb set up in the front of the church. Just before midnight the procession forms to go out of the church, with the clergy and people bearing the sacred vessels, books and banners. While the procession perambulates the church to the accompaniment of the church bells, the tomb is removed, candles replaced and the altar dressed for the first mass of Easter, which begins with the triumphant entry of the procession at midnight.”

<sup>23</sup> AC XV 1; Paul Timothy McCain and Edward Engelbrecht, eds., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions: A Reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 39.

<sup>24</sup> AC XXIV 30–31; *Concordia*, 49.

<sup>25</sup> Ap XV 13; *Concordia*, 190.

forgiveness, nor does it earn salvation. It does, however, promote the good order of the church as it anchors us in the centuries-long practice of living and proclaiming the story of Christ's death and resurrection. This service also benefits the body as it gives us a more sensory experience than we may be accustomed to the rest of the year—gathering in the dark, the light of Christ piercing the darkness, unhurriedly hearing and meditating on God's Word, experiencing the joyous burst of light once Christ's resurrection is proclaimed. "The Fathers celebrated human rites for the body's benefit" too.<sup>26</sup>

Apology XXIV says that "ceremonies should be celebrated to teach people Scripture, that those admonished by the Word may conceive faith and godly fear, and may also pray."<sup>27</sup> The Easter Vigil does this plenteously in the Service of Readings as the congregation hears the overarching story line of God's salvation from the Garden of Eden to the empty tomb. Apology XXIV also speaks of ceremonies that are received by faith: "A ceremony is a sort of picture, or seal, as Paul (Romans 4:11) calls it, the Word making known the promise. Therefore, just as the promise is useless unless it is received through faith, so a ceremony is useless unless faith, which is truly confident that the forgiveness of sins is here offered, is added."<sup>28</sup> The Easter Vigil is rich with ceremony, much of it not experienced through the rest of the liturgical year. This ceremony can be received with faith and for the benefit of faith—the light of Christ piercing the darkness as the paschal candle processes into the nave, like the Old Testament pillar of fire; patiently waiting, hearing God's Word, meditating and praying in semi-darkness; being renewed in our Baptism; bursting forth in joy upon hearing that Christ is risen; and receiving his holy body and blood that give eternal life.

Even as the Easter Vigil is being reclaimed in our time, some may still wonder why they themselves should consider it. Despite the biblical and historical roots of the service and how it fits with our Lutheran Confessions, some may still ask, "Why?"

One question that often arises is this: Why would we choose to celebrate Easter early, that is, before Easter Sunday morning? Congregation members and fellow pastors may express concern that the Vigil could remove, or at least downplay, the "surprise" of Easter Sunday. Three responses are appropriate. First, there really is no "surprise" to our Easter celebration. We in the church already know the story, because it is a historical event and has been told for nearly two thousand years. We intellectually know what happened and how God worked his salvation through the

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<sup>26</sup> Ap XV 20; *Concordia*, 191.

<sup>27</sup> Ap XXIV 3; *Concordia*, 220.

<sup>28</sup> Ap XXIV 70; *Concordia*, 231.

death and resurrection of his only-begotten Son, the Word made flesh. When we celebrate the Vigil, we go beyond what we already know. Once again, we place ourselves into that story as our story. This is *our* Passover from death to life, from sin to forgiveness.

Second, we can look at the timeline and timing of the Vigil. The Easter Vigil is intended to be a time of waiting, preparing, and watching for the celebration and a time of reliving the story about to burst forth. In the tradition of the Eastern Church, the waiting, watching, and processing begins late on Saturday. Then, at midnight—now “Easter Sunday”—the *bona fide* celebration kicks into high gear, going into the wee hours of the morning. More beneficial would be considering the Easter Vigil from the ancient reckoning of time, the historical context whence it comes. In the ancient reckoning of time (Jesus’ day and into the early church), the day actually began at sundown on the evening before. We recall the order from creation: “There was *evening* and there was *morning*, the first day” (Gen 1:5, emphasis added). While we may celebrate the Easter Vigil on Saturday evening by our Western time reckoning, it is also—and already—Easter Sunday by biblical and ancient time reckoning.

Third, consider what we are celebrating. On Easter Eve, we celebrate the biggest, most profound event that changes us, our lives, indeed all of human history—namely, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hence the church sets aside not merely one Sunday to celebrate Easter, but an entire week of Sundays—seven weeks, fifty whole days. This is the church’s way of saying, “This resurrection thing is so big that we cannot contain all the joy and all the celebration in just one Sunday.” Likewise, the Easter Vigil, on the front end, is the church’s way of saying, “We simply cannot wait to get that celebration underway!” Perhaps it helps to think of a child at Christmastime. Despite mother’s repeated commands not to, the child may frequently sneak under the Christmas tree to shake the presents in an effort to discern what rattling sounds they give and what clues those sounds may proffer. Children are eager to get to the celebration of the story. In the same way, Christians are eager to get to the celebration of their God-given story, their new life in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Speaking of Christmas, we may also connect the Easter Vigil with this more commonly accepted, and rather expected, celebration in the church year. Most Lutheran congregations celebrate our Lord’s incarnation on both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. (And pastors do wish that congregation members would take part in *all* the services to receive the full message and meaning of the story, not merely pick and choose the service time that fits into their family traditions.) The traditional Christmas “candlelight service” serves as a telltale sign of a vigil, or keeping watch, at Christmas. When this Christmas Eve service is celebrated as a midnight service,

even beginning at 11:00 p.m., it functions in the same manner as the Easter Vigil prior to Easter Sunday morning. Why start celebrating Christmas *before* Christmas Day? Why gather at such an odd hour, when little ones are sleepy and come to church dressed in their “church pajamas,” as one worshiper once phrased it? The answer is simple: we are holding vigil, keeping watch, for Christ’s coming at Christmas. First, on Christmas Eve, we wait and watch by hearing the story of our Lord’s Nativity (Luke 2). Then on Christmas Day, we actually celebrate and plumb the depths of meaning that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). We may consider such a Christmas Eve service to be something of a “vestigial vigil.” This vestigial vigil at Christmas, by analogy, can help us introduce and celebrate the Easter Vigil itself. Both are essential parts of the story that God himself narrates for us and through us.

### III. What Is the Easter Vigil?

Now we take a look at the “beating heart” of the Easter Vigil. What is the overall thrust of the service? How does the service move and flow in bringing us God’s story of salvation to receive, live, and proclaim?

#### Its Beating Heart

The Easter Vigil is designed to be celebrated in the dark hours of the evening of Holy Saturday, the evening before the joys of Easter burst forth in full bloom.<sup>29</sup> Here we keep in mind that the service is about two things: (1) Easter itself, the narrative of our Lord’s resurrection victory over death, and (2) keeping watch (vigil) that we may receive, be immersed in, and relive that biblical, historical story.

The term “Easter” draws us back to the great Hebrew *pesach* (in Greek, the *pascha*), that is, the Passover. Celebrating the Old Testament Passover was no mere hasty mental recollection of what happened a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away. Rather, it was ancient Israel’s way of “reenacting” or “participating in”—even “owning”—the reality of God’s salvation given in his mighty works of rescue and his meal of deliverance. In Deuteronomy 6, Moses exhorted the second generation of post-Egypt Israelites: “When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the Lord our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt. And the Lord brought *us* out of Egypt with a mighty hand’” (Deut 6:20–21).<sup>30</sup> Note the first person plural pronouns. Not just “they,” but *we* were slaves

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<sup>29</sup> With appropriate adaptations, it could also be used in the predawn hours of Easter Sunday morning, for the traditional “Easter Sunrise” service.

<sup>30</sup> Emphasis added.

in Egypt. The Lord delivered *us*, not just “them.” The second generation and all future generations, who had *not* experienced firsthand the slavery nor the Lord’s mighty deeds in the exodus, were to celebrate the same rescue and the same meal as their very own. This is the same thrust in the Easter Vigil. The story of Christ’s *pesach/pascha/Passover*—God’s salvation by the Word made flesh, from beginning to end, from creation to crucifixion and resurrection and beyond—is our story. We own it because, by God’s gracious gift and free forgiveness, he makes it our very own.

This story becomes our very own, and ours to tell, most powerfully and fittingly in vigil—in patiently waiting, in eagerly watching, in joyously taking our time to rehear and relive the whole story of Christ’s salvation from beginning to end. Speaking pragmatically, the Easter Vigil is our time to ignore our clocks, watches, and electronic gadgets that keep us enslaved to a schedule, at least for one evening. Pastors and parishioners need to be prepared for and embrace a longer service, and intentionally so. We twenty-first-century Americans readily and eagerly sit motionless for a two- or two-and-a-half-hour movie that portrays a fictional story. We can certainly manage to carve out a couple of hours to rehear and relive our most authentic, most meaningful, most historical, most biblical, and most true-to-life “real narrative” of being recipients of God’s rescue in Christ Jesus. All of this is to say that “vigil” means both “keep watch” and “be ready to take your time in keeping watch.” There is no need to rush through what God himself delights to proclaim and give over and over again through time and into eternity.

Paul Bosch describes the beating heart of the Easter Vigil as keeping watch with the Lord himself as we celebrate the faith in the present. “The Vigil is an evening service, when the church keeps watch (in ancient times, through the night, right up till Easter dawn!) with its Lord, recalls its holy history, reaffirms its baptismal faith, and celebrates the first Communion of Easter. So the Vigil may be said to contain the fullness of paschal faith: a veritable catechism of faith’s meaning and a breath-taking reenactment of faith’s dramatic journey, anticipated, affirmed, and fulfilled.”<sup>31</sup> Philip Pfatteicher describes the beating heart of the Easter Vigil by highlighting the ritual actions and gestures, initiated long ago, that draw us into “replaying” the Christian story of salvation. He writes, “Space is transcended: the act of remembering takes place at a grave, but the grave is anywhere the event is recalled. The church building and with it the congregation moves from darkness to light, and in the font the baptized move from death to resurrection, boldly challenging the threatening powers of darkness and death. Time is transcended: ‘this is the night’ the Exsultet sings again and again, for the Passover and the Resurrection

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<sup>31</sup> Bosch, *Church Year Guide*, 38–39.

and the church's celebration of Easter all merge and become contemporary events." Pfatteicher explains that in the Vigil service the original event lives again. "What happened once *in illo tempore* (at that time) is repeated again and again *hic et nunc* (here and now) as an experienced reality. It is a re-creation of what happened in the archetypal event, newly activated in the here and now of each celebration. The fullness of the Christian faith is found in the Vigil...."<sup>32</sup>

### The Movement of the Easter Vigil

How does the Easter Vigil move and flow as it delivers God's story of salvation for us to receive, live, and proclaim? The rite in *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book* gives a six-part outline to the Vigil.<sup>33</sup>

#### *The Service of Light*

Ideally, the Service of Light begins in a place other than the nave, preferably outside, after sundown (weather permitting, of course) and moves us step by step from darkness into light. A fire may be built outside, on the ground or in a brazier, to symbolize the light penetrating the darkness and to facilitate the lighting of the paschal candle. "As at creation light came into the darkness, so at the beginning of the celebration of the new creation a fire is kindled in the darkness."<sup>34</sup> The paschal candle serves as a sign of the presence of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, bringing the splendor of his resurrection into the place of worship and the world. It also draws our attention back to the children of Israel as they were led through the wilderness and into the Promised Land by the pillar of fire. For us Christians, this pillar of light in the paschal candle leads us out of the slavery of sin and into the joyous new life of being God's children, anticipating the ultimate promised land of our Lord's new creation.

