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Faith in the Old and New Testaments: Harmony or Disagreement?

Seth Erlandsson

Many people are rather unclear about the Biblical concept of faith. This lack of clarity especially pertains to faith in the Old Testament, but it also involves faith in the New Testament. Does "faith" really mean the same thing in both testaments? Is not Old Testament religion mainly a religion of law in contrast to that of the New Testament? Are the object and content of faith the same in both testaments? If so, does the harmony consist in this, that our justification in both testaments is based upon faith plus works? Or does it consist in this, that our justification in both testaments is based solely on the Lord and accepted through faith alone? I think that the uncertainties about faith in the Bible are due, first of all, to superficial ideas about the teachings of the Old Testament. Therefore, faith in the Old Testament will attract most of the attention in this study. In order to clarify the nature and content of faith, it is natural to concentrate on two subjects: (1.) the gospel (the object of faith in the two testaments) and (2.) the law and its role in the two testaments.

I. The Gospel

The gospel presupposes that man, without God's grace and mercy, is hopelessly lost. The Fall of man and its disastrous consequences are the background for the gospel in both the Old and New Testaments. Because of its corrupted nature, mankind cannot produce the new man (that is, the righteousness and holiness) which God demands. Man is, therefore, worthy of death and eternal damnation. The gospel in its proper sense is the good and joyful message that the Lord Himself takes care of the hopeless sinner. To such sinners God promises and gives mercy, forgiveness of sins and eternal life "for His own sake," for man has in no way deserved God's grace and salvation. The Formula of Concord gives this clear definition of the gospel (SD V:21):

For everything which comforts and which offers the mercy and grace of God to the transgressors of the law strictly speaking is, and is called, the Gospel.¹

It ought to be superfluous here to prove that the background for the gospel, man's corrupted human nature and inability to keep the law, is the same in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. But what about the gospel? Is the object of faith the same?

A. HARMONY

The object of faith in both testaments is God's undeserved goodness and mercy. Through His gracious acts and promises, God shows that He cares for sinful man. He promises sinful man His blessings and salvation "for His own sake," which means that He Himself is the only cause of this grace.

A Short Survey

A short survey will confirm this conclusion. As soon as man has revolted against God and brought about his own ruin, God shows that He cares for sinful man. God does not wait for man's improvement before He promises help and salvation. He always takes the initiative and offers to be the sinner's God and to save him. He helps Adam and Eve to realize their sin (Gen. 3:14-15). Man is given hope and new life through this promise. Then God continues to show His goodness toward man. He makes garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothes them (Gen. 3:21). Even the brother-murderer Cain receives a mark from God so that no one will kill him (Gen. 4:1). Eve praises God's grace when she gives birth to Cain (Gen. 4:1) and Seth (Gen. 4:25). And at that time people start publicly to proclaim — call out and call on (in Hebrew *qara'*) — the name of the Lord (Gen. 4:26). Notice that the basis for true worship is God's blessings (see also Gen. 12:8). The believer knows that the reason for God's mercy and man's life and salvation is only "the name of the Lord." To believe (in Hebrew the *hiphil* of *'mn*) means to say "amen" to God and His promises, to trust Him and His words.

When we reach Abraham's time, about two thousand years before Christ, God makes His promise about the woman's seed more and more specific, first to Abraham and his offspring: "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3); "Through your seed all nations on earth will be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). Of Abraham's children, the promise is given specifically to Isaac (Gen. 26:4,24); of Isaac's children, to Jacob (Gen. 28:14); of Jacob's children, to Judah (Gen. 49:8-12); of Judah's many descendents, to Jesse (Is. 11:1); and of his children, to David (2 Sam. 7). And when the time had fully come and God the Father sends His beloved Son, the promised Savior, He is born, in accordance with the promise in Micah 5:2, in Bethlehem, the town of David. So the New Testament is correct when it emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the oath-bound promise to Abraham in Genesis 22 (Luke 1:73; Gal. 3:16), the promise to David (Luke 1:32, 69), the promises through the prophets (Luke 1:70). The basis for the promise of life and victory,