After the opening address and prayer, the paschal candle is lit according to the detailed rubrics in the *Altar Book*. The ritual actions of tracing the Alpha and the Omega, placing the year on the candle, and inserting the five nails are salutary ceremonies that, done well and not rushed, communicate the focal point of the whole service: Christ crucified and risen is coming to bring us out of darkness into his most marvelous light.

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<sup>32</sup> Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Commentary on the Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 258–259. Pfatteicher seems eager to connect the Vigil service—the specifically Christian Passover—with the general religious experience of all of fallen humanity, but we can appreciate what he says specifically related to the “beating heart” of the Vigil itself.

<sup>33</sup> *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book*, 529.

<sup>34</sup> Philip H. Pfatteicher and Carlos R. Messerli, *Manual on the Liturgy: Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979), 328.

Following a prayer, the Service of Light continues with the Entrance. The paschal candle leads the procession into the church, followed by the choir, the baptismal and confirmation candidates, other worshipers, and finally the assisting ministers and the presiding pastor. As the paschal candle proceeds down the center aisle, worshipers light their candles from it and then pass the light to others. The semi-dark sanctuary becomes slightly more lit from the candles, but not yet at full light. As the procession enters, one choir member sings, “The light of Christ,” and the congregation responds, “Thanks be to God.” These lines are repeated until all candles are lit and all are in their places.

Then the Exsultet—the song calling for all of creation, including us, to rejoice in God’s ultimate redemption and deliverance—is sung. Following the Exsultet comes the greeting and the proper preface, akin to what we hear and sing during the Communion liturgy on Sundays. This proper preface, however, repeats the phrase, “This is the night” and recounts the story of God’s salvation, explicitly tying Christ’s atoning work to the story of the exodus. Following the Exsultet, the congregation extinguishes the candles and places them on the floor.

### *The Service of Readings*

For the second portion of the Vigil, *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book* gives twelve potential Scripture readings, with appropriate psalms or canticles that may be used for sung reflection on each portion of God’s Word after it is heard. “It is not expected that all twelve readings will be read,”<sup>35</sup> the *Altar Book* evangelically notes. In Gospel-centered Christian freedom, the pastor will carefully choose readings based on both the guidance in the *Altar Book* and his congregation’s ability to endure more and longer readings. This endurance can certainly increase after years of offering the Easter Vigil service. The *Altar Book* does give three readings that are always read: (1) The Creation (Gen 1:1–2:3); (2) The Flood (Gen 7:1–5, 11–18; 8:6–18; 9:8–13); and (3) Israel’s Deliverance at the Red Sea (Exod 14:10–15:1). When a fourth reading is added, it is to be The Fiery Furnace (Dan 3:1–30). When other readings are added or rotated in and out, all of the readings chosen are read in the order in which they are listed in the *Altar Book*.<sup>36</sup>

The point of the Service of Readings is not how many readings are used or which ones are chosen beyond the three or four, but that the entire scope of God’s saving work in Christ Jesus may be read, heard, marked, learned, and inwardly digested. Remember, we are holding vigil. We are waiting. We are watching for Christ’s coming in his resurrection. There is no hurry, no rush. Rather, we are delighting to gather together, to hear God’s Word, to be comforted and reminded

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<sup>35</sup> *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book*, 530.

<sup>36</sup> See *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book*, 530.

of our real story in Christ. When it comes to the pastor's preaching task at the Vigil, the multitude of readings provides bountiful material for a brief homily, not in thorough, expository preaching, but in weaving together key themes and pointing them all to their proper fulfillment in Jesus' victorious bursting forth from the grave.

In keeping with the patient waiting of vigil and in order to allow for meditation on the portions of God's Word that are heard, silence for meditation is kept after each reading. For congregations new to the Vigil, thirty seconds is sufficient; for those more accustomed to silent reflection on God's Word, sixty seconds is very doable. Such times of silent meditation on the Word of God allow us to ponder anew what God has done for us and how he makes Jesus' story our story. The pastor will want to prepare his people in advance for this part of the service. Sung meditation on the readings may also be included, using the suggested psalms or canticles. Here again, however, the congregation need not be overburdened by too much taking place, especially if the Vigil is still new. If five or six readings are selected, only one or two psalms/canticles would suffice. Care should also be taken that the congregation can sing the selections with confidence and ease, especially in the dimly lit space.

The Service of Readings gives us the bird's-eye view of the scope of God's creation and his redemption of us sinners. Far from being randomly ordered Scripture passages, these readings immerse us in our real narrative, written and carried out by our "universal storyteller," the triune God. Here we rehearse and relive the centuries-long flow, from beginning to end, of God's work of redeeming us from sin and rescuing us from eternal death.

- The Creation story (Gen 1:1–2:3) recalls not only God's original will for us and his world, but also reminds us how we humans have sinned and fallen short of the glory he intended for us.
- The Flood story (Gen 7:1–5, 11–18; 8:6–18; 9:8–13) proclaims God's judgment upon human sin and evil as well as his salvation through the floodwaters, specifically pointing us to our Baptism (see 1 Pet 3:20–21).
- The Testing of Abraham account (Gen 22:1–18) prepares us to anticipate and expect the sacrifice that God himself would make of his only-begotten Son.
- The narrative of Israel's Deliverance at the Red Sea (Exod 14:10–15:1) ties our deliverance from sin and death to God's deliverance of Israel from their bondage in Egypt. As they followed the pillar of cloud and fire to their safety, we follow our risen Savior into eternal life.
- The prophetic passages, Isaiah 55:1–11 ("Salvation Offered Freely to All") and Ezekiel 36:24–28 ("A New Heart and a New Spirit"), both invoke the prophetic

witness to the coming Savior, who freely offers his salvation that creates a new heart and spirit in us.

- In Deuteronomy 31:19–30, we hear the narrative of God’s Faithfulness to Israel and us as we learn, sing, and teach the song of his salvation as a witness to him.
- The Valley of Dry Bones story (Ezek 37:1–14) illustrates how God breathes his new life, achieved in Christ’s death and resurrection, into us through the work of his Holy Spirit.
- The account of Job confessing the living Redeemer (Job 19:20–27) leads us to confident trust in the One who has conquered death itself and promises bodily, fleshly resurrection for us.
- The story of Jonah preaching in Nineveh (Jonah 3:1–10) proclaims both Jesus’ three-day rest in the grave and the victory we have in baptismal repentance, daily dying to sin and rising to new life in Christ.
- The Gathering of God’s People in Zephaniah 3:12–20 provides a much-needed remedy to the individualism and self-centeredness of our age: our salvation in Christ crucified and risen ushers us into the joys of God’s community, the body of Christ, together rescued from our oppressors of sin, death, and devil.
- Finally, the Fiery Furnace narrative (Dan 3:1–30), the capstone of the readings, shows us that not only does our risen Savior accompany us in the fiery trials of this fallen world, but through his death and resurrection he also preserves and delivers us.

When we gather in vigil, we gather to wait and watch for Christ’s Easter coming. As we wait, we hear again the real story of God’s salvation for sinners and restoration of creation through his Son, again making the story our own and reliving it. The Service of Readings allows us to unplug from our twenty-first-century digital craziness and distraction, and such unplugging does no one any existential harm. In fact, it might just give the peace and the joy that so many people so hastily clamor to discover.

### *The Service of Holy Baptism*

After the Service of Readings comes the Service of Holy Baptism, a slightly abbreviated form of the regular Rite of Baptism in *Lutheran Service Book: Pew Edition*. The Service of Baptism is always used, whether candidates for Baptism are present or not. The exhortation includes Romans 6 and Luther’s “Flood Prayer,” both most appropriate for celebrating our Easter *Pascha*. If there are candidates

for Baptism, they joyously receive God's gifts of forgiveness and life through water and his word. If there are no candidates for Baptism, the congregation still delights to remember the joys of Baptism once again. Again, this is our Christian Passover story being enacted and relived in our midst.

The Rite of Confirmation comes at this point in the service, when there are catechumens to be confirmed. The Easter Vigil is perhaps the most fitting annual time when the congregation confirms those who have been instructed and examined in the faith. After all, it was in this liturgical context in the early church when catechumens were first catechized during Lent, then baptized and led to confess the faith on Easter Eve, then to proceed to the altar for their first Communion at the Christian Passover.

#### *The Service of Prayer*

The Service of Prayer is comprised of a litany centered on the theme of our Lord's resurrection and may be prayed by the pastor or an assisting minister from their regular seats in the chancel. The *Altar Book* notes that in the interest of shortening the Easter Vigil this service may be omitted. This is advisable when introducing the Vigil to a congregation. Once the congregation is accustomed to the longer duration of the Easter Vigil, the Service of Prayer may be added.

#### *The Service of the Word*

At this point in the Vigil service, we are quite ready to burst forth in joy and praise. Moving into the Service of the Word, the presiding minister acclaims, "Alleluia! Christ is risen!" and then the congregation joyously shouts back, "He is risen indeed! Alleluia!" The lights come up and the congregation sings, preferably, "This Is the Feast" for the first time after a six-week fast from the Hymn of Praise. The candles are lit. The Table is prepared for the Lord's Holy Meal. And all is set right. Darkness has finally given way to full light. Death is fleeing. Life is ours. The Easter Gospel from either Mark 16 or John 20 is read. A brief homily is proclaimed.

#### *The Service of the Sacrament*

Finally, the Service of the Sacrament, as is customary on Sunday mornings, comes in all its glorious Passover and Easter fullness. Somehow, the length of the Vigil service does not seem to matter once God's redeemed people begin singing joyous Easter hymns such as "At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing" (*LSB* 633), "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today; Alleluia" (*LSB* 463), and "Good Christian Friends, Rejoice and Sing" (*LSB* 475). After all, this is *our* Passover. The risen Lord has just delivered *us* and given us our story to live and proclaim to the ends of the earth.

#### IV. Conclusion

Robert Jenson wrote:

To be a real world for her members, and not just a ritual illusion, the church must pay the closest attention to the substance of her liturgical gatherings and to their constitutive language. If the church's interior drama is not fiction, this is because the subject of that drama is a particular God, the Creator-God who authors all reality. If liturgy is not to be sickly pretense, if it is to be real presence of reality's God, everything must enact the specific story Scripture actually tells about that particular God.<sup>37</sup>

In our world where stories are no longer “real narratives” that can actually happen, dislodging us from reality itself, we human creatures desperately need stories—a story—that provides authentic meaning, identity, and security. The Easter Vigil ushers us into the real story of the real and only God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is much more than some narrative theology; this is reality and history itself. Because of our Lord's historical crucifixion and resurrection, his Passover from death to life, we have a new life, a new story. The overarching narrative of God redeeming his lost and condemned creatures through Jesus Christ is foundational to our salvation and our being Christian. The Easter Vigil leads us to ponder this overarching narrative and relive it as our very own, just as generations of Israelites after the actual events of the exodus claimed the Passover celebration as their very own. When we reclaim the church's age-old Easter Vigil, we reclaim our real story in a most potent manner, for here we ponder the stories—the story—of Christ's atoning, life-giving work for us.

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<sup>37</sup> Jenson, “How the World Lost Its Story.”

## Theological Observer

### “What Can We Learn from Them?”

Four travelers went to Ethiopia in March: Presidents Dale Meyer of Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, and Lawrence Rast of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Skopak and Mr. Andemichael Tesfazion of Grace Lutheran Church in Jacksonville, Florida. Pastor Skopak and Mr. Tesfazion went especially to see the support of their congregation for orphans and to explore future ways to support local congregations in and around Bishoftu. Presidents Meyer and Rast went especially to meet with Dr. Bruk Ayele, president of the Mekane Yesus Seminary (MYS) in Addis Ababa, to discuss how our three seminaries can partner in our Lutheran mission for the Lord Jesus.<sup>1</sup> It was an absolutely inspiring trip. The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is experiencing growth like that of the early church in Acts and soon will be the church home of ten million people. Upon returning to the United States and sharing our experiences, people asked, “What can we learn from them?”

There are several fundamental learnings for congregations, seminaries, and our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod; but first, Ethiopia is a storied land, mentioned already in the ancient poem of Homer:

But now Poseidon had gone to visit the Ethiopians worlds away,  
Ethiopians off at the farthest limits of mankind,  
A people split in two, one part where the Sungod sets  
And part where the Sungod rises. There Poseidon went  
To receive an offering, bulls and rams by the hundred—  
Far away at the feast the Sea-lord sat and took his pleasure.  
But the other gods, at home in Olympian Zeus’s halls,  
Met for full assembly there. . . .<sup>2</sup>

The fifth-century BC Greek historian Herodotus tells a tale, perhaps essentially true but delightfully embellished with myth, how the king of Ethiopia dealt with spies sent by Cambyses, the king of Persia. In a second passage, Herodotus describes the dress and weaponry of Ethiopians who fought for Xerxes.<sup>3</sup> The Greek geographer Strabo (ca. 64 BC–AD 21) has many descriptions of the land and its

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<sup>1</sup> Strengthening ties with church leadership at both the national and local synod level was also a central purpose, and meeting with Teshome Amenu, General Secretary, was a highlight. EECMY President Yonas Dibisa was continuing his PhD studies at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, during our visit, and so we were unable to visit with him on this trip.

<sup>2</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, I.21–25.

<sup>3</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, III.17–23; VII.69–70.

people throughout his seventeen books. Ethiopia, sometimes identified as Cush, is often mentioned in the Bible.<sup>4</sup> Most familiar to us is the account of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26–40.

He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah [53:7–8] . . . And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

In ancient history, “Ethiopia” defined various regions in Africa, sometimes even the Saudi Arabian peninsula, but “by late biblical times . . . the geographical meaning of the term had come to be well limited to the lands south of Egypt.”<sup>6</sup>

Ethiopia’s more recent history has not always been favorable. Emperor Haile Selassie was deposed in 1974 and replaced by the Derg, a military government that identified with communism and the Soviet Union. It was a time of persecution for Christians. Our fellow traveler Mr. Tesfazion had been an officer in the Ethiopian Air Force and spent years in jail under the Derg. Many of his fellow prisoners were executed. One Ethiopian pastor told us how he and others would leave their homes and spend nights in the desert to escape Derg soldiers who might break into their homes to conscript them. In these times of persecution, the church grew. “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”<sup>7</sup> The Derg’s reign of terror ended in 1987, and today Ethiopia has a federal parliamentary government. Christians are free to worship and evangelize, although there are some restrictions. For example, private schools cannot teach Christianity. Christianity is about sixty-three percent of the country’s 102 million inhabitants. Muslims, about one third of the population, are aggressively seeking converts. But it was the growth of the EECMY that amazed us, showing us that God is fulfilling prophecies from long ago: “Nobles shall come from Egypt; Cush [Ethiopia] shall hasten to stretch out her hands to God” (Psalm 68:31). “In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover

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<sup>4</sup> Genesis 2:13; 10:6 (Cush, son of Ham); Numbers 12:1; 2 Samuel 18:21–23; 1 Chronicles 1:8; Psalm 68:31; Isaiah 11:11; Ezekiel 38:5.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 8:27–28, 34–35. This and all other quotations from Scripture are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>6</sup> Katharine Doob Sakenfeld ed., *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. II, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 177.

<sup>7</sup> Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, chapter 50.

the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush” (Isaiah 11:10–11).

Now to the pressing question, what can we learn from them? People ask that question because the LCMS is not growing. President Rast gave a presentation to about seventy pastors and evangelists of the EECMY and laid out how our LCMS has grown through its history up to 1970. First he presented our growth, noting LCMS growth by decade:

1847–1850	58%	1900–1910	20%
1850–1860	343%	1910–1920	14%
1860–1870	154%	1920–1930	15%
1870–1880	90%	1930–1940	24%
1880–1890	32%	1940–1950	29%
1890–1900	39%	1950–1960	65% <sup>8</sup>

More recent decades have painted a more challenging picture:

Year:	Congregations:	Baptized Members:
1847	30	4,099
1967	5,993	2,847,425
1977	6,051	2,776,958
1987	6,269	2,707,134
1997	6,213	2,603,036
2007	6,158	2,383,084
2017	6,052	1,968,641 <sup>9</sup>

The first basic learning is that the American cultural context has changed. We live in different circumstances today. They are not better or worse; they are different. Yet our synod and many of its institutions developed their structures in a time and for a world that has since radically changed. We are all familiar with the decline

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<sup>8</sup> August R. Suelflow, “The Congregation-Synod Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in Historical Perspective, 1897–1961: A Report to the Synodical Survey Commission (Report 3A),” 94.

<sup>9</sup> These numbers are drawn from *The Lutheran Annual*, various years.

of mainline Christianity and the rise of the “nones,” people who do not identify with a Christian denomination. We find ourselves in the midst of a culture that is changing before our eyes and doing so with a rapidity that the LCMS has not experienced since we transitioned from German to English between the World Wars. Traveling throughout the church, in a different congregation almost every weekend, we meet pastors and laypeople who know we are in changed times. Some are discouraged and resigned to decline, grieving what they’ve seen lost in their lifetimes. A few are rejoicing to see their congregation growing. In general, however, and this is a subjective opinion, a large percentage of people in the Synod—in national, district, and congregational structures and agencies—have not come to terms with our changed times and hence not moved toward changes necessary for our new American context. We hasten to add that we are not talking about changing or watering down our precious doctrine!

With that overarching change in our LCMS cultural context, what else can we learn from the growing EECMY? A vision that God’s work is global and multiethnic in the United States is a key to energizing local ministry and mission. Hence a second fundamental learning is that we do well to weave mission stories and mission trips into our shared life as Missouri Synod Lutherans. A St. Louis–area pastor recently asked President Meyer how he could energize his congregation. His church is at peace, relationships are fine, finances passing, but this pastor wants more “get up and go.” President Meyer’s suggestion was mission trips. When people have an experience with Christians in a different context than the friendly confines of their congregation, they see worship and congregational life at home in a different way. You don’t need to leave the country; short experiences are effective too. St. Louis and Fort Wayne both have numerous opportunities for outreach to immigrant groups. All major metropolitan areas have significant ethnic groups, first- and second-generation immigrants, who need the Gospel, and Lutheran outreaches are many. LINC has vibrant ministries in several major metropolitan areas. Mapleton, Iowa, is home to Mission Central, always an inspiring visit.

A third learning is “two wings.” The Rev. Dr. Wakseyoum Idossa, immediate past president of the EECMY, described their church’s approach as having “two wings.” The first is evangelization. The second is human care. Ethiopia is one of the poorest nations in Africa. So, as just one example, the Central Ethiopian Synod has a program for congregations that involves fifteen church members of a local congregation and fifteen non-church members. The program teaches the thirty how to become entrepreneurs and thus work their way out of poverty. Obviously, the non-church members learn about Jesus and the fellowship of the local congregation. “Two wings” is not how most of our congregations saw their mission in the days of twentieth-century “Christian America.” Local congregations preached and

shared the Gospel, but human care was often done by church and government institutions. The larger Christian cultural milieu understood that we are all to love our neighbor through works of mercy. In today's post-churched America, the witness of the local congregation will be more effective with the "two wings," evangelization and human care. "Don't tell me what a friend I have in Jesus until I see what a friend I have in you." Interestingly, Walther's *The Proper Form of a Christian Congregation* shows that this "two wings" approach was an important aspect of the congregations of the Synod's life together in our early history.

A fourth fundamental learning is to communicate to people throughout the LCMS how our seminaries are partnering to share confessional Lutheran theology at home and abroad. This consumes a far greater portion of our professors' time and seminary resources than most people realize. Yes, we form the next generation of pastors and deaconesses for the LCMS, but our involvements with seminaries overseas is forming generations to come in confessional Lutheranism. Both American seminaries have sent professors to teach at MYS and to present to EECMY pastors and evangelists. The EECMY sends students to both of our seminaries, as do many other overseas church bodies. Thirty-four students from fifteen countries are studying at Concordia Theological Seminary, and thirty-eight students from seventeen countries are at Concordia Seminary. Not only do these international students get world-class formation in confessional Lutheran theology, but they also enlarge the panorama of mission for American seminarians and form friendships which will enrich future ministries overseas and in America. As our seminarians learn from international students and hear our professors talk about mission overseas, they cannot help but take the vision to the congregations where they will be called. "This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations" (Matthew 24:14). Indeed, a growing global vision of our Lord's church will invigorate ministry and mission in local congregations.