salvation and blessing, which was given to the fathers since the day of the fall, was all the time the promised seed, the Son of Man, the Savior. *He* is the only salvation, peace, comfort, righteousness, and light for every man since the day of the fall till the last day. He Himself says that Moses wrote about Him (John 5:46). Not only is He the decisive content of the gift of God, the gospel; He is also the content of the demand of God. He is the new Man who loves the Father and His fellowman perfectly. He says, "Here I am, I have come — it is written about Me in the scroll" (Ps. 40:7).

What Is Meant by Faith?

It is impossible to speak about faith in the right way if one does not speak of and include the *object* of faith, namely, the promises of grace and mercy. Luther explains the *nature* of faith when he comments on the blessings through Abraham's seed:

It is the nature of faith to believe with certainty that we are blessed, not through ourselves but through Christ, who is our blessing. Hence we bless ourselves and maintain that we are the ones to whom that blessing belongs, for it is faith which apprehends the blessing.²

To believe these most glorious promises and to expect these blessings from God with firm confidence is true faith.³

Accordingly, let us strengthen and fortify ourselves against the doubts of the papists, and let us learn that for God the only completely pleasing worship and obedience is faith, that is, to believe and trust our God.⁴

In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession we get the following definition of true faith:

The faith that justifies, however, is no mere historical knowledge, but the firm acceptance of God's offer promising forgiveness of sins and justification [IV: 48].

Faith is that worship which receives God's offered blessings . . . It is by faith that God wants to be worshiped, namely, that we receive from him what he promises and offers [IV: 49].

He [Paul] says that only faith can accept the promise. He therefore correlates and connects promise and faith [IV: 50].

And so at every mention of mercy we must remember that this requires faith, which accepts the promise of mercy. Similarly, at every mention of faith we are also thinking of its object, the promised mercy. For faith does not justify or save because it is a good work in itself, but only because it accepts the promised mercy. This service and worship is especially

praised throughout the prophets and the Psalms. Even though the law does not teach the free forgiveness of sins, the patriarchs knew the promise of Christ, that for his sake God intended to forgive sins [IV: 55-57].

This is how God wants to be known and worshiped, that we accept his blessings and receive them because of his mercy rather than because of our own merits [IV: 60]

That this definition of faith in the Apology is true not only regarding the New Testament can be shown by a few examples from the Old Testament. Already a look at book one of the Psalms (Ps. 1-41) will convince us:

From the Lord comes deliverance [3:8].

Turn, O Lord, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love [6:4].

I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me [13:5-6].

The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Savior! [18:46].

O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer [19:14].

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing [23:1].

Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old [25:5-6].

For the sake of your name, O Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great [25:11].

The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life — of whom shall I be afraid [27:1].?

For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime [30:5].

Be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me [31:2-3].

Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O Lord, the God of truth [31:5].

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered [32:1].

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" — and you forgave the guilt of my sin [32:5].

We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name [33:20-21].

The Lord redeems his servants; no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned [34:22].

Say to my soul, "I am your salvation" [35:3].

Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies [36:5].

Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Savior [38:22].

Is it possible to describe the object of faith and salvation by grace alone in a better way?

If space permitted, we could see in the Old Testament prophets how the demands of the law and the promises of the gospel are presented side by side. For example, after Isaiah presents the law's demand for a new and clean man in 1:16-17, he adds the absolution of the gospel: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (v 18). Only he who believes the promise of the gospel gets a new heart which wants to fulfil the demands of the law. The words "wash and make yourselves clean, stop doing wrong" denounce ungodly hearts and require faith, which only the gospel can create. The gospel shines clearly in the prophets as well as in the Psalms. A few more examples would be appropriate:

I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more [Is. 43:25].