Related to that global vision is your seminaries' passion to share Lutheran theology with people in America who are not Lutheran. Professors tell us that non-LCMS Christians, especially evangelicals, are discovering the theological depth they desire in the writings of Luther and Lutheran theologians. Non-Lutheran publishers, like Baker and Eerdmans, have been finding a market of Christian readers for distinctively Lutheran theology.<sup>10</sup> The graduate programs at both seminaries have long been open to non-LCMS students, and *nota bene!* This openness does not mean a watering down of what we teach. Your two seminaries will not become

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<sup>10</sup> E.g., *Dictionary of Luther and the Lutheran Traditions*, ed. Timothy Wengert (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2017); *God's Two Words: Law and Gospel in the Lutheran and Reformed Traditions*, ed. Jonathan Linebaugh (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018).

generic divinity schools because we will continue to focus our residential programs on the formation of workers for the LCMS and because the bond between the Synod and her seminaries remains strong. Our vision for the future features our graduate programs acting as “Lutheran leaven” by offering substantial Gospel theology to Christians both at home and overseas.

Fifth, congregations and seminaries can cast a vision for a truly multiethnic Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. This is more than mission information, which is inspiring to read and hear; this is working to change the faces of the LCMS so that more and more we reflect American demographics and anticipate in time what Revelation chapter seven teaches we will see in heaven. Among other effects, the decline of the LCMS has shrunk the pool of pastors for the future if . . . and this is a big if . . . if we continue to think of future clergy as white Lutherans of European descent. We certainly do need these candidates for the future; they can invigorate and grow, by the Spirit’s grace, congregations in communities where the LCMS traditionally does well, but how will ethnic communities in the United States “hear without someone preaching?” (Romans 10:14). Increasing our number of ethnic pastors will help us reach these communities that otherwise may well not be blessed with our wonderful Lutheran, christocentric understanding of Law and Gospel, that “everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame” (Romans 10:11). The student populations at your seminaries are already more diverse than the overall LCMS. The Center for Hispanic Studies and the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology at CSL and the Latino SMP program at CTSEW offer online learning, but the residential population remains predominantly white and of European descent. We need to begin recruiting the children and grandchildren of immigrants now for residential MDiv and deaconess study. This is your seminaries’ vision, and we pray you and your congregation will find it invigorating and partner with us.

What can we learn from our Lutheran brothers and sisters in Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus? These points and much more, but we circle back. We in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod live in different circumstances today than in past days of growth. Today’s circumstances are not better or worse; they are different. And they are abundant with new opportunities to share the everlasting Gospel. As our years in office lengthen, we presidents find ourselves spending much time discussing the vitality of our seminaries twenty and thirty years into the future. We’re habituated to think that future vitality will depend upon money, but in years to come the real challenge facing seminaries may not be money, but people. We’re not going to get our future pastors and deaconesses solely from the demographics of the past. While some are doing so, we need a more general passion throughout the Synod, pews, and pulpits to reach into the diasporas, those immigrants and their children throughout the United States. The Ethiopian

diaspora is some 2 million people in the United States. When we reach them for Jesus, the second and third generations will have become more Americanized and will be well qualified for the residential programs at our seminaries. Future pastors and deaconesses with European surnames are needed, yes indeed, but will not be enough to make the composition of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod grow so that we reach America’s demographics with the Gospel and start to see in time what we will see in eternity, “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9). The prophecy of our Savior in Isaiah 49 should be true of us, Christ’s Body today.

And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him—for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength—he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:5–6)

We are your seminaries—for the Gospel!

Dale A. Meyer  
Lawrence R. Rast, Jr.

## Teaching Elementary Greek<sup>11</sup>

Teaching elementary Greek is dependent upon a larger question: “Why should one learn Greek (or Hebrew) at all?” The answer to that question, however, is not that straightforward. On the one hand, it is not right to say, “If you don’t know Greek, you really cannot understand the New Testament at all.” That is not true. Many strong believers and many strong witnesses to the Gospel have had no knowledge of Greek. (St. Augustine may well have been one; certainly my mother was.) On the other hand, it is not right to say, “It really doesn’t make any difference at all if you don’t know the original; it’s just a seminary hoop to jump through.” That, too, is not true.

Here is my answer by way of analogy. The difference between reading the New Testament in English, on the one hand, and knowing Greek and interpreting the New Testament with it, on the other, is like the difference between watching an NFL game on a twelve-inch black-and-white TV and being at the game. The two experiences are not *entirely* different. It is not as if the Indianapolis Colts win if you watch on the small TV, but the Green Bay Packers win if you are at the game. When you are at the game, however, *you see so much more* and *you have a much deeper understanding of what is going on*. This was driven home to me in 1995, when the Rams moved to St. Louis from L.A., and my colleague Chuck Arand and I got season tickets for the games. *Only when you are at the game* do you understand the terror of playing press cornerback in the NFL—you’re out on an island against a lightning-fast, jitterbug wide receiver, backpedaling, flipping your hips, and then, it’s apparent, just how much ground you have to make up to close and deflect the pass. *Only when you are at the game* is it apparent what a fantastically accurate cannon of an arm Dan Marino has. Indeed, *only at the game* can you feel momentum shift in the building, as when Jim Kelly just “willed” the Buffalo Bills to a win in the last two minutes of a game in which he had done almost nothing for the previous fifty-eight.

It is the same way when you read a text of the NT in the Greek. Perhaps to oversimplify, by having knowledge of three specific features of the language, you have a great advantage over interpreters who do not know Greek, three features that help to “take you to the game.” These are word order, middle voice, and aspectual features of the verbal system. Indeed, all of these are features of the Greek language that standard English versions regularly neglect or deliberately *under translate*. (I know this from my experience as one of the “Translation Review Consultants” of the ESV.)

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<sup>11</sup> Presented at a convocation at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, October 10, 2019.

With word order—which is more flexible in Greek as an inflected language than it is in English, which is largely non-inflected—you can see points of emphasis that are not normally conveyed in English translations. With the middle voice and verbal aspect features, dimensions of meaning not easily communicated in English without often awkward extra verbiage become readily apparent.

A passage that illustrates all three features is well-known Acts 20:28, often used at ordinations, part of St. Paul’s farewell to the Ephesian elders, the beginning of which the ESV translates thus: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God . . . .”<sup>12</sup>

But when we read this text in the Greek, we see that the “you” of the phrase “made you overseers” is thrust to the front of its clause—“in which **you**, the Holy Spirit has made overseers”; it is *emphatic*. Then, the form of the word for “made”—or better, “placed”—τιθημι, is ἔθετο, *middle* voice, not the simple active voice form, conveying that such an action is done with *deliberation* and *purpose*, to fulfill the Spirit’s plans. And then when Paul tells the elders to care for—literally, “shepherd”—the church of God, he uses the *present* infinitive, ποιμαίνειν, not the aorist, which *connects* the action to his hearers, conveying that they are involved not in a mere job but in a thoroughly engaging calling. So let us translate the beginning of Acts 20:28 like this: “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed *you, for his own purposes* as overseers, to *engage in tending as a shepherd* does the church of God . . . .”

When you, as interpreter of the sacred text, bring these sorts of dimensions to life for your people—and you can—you are, as I have come to call it, “taking them to the game.”

This, then, is the baseline and the foundation for the classroom experience of elementary Greek. Yes, such a class is a kind of “hoop” for students to jump through in order to commence seminary training. Yes, it is an academic class. But overall, the experience of elementary Greek is a chance to be electrified by the depth of the text of the New Testament, which then allows future pastors to convey that electricity to God’s people—or, to use my phrase, to “take them to the game.” And from the standpoint of the professor, everything done in the classroom must be directed to this end, whether that be the discussion of forms/morphology, the discussion of syntax, the discussion of the Greek verbal system, the discussion of vocabulary, or whatever. Such features are never ends in themselves, but they are

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<sup>12</sup> Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

always building blocks for creating a fuller understanding of God's dynamic, saving word.

Let me conclude with several observations concerning, specifically, the *teaching* of elementary Greek. A good teacher has three qualities—qualities that are at a *premium* when teaching introductory courses such as elementary Greek. First, a good teacher must know his subject thoroughly. That is why it is important to stay up to date on a whole range of linguistic issues and to be a regular participant (not just attendee) at scholarly society meetings. Second, a good teacher must love people. If he does not have genuine affection for his students, he should be doing something else. And third, that teacher must remember what it is like not to know, what it is like not to “get” what a chapter (or a section of a chapter) is about.

Especially the last of these qualities is so critical. It gives empathy with the student. It gives insight into the source of a student's struggling. And it, thus, enables the professor to build necessary interpersonal relationships and to communicate effectively—all foundations to a successful classroom experience. Such an experience is not merely a transfer of information—though such transfer does occur—but it entails having a common learning experience together.

James W. Voelz

## Using *Fundamental Greek Grammar* to Teach Greek at the Seminary<sup>13</sup>

I would like to thank Jim personally for having produced a noteworthy textbook—*Fundamental Greek Grammar*<sup>14</sup>—that has more than adequately prepared many pastors of our church body with a foundation in the Koine Greek of the NT. This is no small matter, since Jim noticed already in the early to mid-eighties (when he began putting the textbook together) that most beginning Greek students bring “very little” with them to seminary.<sup>15</sup> What Jim does consistently in *FGG*, therefore, is move the class from knowing next to nothing about Greek to setting a path upon which students can be led—in ten weeks’ time—to acquire enough philological competence to begin our seminary’s required exegetical sequence in the New Testament: Gospels I (Matthew), Gospels II (Luke/Mark), Pauline Epistles (Galatians/Romans selections), Gospels III (John), five NT Greek Readings courses, and, for the students of exceptional interest and ability, Advanced Greek.<sup>16</sup> Hence, *FGG* is an excellent textbook for achieving the purposes to which it has been put in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod for the past thirty-two years. (The first edition of *FGG* appeared in 1986.) Nevertheless, I believe the textbook could be substantially improved and so serve our church better than it has prior to this point.

First, one immediate problem is that *FGG* is riddled with accentual errors which mar the book and impede progress as professors are obliged to interrupt instruction to set students straight. Missed graves for acutes, or acutes for graves, obviously do not trouble people who do not know Greek at all or are mere beginners;<sup>17</sup> however, as students are subjected to nearly daily quizzes, I deduct for missed accents (half point), to say nothing about missed endings (which are a one-point deduction).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Presented at a convocation at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, October 10, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> James W. Voelz, *Fundamental Greek Grammar*, 4th ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014). Hereafter *FGG*. Since the colloquium with Dr. Voelz, a 4th Revised edition of *FGG* has appeared, published in 2019. Unfortunately, nearly all of the errors in the 4th edition have been perpetuated in the 4th revised edition.

<sup>15</sup> Voelz, *FGG*, v.

<sup>16</sup> For the (at the time) “new curriculum” for which most of these courses were developed originally at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, see Charles A. Gieschen, “‘They Bear Witness to Me’: Christ, the Scriptures, and the New Curriculum,” *For the Life of the World* 9, no. 3 (July 2005): 18–19.

<sup>17</sup> For the differences between grave, acute, and circumflex accents in the Greek language, see *FGG*, 8–11. See also John G. Nordling, “Teaching Greek at the Seminary” *Logia* 21, no. 2 (Eastertide 2012): 70.

<sup>18</sup> In making the course my own, I have added two sets of quizzes, administered four days out of five—namely, Monday and Friday, brief vocab quiz; Tuesday and Thursday, paradigm quiz; Wednesday, no quiz. The so-called “brief vocab quiz” consists of the following exercises: (1) passive

Hence, it is frustrating to use a book—now in its fourth revised edition—that is riddled with errors of this type. I have used *FGG* twice per year since 2006 and taken careful note of the mistaken accents, breathing marks, and iota subscripts and sent these some time ago to Concordia Publishing House for revision. Sloppy accents and other errors convey the impression that fine points do not matter—and that Greek itself probably is not that important, especially if one can simply read Bible passages in a good translation (for example, the English Standard Version). I believe, however, that accents *do* matter, and that students still can learn them well, especially when they are trained to learn Greek—and then after Greek, theology—at a high level.

Second, I object to the verbosity of *FGG*—to what I call in class the “Voelzian verbiage” (with all due respect to Jim Voelz himself). Years ago, while learning how to teach Latin at the University of Wisconsin—Madison during graduate school, I had a colleague who used to quip, “*non multa praecepta, multa exempla,*” which I may paraphrase: “Not many precepts [about teaching a language], but many good examples [used well and correctly].” Exposure to good *exempla* is how students actually begin to acquire a foreign language—not by talking *about* the language *ad infinitum* (this is what I refer to as “verbiage”), but by compelling students to use the language actively by thinking, writing, and speaking in the source language.<sup>19</sup> Granted, it is next to impossible to compel modern students to *speak* ancient Greek nowadays; nevertheless, there are many things an enterprising professor can do to make Greek more active—such as have students change plurals to singulars (and vice versa) or have them change phrases, clauses, and entire sentences from English into Greek (composition). Composition has always been an indicator of language mastery, and the best programs in Greek and Latin use composition to this day. After chapter 12, *FGG* has only one English-to-Greek sentence per chapter through the duration of the book—and provides the sentence in the answer key! Hence, I have myself written two English-to-Greek sentences per chapter to be used each day. I compel students to write them on the whiteboard, and I call on still other students to correct the inevitable mistakes. Is this a laborious, time-consuming class procedure? Well, of course it is! The students can be counted on to make many blunders. But they are constantly corrected—for each and every error—and

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vocab (five words); (2) active vocab (three words); (3) noun-adjective pair, verb conjugation, or noun-participle combination; (4) principle parts (one to two verbs); (5) composition (English to Greek). The “paradigm quiz” consists of the following: (1) nominal declination or verbal conjugation; (2) passive vocab (six to eight words); (3) passive translation (Greek to English).

<sup>19</sup> By “source language,” I mean the language from which a translation originates as opposed to the “target” or “receptor language” (e.g., see Matthew S. DeMoss, *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of New Testament Greek* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001], 115, 120). See also Nordling, “Teaching Greek at the Seminary,” 72 n. 13.

over time stop making the mistakes that other students do who have not been exposed to the rigors of composition. Jim's book, then, perpetuates the problem of learning Greek passively in the schools of our church; and such passive learning, I would argue, has resulted—sadly—in a good number of pastors who do not use Greek very well in the course of their ministries since the requisite vocabulary, forms, and paradigms were never instilled in them from the beginning.

Let us not forget that we are dealing with *beginning* students who cannot be expected to know or understand the fine points of Greek. So things like “focus on the action” (the action itself) or “focus on connection” (the bond or linkage between the doer and the activity) can be postponed to a later stage of Greek language acquisition, if taken up at all (perhaps not).<sup>20</sup> No other Greek grammar uses such idiosyncratic terminology, however, so when I use *FGG* to teach beginning Greek at the seminary I use such “jargon” sparingly. Nevertheless, I am convinced that my students learn Greek better by not getting sucked into such hairsplitting too early. And chapter 9 in *FGG* is way too early to get a handle on aspect. This fine point can be worked on collectively in New Testament Greek Readings (our students are required to have five Greek Readings classes for the MDiv)—or as pastors in the field who meet weekly to read and appreciate next Sunday's gospel in the glorious Greek. Then, to be sure, aspect (and many other fine points) can be referenced and put to use to preach God's Word powerfully to the Christians who constitute our congregations.

Third, I have begun a second list of what I call overlooked constructions in *FGG*. Of course, no beginning Greek grammar can be expected to cover all grammatical constructions needed to read Greek adequately. However, it is astonishing how many constructions *FGG* does *not* take up: the possessive dative, accusative of respect, future participle of purpose, the Jussive Noun Clause (or at least content clauses such as one encounters repeatedly in the Pauline epistles), the so-called cognate accusative, the fear clause, indirect question, the use of the definite article to indicate possession (admittedly, more of a classical construction), and grammatical apposition. The infinitive in indirect discourse construction (sometimes referred to as ACI = Accusative with Infinitive) appears in chapter 42 (the final chapter of *FGG*), so students never really learn this construction—no, not even exceptionally gifted students.<sup>21</sup> Were I to revise *FGG*, I would put the infinitive

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<sup>20</sup> For the distinction between so-called “focus on the action” and “focus upon connection,” see chapter 9 (Aspect, and Imperfect Indicative Active and Middle Verb Forms) in *FGG*, page 56, and several additional times throughout the book.

<sup>21</sup> This type of indirect discourse consists of a verb of saying/thinking/knowing etc. that sets off a depending clause wherein a noun in the accusative case serves as the subject of a verb in the infinitive mood. Thus, “the apostle says [λέγει] that Jesus [τὸν Ἰησοῦν] loves [ἀγαπᾷν] the sinners.”

in indirect discourse construction much earlier in the book (at chapter 17, which is the second chapter on the infinitive); I would also add at least one example of this challenging construction in the practice sentences of all subsequent chapters so that students could understand it well before chapter 42. A similar argument can be made for the ACP construction—namely, Accusative-with-Participle-after-a-verb-of-Perception—which does not appear until chapter 41.<sup>22</sup> However, if ACP were introduced by chapter 22 (the third chapter on the participle) and drilled in the practice sentences of subsequent chapters, students would learn this construction by the time they got to the end of the book.

Admittedly, no one Greek grammar by itself is without fault or cannot be improved upon. Indeed, that is the job of any professor worth his or her salt—not to take a textbook “as is,” but indeed to work with it to teach students optimally, playing to strengths and helping each student to learn, regardless of limitations. *FGG* has served our church and its constituencies well and faithfully for many years—and, I hope, will continue to do so into perpetuity. But it can be improved upon in the ways just shown.

John G. Nordling

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For many examples of this construction that occur in the NT, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 604–605.

<sup>22</sup> An anarthrous participle in the accusative case, in conjunction with an accusative noun or pronoun, sometimes indicates indirect discourse after a verb of perception or communication. Thus, “when Jacob heard [*ἀκούσας*] that there was grain in Egypt [*ὄντα σιτία εἰς Αἴγυπτον*]” (Acts 7:12). For this example (and several others), see Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 646.

## Book Reviews

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**Barrett, Matthew, editor. *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls: Justification in Biblical, Theological, Historical, and Pastoral Perspective*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2019. 912 pages. Hardcover. \$60.00.**

As the title of this book alludes, it covers the doctrine of justification from the perspectives of the four-fold division of theology. There are twenty-six chapters by twenty-six authors. All but one has an earned doctorate and the exception is a Ph.D. candidate. The authors are of the Reformed persuasion, except for Timo Laato of Sweden and Korey Maas at Hillsdale College, Michigan, who are Lutheran.

The foci of this book are the challenges brought to the historic Reformation doctrine of justification by the “New Perspective on Paul” (hereafter NPP) and other recent trends. NPP is associated chiefly with the names of E.P. Sanders, James D.G. Dunn, and N.T. Wright. NPP is hardly new these days! Our Saint Louis seminary had two fine articles on NPP in the *Concordia Journal* by James Meek and Andrew Das in 2001 (*CJ* 27 [2001], 208–52). Our Fort Wayne seminary devoted two days in its Exegetical Symposium, January 17–18, 2006, addressing NPP and related issues. Many of those essays were published thereafter in the *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, e.g., Stephen Westerholm in 2006 (*CTQ* 70 no. 3/4 [July/Oct 2006]) and Mark Seifrid in 2008 (*CTQ* 72 no. 1 [Jan 2008]). The present book, edited by Barrett, overwhelms all of the arguments of NPP, and in my opinion does so successfully.

Which essays in this book are most useful or interesting for Lutheran pastors? I put five on the top of my list. First, I recommend Robert J. Cara, “Setting the Record Straight: Second Temple Judaism and Works Righteousness” (147–178). This is based on research found in Cara’s book *Cracking the Foundation of the New Perspective on Paul* (Mentor, 2017) and in: *Justification and Variegated Nomism* (Baker Academic, 2001), edited by D.A. Carson, Peter O’Brien, and Mark Seifrid. It proves conclusively that Second Temple Judaism had a strong element of works righteousness, and this is what Jesus and Paul were arguing against. Second, I recommend Timo Laato, “The New Quest for Paul: A Critique of the New Perspective on Paul” (295–326). This essay, which is the most pointed assessment of NPP in this book, is based on his articles and book, *Paul and Judaism: An Anthropological Approach* (Scholars Press, 1995).

Third, I recommend Korey Maas, “The First and Chief Article: Luther’s Discovery of *Sola Fide* and Its Controversial Reception in Lutheranism” (657–700).

This is an historical piece on Luther and his 16th century followers. Besides quoting familiar Lutheran authorities in his footnotes, Maas ends with a needed critique of the 1999 Catholic-Lutheran *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. Fourth, I would encourage readers to spend time on Bruce P. Baugus, “The Eclipse of Justification: Justification during the Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment Eras” (769–810). This is not just another historical piece that paints a picture of the “usual suspects.” Rather the author rightly points to Socinianism and its Unitarian connections, to English rationalists, to Pietists (!), and to Albrecht Ritschl as key enemies of the Reformation idea of justification. Finally, I encourage parish pastors and catechists to read the very practical and thought-provoking essay by Sam Storms, “The Ground on Which We Stand: The Necessity of Justification for Pastoral Ministry” (839–866). Storms makes the key distinction that “Not all faith is saving faith!” (848–849). What then is saving, justifying faith? If you do not know, answers can be found in the latest volume of Johann Gerhard, *Justification through Faith* (CPH, 2018), xiii, 112-119, 122-123, 215, 242-245.

Behind all this impressive scholarship lies the encouragement and research of older scholars like Mark Seifrid—now at our Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, and D.A. Carson. Carson gives a foreword and thus his imprimatur to this book *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls*. It is encouraging to see Carson’s “The Gospel Coalition” (see [www.thegospelcoalition](http://www.thegospelcoalition)) bring together Evangelical and Reformed leaders, in an attempt to preserve key Reformation insights in their institutions and churches. Preserving the doctrine of “justification through faith alone” is the key part of that attempt.