I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you [Is. 44:22].

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness" [Jer. 23:5-6].

B. DISAGREEMENT

The Outward Form of the Gospel

There is no real disagreement between the Old and New Testaments, only slight differences regarding the outward form of the gospel. For obvious reasons the promised salvation and the Savior appear in more detail when the fulfilment of the promise takes place. Let us use the language of Paul in Colossians 2:17 about the shadow of things that were to come, and Christ and His work as the reality behind this shadow. It is natural that the proper interpretation of the shadow in the Old Testament may be found in the reality itself, the New Testament fulfilment; for the shadow emanates from the reality. We can also use the picture in Isaiah 30:26 and apply it to the greater clarity of the New

Testament: "The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days, when the Lord binds up the bruises of His people and heals the wounds He inflicted." The Christian church therefore is not ashamed of interpreting the shadows in the Old Testament from the fulfilment in Christ. When, for example, the promises in the Old Testament do not mention the meritorious cause of God's mercy and the forgiveness of sins or else use the words "for his own sake" or "for the sake of his name," it is possible for the Christian church to state more precisely "for Christ's sake." In the Apology we have many examples of this specifying interpretation of the Old Testament. But the meritorious cause is mentioned also in the Old Testament, even in detail, as in Isaiah 53. And the sacrifices of unblemished animals, which vicariously had to die for human sins, are a very clear shadow of Christ's *satisfactio vicaria*.

The Pictorial Language of the Old Testament

Regarding differences, we ought also mention that the gospel in the Old Testament is often clothed in pictorial language, which refers to the unique conditions of the Old Testament theocracy — the connection of the Old Testament church with a certain land, a certain nation, a certain city, a certain mountain, a certain priestly tribe, etc. In order to picture the realities of the spiritual blessings of the New Testament the Old Testament prophets use the physical realities of the Old Testament church. Against the background of ruined cities, war and desolation, deportation, bad roads, droughts and deserts, a destroyed temple, dangerous lions and vipers, the spiritual blessings of the New Testament salvation might be pictured as reconstructed cities, a return to the promised land, an absence of wars and rough ground, streams in the desert, a new temple, peaceful lions and vipers.

The differences between the Old and the New Testament have nothing to do with the real content of the gospel. It is the same gospel and the same way of salvation in both testaments. The differences refer only to the outward form of the gospel.

II. THE LAW

If many people are unclear about the gospel in the Old and New Testaments, their confusion about the law in the two testaments is even greater. Often they find similarities where there are real differences, and differences when none actually exist. For instance, some demand that the New Testament church obey many of the regulations of the Old Testament theocracy, even though these have been fulfilled and are not intended for the New

Testament church. And at the same time people are unclear about the real harmony.

A. HARMONY

Neither in the Old nor the New Testament is the law intended to create a new man, a believer, out of a sinner. The law displays what the new man looks like and accordingly denounces every man after the fall for not meeting its standard of trust and love. The law cannot create what it demands. It does not give life. It kills and creates despair. Only the gospel can give what the law demands . . . and the gospel offers it freely.

It is important to distinguish between keeping the law *in order to obtain* a gracious God and keeping the law *because*, through the gospel, *we have* a gracious God. When Jesus says, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples" (John 8:31), it does not mean that we earn God's grace and discipleship by holding to God's teaching. It means that what we have already, God's grace and our discipleship by grace alone, is thrown away when we no longer trust God and His Word and do not wish to act according to His will. The recipient of God's grace wants in thankfulness to stay close to all that God says. Without belief in the gospel no one can hold to God's teaching. Therefore, grace comes first and the keeping of the law afterwards, and so it is in both the Old and New Testaments.