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**Nafzger, Samuel H., John F. Johnson, David A. Lumpp, and Howard W. Tepker, editors. *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology*. 2 Volumes. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017. 1,336 pages. Hardcover. \$89.99.**

An introduction in the first volume of *Confessing the Gospel* explains how this two-volume dogmatics will follow the building-block approach, a method resembling how encyclopedias are arranged according to topics and then further divided into sub-topics each with a different author. The project was initiated by then LCMS president Ralph Bohlmann who, in 1983 in response to several requests, appointed a committee to discuss the feasibility of a new dogmatics to serve the synod (xxv–xxviii). Directing the project from beginning to completion was

Samuel F. Nafzger, executive of the LCMS's Commission on Theology and Church Relations, who was well placed to identify theologians in the LCMS and its sister churches for the task. Thomas Aquinas's *De Summa Theologicae* and seventeenth century Lutheran, Reformed and Catholic dogmatics had only one author. More recent dogmatics with one author are Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* and Karl Barth's monumental *Church Dogmatics*, both of which are still cited. Since dogmatics are written to address current theological issues, there can be no once and for all dogmatics, though Pieper's dogmatics continues to represent the doctrinal position of the LCMS. Theology has become so expansive and diverse that the task was considered too large for one person and so was parceled out to about one hundred contributors. Multiple authorship has been used before. To commemorate the LCMS's centennial, it published *The Abiding Word*, but its popularly styled articles is not a dogmatics. More recently Fortress Press published *Christian Dogmatics*, edited by Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson. Each volume in *The Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics*, first edited by Robert Preus, then John Stephenson and now Gifford Grobrien, has one writer for each volume each with one locus or two. *Confessing the Gospel* lists the major author for each locus into which the contributions of others are added. Editors are responsible for the final form.

Twenty-five writers make the grade as "Primary Loci Contributors" for the fifteen loci or topics and approximately seventy are listed as contributors without identifying to which section they contributed. The 120 page locus on anthropology alone has five major contributors. Robert Kolb writes on baptism and election. From the beginning to the end of the thirty-five year production cycle, decisions were in the hands of Nafzger and the yeoman's work in polishing up the manuscripts was done by David Lumppp. What amounts to anonymous authorship follows the protocol of LCMS's Commission on Theology and Church Relations whose opinions originate with one person chosen by the commission and then expanded, abridged and edited by its members. With the Braaten-Jenson *Christian Dogmatics* and the Preus *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics*, readers know the author and can engage him. Respondents to *Confessing the Gospel* do not know for certain that the major contributor for the locus is responsible for what made it to the printed page.

Each locus follows the prescribed outline of the building block approach: scriptural foundation, confessional witness, systematic formulation, historical and contemporary development and, implications for life and ministry (1:xxix–xxx). A format of this kind is common in encyclopedias and *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. The historical and confessional blocks in *Confessing the Gospel* have a certain scholarly objectivity in summarizing how doctrines were regarded in the past. This comes with the turf. An index prepared for a second edition would

enhance these sections. However, dogmatics involve more than historical and confessional theology. Dogmatics are expansive theological treatises in which biblical data, creeds and confessions, church history, contemporary issues and practice are brought together and interwoven into theological topics called a locus. In doing this it challenges views contrary to the Scriptures and the Confessions.

The locus on Christology is as good as any other in seeing how the building block approach works. It is divided into two parts, the first is on the person of Christ (343–418) and the other on the work of Christ (419–622). Sub-sections are provided for the Old and New Testaments, each of which is further divided into sections for some but not all of the biblical books. By themselves such sections in themselves would be regarded as biblical theologies. Here it must be asked if what the Old Testament says about Christ and the New Testament says about Jesus as the Christ can be separated from the task of systematic theology? The section “Historical and Contemporary Developments” (481–513) would have been better subdivided. Historical theology tells us how the church did theology in the past and contemporary theology involves addressing new issues and those that remain unresolved. Without the integration of these topics into one section, the section on systematic theology section reads like a bare bones doctrinal statement lacking extensive theological engagement (459–479).

Christ’s descent into hell, his resurrection, his ascension and session at God’s right hand, and his second coming receive barely one page (467–470). Discussion on the descent makes no reference to 1 Peter 3:18-20, the traditional *sedes doctrina*. According to the building block arrangement this passage should be placed in the biblical section, but it is not. Hebrews 3:2 is cited with the intent of rejecting the view that a chance to repent is given after death, which is true, but this passage says nothing of the descent. With diverse views on what the descent into hell means, how the Orthodox, Catholic, the Reformed and contemporary theologians interpret it might have been included. This is not an insignificant issue, since the ELCA’s Evangelical Lutheran Worship offers the alternative that Christ went to the dead, a phrase so ambiguous that several interpretations are allowed. This section in *Confessing the Gospel* grasps the theological theme that the descent into hell has to do with Christ’s conquest of Satan. Well and good, but the argument that it is in “keeping with the analogy of faith” is no substitute for fuller biblical exposition of a phrase in a creed that was already in use in the apostolic era. In a more typical dogmatic, this would have been the locus to engage the *Christus Victor* theme offered in the last century by Gustaf Aulen and now taken up in the *Theology of the Cross*. Christ’s descent into hell takes us back to Genesis 3 with the promise that the woman’s seed will crush the serpent’s head. The biblical, historical, and contemporary aspects of a doctrine are better presented as a whole than divided.

Critique of Vincent Taylor's denial of Christ's death as a propitiation for sin is properly addressed (498–502) and includes a refutation of Gerhard Forde's view the atonement as only complete "when God succeeds in creating faith, love, and hope" (501). Why then is Forde commended in the Prolegomena (11, n 15)? Forde comes up for discussion for his views on predestination that God is the cause of faith and also apostasy. More precisely the human will is not the cause of apostasy. Divine action takes place in proclamation, a view taken over from Forde (1,256) into the *Theology of the Cross*. Luther's theology of the cross, classically articulated in the Heidelberg Disputation finds its way into the prolegomena. If this is a theme that rarely comes later in the Reformer's theology (10–12), why does it have a place in the section on how theology is done? It is not pointed out that Luther's version is hardly identical with what has been and is being proposed by Forde, James Nestigen and Steven Paulson.

One cannot expect a unifying theme or a cohesive narrative from a book like *Confessing the Gospel* which evolved from multiple authors, even for the same sections, and editors. In certain cases one is uncertain on what was intended. Consider this, "What is written in the Scriptures possesses unquestioned authority, authority alongside of and equal to the Words of the incarnate Word of God himself (John 2:22)" (633). Really? What is written in the Scriptures are the very words of the Incarnate Word himself not words alongside of his other words. Why is "Words" in upper case? Is it really so that "after Pentecost, the authoritative writings of the early church were Hebrew Scriptures . . . [or] the Greek translation, the Septuagint" (664)? The oral gospel, what Acts calls "the teaching of the apostles," took precedence over everything else. Early Christians came together to talk about Jesus (Acts 2:42) and they did this in terms of the Old Testament which was never isolated from what Jesus had done. Defining biblical inspiration not only as a supernatural but also an historical act is appreciated (741). Paul's epistles were so widely read that they were considered Scriptures and the same can be said for whatever Gospels were in hands of the apostolic churches. The half page on infant faith informs readers that infants do not have "conscious faith' or 'reflective faith'" (567). There is enough scientific evidence to show that these little ones even before they are born have active intellects. It would help if these, and similar truisms, were biblically demonstrated. The "of course" arguments do not do the job.

Any dogmatics is anchored in time and with a dogmatics that took over thirty-five years from start to finish, some of the major contributors and those of whom they wrote have left the stage. A word of clarification is in order about the origins of *Confessing the Gospel* in the year 1983 (xxiii). Seeds for this project were sown when Bohlmann and Robert Preus were both still professors on the Saint Louis

faculty. The year was no later than 1973. (See my *Surviving the Storms*, 185–197). *Confessing the Gospel* was a “go-fund-me” project that would not have made it off the Concordia Publishing House printing presses without a little help from above.

Along with others I will consult *Confessing the Gospel* from time to time to ascertain what is said to be the synod’s doctrinal position. Sections on creation, God, and Christology were good reading. An index for the second edition would make it better reading. Preparing this review was like having a conversation not knowing with whom one is speaking unless the writer(s) should later come forward and identify themselves. Anonymous multiple authorship is not a new theological phenomenon. For generations, Old Testament scholars have been singling out J-E-D-P to identify the origins of the Pentateuch. New Testament scholars do the same in locating the origins of Matthew and Luke in Mark and Q. In similar fashion, *Confessing the Gospel* brings the LCMS into the guessing game of matching the texts with the contributors.

David P. Scaer

**Pribbenow, Brad.** *Prayerbook of Christ: Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Christological Interpretation of the Psalms.* Lanham, Maryland: The Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, 2018. 248 pages. Hardcover. \$95.00.

In Brad Pribbenow’s own words, “the focus of this book is on the Christological interpretation of the Psalms as formed and practiced by Dietrich Bonhoeffer” (181); and yet, it is so much more. Pribbenow’s work begins with a broad historical survey of the way the Psalms have been interpreted from the New Testament through the time of Scholasticism, to Martin Luther’s interpretation of the Psalms, through the time of modernity, and ending with how the Old Testament as a whole was viewed in the early twentieth century. This broad survey lays the groundwork for Pribbenow’s central thesis: namely that Bonhoeffer’s approach to understanding the Psalms and praying them is, in certain aspects, unique in this long tradition of interpretation.

In support of his thesis, Pribbenow contends that Bonhoeffer sees Jesus as the one who not only prayed the Psalms in his incarnation, but also, as true God, is simultaneously the one to whom the Psalms are being prayed. In one thought-provoking example, Pribbenow cites Bonhoeffer’s controversial treatment of Psalm 58 where he sees Jesus as both the one praying the Psalm, *and* the one *against* whom the psalm is prayed. How Bonhoeffer arrives at this interpretation is that he sees Jesus as both the innocent one and the one who assumes all of humanity’s sin and rebellion in himself, becoming “sin for us.” (2 Cor. 5:21)

Pribbenow asserts that Bonhoeffer's unique Christological interpretation of the Psalms provides the church-community with a new understanding of what is happening when Christians pray the Psalms. Because Christ Himself prayed them in his incarnation and made them his prayerbook, the words of the Psalms are given a new authority as the words of God and, as such, they are the ultimate prayerbook of the Church. Pribbenow cites other theologians who support this idea, going even further and asserting that the whole corpus of the Psalms is simply an elongated rendering of the Lord's Prayer, as both the Lord's Prayer and the Psalms encompass everything for which the Christian should pray, as evidenced by the fact that Jesus himself prayed in this way. This understanding of praying the Psalms is enhanced by realizing that Christ, as our ascended High Priest *continues* to pray them as he did while here on earth, with the result that when the Christian prays, it is Christ who is praying *with* him, *in* him, and *for* him.

Pribbenow's work is thoroughly scholarly, providing a richly satisfying insight into Bonhoeffer's theological treatment of the Psalms as he applied them to himself and the people he counseled, especially during the time of Nazi persecution and his own imprisonment. The pastor-theologian will find many examples of how Bonhoeffer treated various Psalms in his sermons, lectures, commentary, and devotional writings. The chapters are short and easily manageable, with the nice addition of a full chronology of Bonhoeffer's life at the end of the book. A minor critique might be that Pribbenow routinely repeats key thoughts and phrases throughout the book, but this does not distract from the book's overall readability. For the pastor-theologian who would be a student of the Psalms, this is recommended reading.

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**Grindheim, Sigurd. *Living in the Kingdom of God: A Biblical Theology for the Life of the Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. 192 pages. Softcover. \$24.99**

As the reader will note, there is no shortage of published material regarding the "kingdom of God." One can easily find piles of books on the topic with each author highlighting a particular aspect of the kingdom of God using a plethora of Bible passages to support their premise. In many ways, Grindheim's book "Living in the Kingdom of God: A Biblical Theology for the Life of the Church" is no different. Refreshingly, however, Grindheim does not go the way of many of his contemporaries which often misuse the term, and therefore much of the Bible, in order to awaken their readers to today's social injustices. No, Grindheim, in a

seemingly chiasmic fashion, sets the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the free forgiveness of sins squarely in the center of his thesis and therefore also in the center of this book.

Each chapter in the book has its counterpart. Chapter one discusses our “dream of utopia” and humanity’s failure to attain it due to our first parents fall into sin. Chapter eight concludes the book looking forward to the day of Christ’s return and the perfect manifestation of the Kingdom of God in the new heavens and the new earth.

Chapter two sets forth the biblical answer to humanity’s failure in the coming of Jesus as the King who rightly deals with the root problem of evil in the world: sin, death, and the devil. “Where Jesus is, there God rules. When you see the person of Jesus Christ, then you see God’s rule on earth. Where Jesus is, there the world is the way God wants it to be. Evil must flee. Justice is established. There is life. There is blessedness. Everything is good. God’s rule is there” (25). In chapter seven Grindheim shows how the Christian community, Christ’s Church, engages society and carries the kingdom of God to the far reaches of the globe. As hearts are transformed by the gospel, whole communities are changed.

In chapter three Grindheim contrasts Jesus’ kingly nature with that of humanity’s expectations. Jesus is a different kind of king who brings a different kind of rule. “He exercised His might by suffering, by being humiliated, and by appearing to suffer the ultimate defeat: the shameful death of crucifixion . . . ” (pg. 46). Having defeated evil, Jesus sets the captives free. That freedom is expressed in chapter 6 as Grindheim discusses the freedom of the Christian, freedom to live as His own dear children. This freedom is a freedom to be good. “No one can do good works unless they are free” (117). The kingdom of God is a kingdom ruled by a gracious king. This “kingly rule of God is a reality that is hidden under the guise of weakness,” (119) not in power or glory.

Chapters four and five are the center of the book. Everything leads to these chapters and everything flows from them. Chapter four sets forth how a person enters the kingdom. Chapter five describes what the kingdom looks like. In chapter four one enters the kingdom by grace through faith. In chapter five we find Christians exercising Christ’s kingly rule as they receive and show forgiveness, are reconciled to God in Christ and reconcile with others. This kingly rule is not established by Christians, nor the church, but it is proclaimed.

Throughout his work, Grindheim makes of use of the biblical testimony, drawing his conclusions from the text rather than the current *zeitgeist*. This makes for a compelling read and a welcome addition to the many and various writings on the Kingdom of God.

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**McKnight, Scot and Joseph B. Modica, editors. *Preaching Romans: Four Perspectives*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2019. 160 pages. Softcover. \$20.00.**

The preacher who uses the three year series will have ample opportunity to preach from Romans during Series A. It is during the Series A cycle that Romans occurs the most frequently in the pericopes. Those who use the one year series will still find opportunities. Whether the preacher chooses to preach occasionally on the readings from Romans, or to formulate a sermon series on the book, there will be a desire to have a deeper understanding of the letter.

McKnight and Modica present the different approaches to Romans that are prevalent today. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list of approaches but rather to highlight those that are most common. The approaches that are presented are the “Reformational Perspective”, the “New Perspective”, the “Apocalyptic Perspective”, and the “Participationist Perspective.”

The Lutheran preacher will obviously be familiar and quite comfortable with approaching Romans from the “Reformational Perspective.” The “Reformational Perspective” recognizes how Paul so clearly presents the Doctrine of Justification by Grace through Faith in his letter. This is the core of Romans. This is the core of the Christian faith and the goal of the preacher is to proclaim clearly forensic justification.

The other approaches to the letter of Romans do not see objective justification as the center of Paul’s letter, at least not in the same way as the “Reformational Approach.” Even the understanding of justification is, to some extent, different. The Lutheran preacher will find much with which to disagree in these approaches. The “New Perspective” for example relies on a reconstruction of Judaism that concludes that Judaism was not a religion of works righteousness and therefore was not fundamentally different from Christianity. The “Participationist Perspective” argues that we should not separate justification from sanctification. The Lutheran, after reading Michael Gorman’s explanation of this view, will counter that we should not confuse them either.

Having presented the different views of Romans, the book presents sermons that are preached from each perspective. This allows the preacher to see how these different approaches might look when preached. The first half of the book does an excellent job of summarizing the different preaching approaches to Romans. Those who are looking for an introduction to the various approaches to Romans will find this to be an excellent resource. The “Reformational” preacher, however, who is looking for new ways to present the timeless message of salvation by grace through faith, the goal of the apostle in this letter, will not find as much value.

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**Johnson, Dru. *Human Rites: The Power of Rituals, Habits, and Sacraments*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2019. 176 pages. Softcover. \$13.00.**

Ours is a ritual-eat-ritual-world and it is not always clear who we can trust to shape our habits and lives. *Human Rites*, by Dru Johnson, is a common-sense argument about why thinking about ritual is important. As far as it goes, it is incredibly persuasive and can easily be placed into the hands of our lay-members to great benefit.

Johnson recognizes the unity of the human person: we are not just minds or souls, but bodies operating in a physical world. Everywhere we go and everything we do is marked by ritual: what you have for breakfast, what clothing you find in your closet, what you listen to in the car, which pew you sit in at church, and what you do with your phone. It is all ritualized—sometimes wittingly, but more often unwittingly. This book calls us to be more witting ritualists, even if we do not exactly understand the ritual (think: Mr. Miyagi, “wax on, wax off”).

And that brings us to the book’s short-coming—if we can call it that: it does not go far enough. Though Johnson is an ordained Presbyterian minister and Old Testament faculty member at King’s College, NYC, he was asked to write this book for anyone from the layman in our pews to the atheist on the bar-stool beside us. (There is an extended, more academic version: *Knowledge by Ritual: A Biblical Prolegomenon to Sacramental Theology*, Eisenbrauns, 2016.) Admittedly, he wrote this book primarily to call attention to the ritualization of daily life, not specifically that of the church. But, as Lutherans, we have been gifted with such a profound and robust ritual heritage—liturgically speaking—that we are left wanting more, especially when it comes to the sacraments.

For that “more,” I would urge you to read John Kleinig’s fine article, “Witting or Unwitting Ritualists” (*Lutheran Theological Journal* 22/1 [1988], 13-22). What Johnson hints at and scratches the surface of, Kleinig gives in full measure; and he does so in just ten pages.

Nevertheless, I heartily recommend Johnson’s book for the sake of its clarity, easy-reading, and accessibility for the average layman. It wonderfully provides the groundwork for a through examination of our own ritualized lives—warning us to discern who prescribes it, to what end, and how the ritual can turn “dark” or “flimsy”—and then invites us to teach the beauty and power of ritual offered to us in the Divine Service. Use it for a book club or Bible study. But make sure you read Kleinig alongside.

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**Grudem, Wayne. *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2018. 1296 pages. Hardcover. \$59.99.**

Wayne Grudem, Research Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies at Phoenix Seminary, is no stranger to the field of ethics, having written books previously on political theology and economic ethics. *Christian Ethics*, however, is his first comprehensive offering in the field, and he covers the material well in this almost one-thousand, three-hundred page tome.

Grudem’s methodological approach is indicated in the subtitle, *An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning*. When considering ethical questions, Grudem says he has tried to consider every Bible passage that addresses the ethical topic and to draw his conclusions from these passages (37). He spends little time considering philosophical methods of ethics, or even theological ethics, which he defines as beginning with certain theological doctrines and drawing ethical conclusions from these doctrines (rather than every relevant Bible passage). He is critical of tactics that allow broader “principles” to make exceptions from following all the “rules” of Scripture (52–53). He acknowledges the deontological, teleological, and virtue-oriented approaches to ethics, yet because and to the extent that they are taught in the Bible.

The vast majority of the book addresses ethical topics categorized according to the Ten Commandments (numbered according to the Reformed system). He has engaging chapters on many topics, and his scope of biblical references will benefit most readers, reminding them of relevant passages that may not always be remembered. Of particular interest are his chapters on truth-telling (ch. 12),

in which he argues convincingly that a Christian never has to lie to prevent a greater sin, and the husband's headship in marriage (ch. 15). His breadth of biblical knowledge is especially demonstrated in these chapters, which would be an encouraging review for many. Various chapters on economics, wealth, and business (particularly chs. 34, 36, 37, and 40), and the environment (ch. 41) demonstrate the Bible's concern for personal property, general economic liberty, and environmental stewardship that recognizes the earth's sustainability under God's providential care.

Occasionally, Grudem does not consider relevant Bible passages. For example, he omits mention of Leviticus 25:13–17 (the return of landed property in the Year of Jubilee) and consideration of the extent to which this suggests a concern with the vast accumulation of economic assets by a few owners. On some other topics, Grudem surprisingly says little or nothing about significant yet often overlooked matters, such as concerns with hormonal types of birth control, or the problems surrounding in vitro fertilization (IVF). Regarding birth control, he does state that birth control which “would cause the death” of a newly conceived child are impermissible (753). However, Grudem also says that most birth-control pills are acceptable, and he says nothing about other hormonal methods, such as injection, the patch, or various types of implants, even though hormonal methods of birth control may, in some cases, cause the death of a newly conceived child. With respect to IVF, while Grudem does argue it is acceptable only when a small number of eggs is fertilized so that no embryos be destroyed, he does not address other concerns, such as the temptation to fertilize many eggs to avoid costs of successive rounds of treatment, the risk of ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome, or the genetic testing done on IVF embryos which can lead to birth defects or other abnormalities.

Perhaps an introductory book on ethics, even one the size of Grudem's, cannot be expected to address every facet of the many topics in ethics. But Grudem's methodology risks setting up the false expectation in the reader that he is addressing every question thoroughly. By claiming to bring every relevant Bible passage to bear in Christian ethics and to apply the teaching prudentially, Grudem is implying that he is being comprehensive in scope. Not every relevant Bible passage is considered; not every facet of application is addressed. In fact, the very nature of ethics as a prudential, circumstantial discipline makes it doubtful that any one work could address the field comprehensively.

That being said, the discerning reader who stays aware of this limitation, can gain much from this volume. While Grudem's treatment is not comprehensive, it is extensive, and his engagement with many and various Bible passages will benefit readers. Scholars, pastors, and lay people alike can deepen their understanding of issues and be oriented to issues which they can pursue through further study—and Grudem provides an extensive bibliography on each topic at the conclusion

of each chapter. The book should benefit both those who read it through and also those who use it simply as a reference to be consulted as topics come up.

Gifford A. Grobien

**Saunders, Stephen M. *A Christian Guide to Mental Illness: Helping Christians Obtain Treatment for Mental Illness. Volume 2.* Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2019. 597 pages. Hardcover. \$49.99.**

In this second volume, Dr. Saunders treats the topics from how to approach one you may think has a mental illness who is not being treated, through the areas of how and when to make referrals. The first volume covered the basics of mental illness; its various definitions and the role of the church in care and support for the suffering and their families.<sup>1</sup> Where the first volume looked more at specific mental health illnesses, this second volume is aimed at understanding the mental health field. The aim of this book is to be a resource for pastors and teachers to help families and individuals make good informed choices in the area of mental health.

The book is divided into five parts. Part one is a history of the treatment of mental illness from antiquity to modern day, including discussions on scientific inquiry, psychiatry, psychology, and social work. Part two is an overview of the mental health system; its history, professionals, ethics, professional standards, and how mental health services are paid. Part three breaks down the diagnosis and treatment process. Part four discusses various causes of mental illness from biological, psychological, and environmental factors. While all the parts are good in their own right, part five is invaluable. Part five covers issues of how to have helpful conversations, potential burdens that face families and caregivers, how to make referrals, and how to be good resources for mental health as pastors, teachers, churches, and schools.

There is a lot of information to process, and this book may be better understood as a reference book. There are good examples and illustrations used; however, note that the flow of the work is sometimes disrupted by the illustrations being placed in various text-boxes.

In the vast field of mental health, these works by Saunders bear an important Lutheran distinction. While he notes a “link between spiritual and emotional well-being” (169), he also states their distinguishing features: “The preaching of Christ

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<sup>1</sup> For more on volume 1, see Gary Zieroth’s online review of *A Christian Guide to Mental Illness, Volume 1: Recognizing Mental Illness in the Church and School*, <https://www.ctsfw.edu/resources/concordia-theological-quarterly/book-reviews/a-christian-guide-to-mental-illness-volume-1-recognizing-mental-illness-in-the-church-and-school>, accessed July 26, 2019.

crucified is the assurance of salvation, which makes many people feel better. But whether they feel better or not, the sins of the faithful are forgiven.” (169) He also points out the dangers of the theology of glory, and how it is “particularly cruel to those persons with mental illness.” (552) To this end, the role of the pastor is not only important, but it is precious, unique and vital to those with mental illness. Saunders confesses, “Proper care for mental illness and mental health concerns is provided by mental health professionals, whereas spiritual comfort and consolation is the duty of pastors and of the church.” (521) If pastors, the church, and mental health professionals work within their vocations, it is good, right, and salutary. Saunders concludes, “It is my firm belief that a proper Christian attitude toward mental illness entails acknowledging one’s sin and being firm in the faith of one’s salvation. These are the things that the church can provide, which mental health professionals cannot. At the same time, mental health professions are able to provide those things needed that the church cannot.” (570). These two volumes are highly worth every pastor’s time.

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**Borrasso, Matthew E.** *The Art of Exegesis: An Analysis of the Life and Work of Martin Hans Franzmann.* Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2019. 220 pages. Softcover. \$27.00.

Today Franzmann is more likely to be known to Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastors and congregations for his six hymns in the *Lutheran Service Book*. His “Thy Strong Word” has found its way into other hymnals and his translation of “With High Delight Let Us Unite” is an Easter favorite. Franzmann was also a New Testament scholar with an extensive literary output (161–191). He joined the faculty of Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis in 1948, not long before methods questioning the historical authenticity of the biblical narratives were introduced. Perhaps with premonition of nearing disruption over the validity of these methods, he left in 1969 to become the tutor of Westfield House in Cambridge, England. During his seminary teaching career he found himself caught between younger professors who held to the newer radical views of biblical interpretations and the old guard who adhered to the historical grammatical method. In February 1974 these differences came to a head when the faculty majority left their posts, an action that eventually led to the formation of the ELCA. Then in England, Franzmann was chosen by LCMS president J.A.O. Preus to deliver the lead essay at an April, 1975, convocation to mediate the opposing positions. Both sides took

exception to Franzmann's paper and despondently he returned to Cambridge and in less than year he had gone to his death (152–155).

Bossarro handles Franzmann both critically and sympathetically. Unless readers knew otherwise, they would not recognize that *The Art of Exegesis* had been submitted first as a thesis for the master of sacred theology degree at United Lutheran Seminary, an institution combining the resources of the ELCA seminaries in Gettysburg and Philadelphia. The challenge in writing about Franzmann is how to present one who was both respected and yet rejected. Those who held opposing views on biblical interpretation looked to Franzmann for confirmation but in the end neither claimed him as its own (156). He was as much of a poet as he was theologian and would likely have lived a more contented life, had he remained an English professor, a position he held at the Northwestern College of the Wisconsin Synod and in whose theology and seminary he was brought up. Assigned by LCMS president John Behnken to prepare theological opinions and represent the synod in conversations with other Lutherans in America and Europe, Franzmann was the synod's de facto ecumenical officer (15, 115–129). What made him stand out from those who shared his theologically conservative views was that commitment to the Lutheran Confessions did not take precedence over the Scriptures by which they must be continually tested.

Franzmann's crowning achievement could have been his essay "The Nature and Function of Holy Scripture" which was delivered at the April, 1975, convocation that was intended as a last ditch effort, by LCMS president J.A.O. Preus, to prevent what was already then the irretrievable split in the synod. At issue was that the historical, critical method on which its practitioners, in and out of the synod, both then and now, had no agreed definition. As he had done before, Franzmann parsed the words 'historical' and 'critical' to come up with a definition with which few were satisfied (154–155). Harold Bultman of the Fort Wayne faculty, a respondent for the conservative side, accused him of avoiding the real issues. For Ralph Klein, representing a radical definition, Franzmann had not gone far enough. Bossarro's last chapter, "Weary of All Trumpeting," echoes Franzmann's desperation that led nearly a year later to his death, which was hardly noted in church publications. King David was both poet and warrior. Franzmann was more poet than warrior (39). By my count he wrote twenty hymns and translated nine (186–187).

Bossarro's account brought back memories of the April, 1975, convocation. In the off hours Franzmann could be seen walking by himself around the campus. The man who had articulated the synod's doctrine and represented its beliefs before other Lutherans was towards the end of his life alone. In calling for a convocation, Preus may have known that reconciliation between the opposing sides was no longer possible—this was evident years before. The dice had already been cast in February,

1974 and by April, 1975 that date had already become history. The convocation was hardly a slam dunk for the conservative party. Buls, who was the assigned champion for the conservative side (154), had his back pushed up against the wall by a barrage of questions from Robert Bertram that he could not answer. A review of the tapes will tell that story. E. J. Otto, Saint Louis chairman of the seminary board whose removal of Tietjen as president that precipitated the faculty walkout, walked back and forth at the rear of the chapel auditorium saying “Get him down! Get him down! He’s blowing it.” What precluded any positive outcome was an agreement there would be no time limitations for those who spoke from the floor microphones. Former Saint Louis faculty took advantage of this to give lengthy speeches that posed as questions. LCMS first vice-president Roland Wideranders was ineffective as chairman. Caught in the middle of a storm that already had lost its fury was Martin Franzmann.

No one event or person led up to that February day in 1974 when the Saint Louis faculty left their positions, but Norman Habel and Martin Scharlemann stand out. In a recent fancifully written autobiography, *Why Are You Still a Lutheran? Memoirs of a Heretic Habel*, who first stirred the pot in proposing an allegorical interpretation of Genesis 1–3, claims that Franzmann encouraged him to hold fast to his views. This seems unlikely, but who knows? Franzmann could be on both sides of an issue. Then there is Martin Scharlemann whose paper to the faculty on higher criticism aroused Franzmann’s ire. Scharlemann, who at first stood to the left of Franzmann, had had moved to his right. Franzmann had not changed. It would have been helpful if Bossarro had gone into detail on Franzmann’s critique of Scharlemann.

Bossarro’s book adds another chapter to what happened at the Saint Louis seminary in 1960s and 70s, but with Franzmann there will always be a few more cracks to be filled. In a master of sacred theology thesis presented to the Fort Wayne seminary faculty, LCMS pastor Daniel Burfiend argues that Franzmann should be understood primarily as a hymn writer (xi). This may be one way, but not the only way, in coming to terms with the man Martin Franzmann was. His leaving the seminary six years before the majority faculty walkout may have been prescient that differences between friends could not be resolved without someone—perhaps all, including himself—being hurt. He was as much a tragic figure as was the synod itself. Bossarro has done a favor for the synod to which Franzmann devoted his professional life. Since this book preserves data that is not otherwise available, it deserves an index.

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- Cary, Phillip. *The Meaning of Protestant Theology: Luther, Augustine, and the Gospel That Gives Us Christ*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. 384 pages. Softcover. \$32.99.
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- Gignilliat, Mark S. *Reading Scripture Canonically: Theological Instincts for Old Testament Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. 144 pages. Softcover. \$21.99.
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Myers, Ben. *The Apostle's Creed: A Guide to the Ancient Catechism*. Christian Essentials. Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2018. 112 pages. Hardcover. \$15.99.

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Senkbeil, Harold L. *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart*. Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2019. 312 pages. Hardcover. \$21.99.

Van Pelt, Miles V. and Gary D. Pratico. *Biblical Hebrew Vocabulary in Context: Building Competency with Words Occuring 50 Times or More*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019. 144 pages. Softcover. \$16.99.

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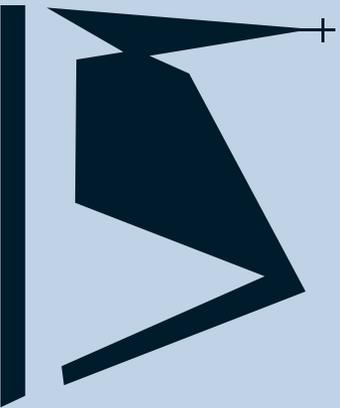
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