God did not give His commandments at Sinai to find out whether Israel was good enough to earn His salvation. First He saved them and gave them His grace and undeserved mercy only because of the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then He gave His commandments to *saved* people who needed to know the will of God and their duties as God's people, laws and duties which only a people grateful for God's salvation would want to obey and thereby to confess its thankfulness and faith. The believers did not obey God's commandments in order to earn grace and salvation, but because they *had* grace and redemption. They wanted to remain in fellowship with their gracious God and not to depart from Him and His grace.

If we study the role of law from the first page in the Bible on, we will find that God's great goodness and fellowship with Him come first, His commandments afterwards. Already before the fall God did not deliver His commandment (Gen. 2:16-17) in order to give Adam a possibility to gain fellowship with Him. Adam already had fellowship with God as a gracious gift. Through obedience to the commandment Adam would demonstrate his happiness for

this fellowship, his faith in such a good and gracious God, and his trust in all that God said to him and did for him. And after the fall God always takes the initiative and creates faith and offers fellowship through His word of promise and by grace alone. The basis for grace and forgiveness is never the obedience of man. But the obedience of man is a consequence and a testimony of his faith in God's grace and mercy.

The Exhortation to Do Good Works

Both the Old and New Testaments exhort man to do deeds of love. The apostle says in 1 Corinthians 13:2 that he is nothing if he has not love. This is often misunderstood, as if Scripture taught that we will be justified through our love and good works. The Apology refutes this misunderstanding in a clear way:

In this text Paul is not discussing the mode of justification. He is writing to people who, upon being justified, needed urging to bear good fruits lest they lose the Holy Spirit [IV: 220].

No one can draw anything more from this text than that love is necessary. This we grant. It is also necessary not to steal. It would be a fallacy to reason that because it is necessary not to steal, therefore not stealing justifies [IV: 222].

Melanchthon's last point can be applied to theologians in our time who maintain that the gospel frees them from the necessity of rejecting higher criticism and false prophets. We also have to stand up for the doctrine of justification through faith alone, the gospel of both the Old and New Testaments. But to avoid higher criticism, false prophets, unionism, and stealing is necessary, not in order to *become* justified, but because the one who has received the gift of justification is anxious to remain in God's Word and not to leave the Lord.

God's Dealing with Israel

God's dealing with Israel and His election of this people to a specific task in history during the Old Testament era clearly demonstrate God's grace and that the law did not abolish the gospel. This is emphasized in Romans and Galatians. But Moses had already written:

The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples . . . it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers [Deut. 7:7-8].

It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on

account of the wickedness of these nations, the Lord your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people [Deut. 9:5-6].

Daniel prayed: "We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your name" (Dan. 9:18-19).

B. DISAGREEMENT

The Outward Regulations in the Old Testament

Just as the gospel in the Old Testament often has an outward form due to the special conditions of the Old Testament theocracy, so also the law with its demands of love to God and our neighbor is connected with many outward regulations due to the fact that Israel as a visible nation had a special task during Old Testament times. It was not that Israel would obtain righteousness before God by observing all these regulations, however. God had already given His grace and fellowship to Israel, and He had for His own sake given her both spiritual and physical promises. As God's redeemed people the Israelites ought to have shown their thankfulness for God's gracious salvation by faithfully obeying the regulations of the law. Disobedience was a testimony that they no longer trusted the Lord and no longer were thankful for His grace and blessings. The Old Testament teaches that most of the people lost their faith and rejected the Rock, their Savior (Deut. 32:15). Moses had to say, "You deserted the Rock who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth" (Deut. 32:18). By turning their back on God's salvation the people lost both the spiritual and physical blessings which God had promised them. Just as Moses had foretold, "If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed" (Deut. 8:19). By grace alone the Lord was their God and their salvation. But unbelief, the rejection of His grace, demonstrated in disobedience, meant the loss of God's gracious gifts. Isaiah predicted that only a remnant of Israel would rely on the Lord (Is. 10:20ff.).

The Laws Necessary for a Theocracy

During Old Testament times the summary of the law, trust in

the Lord and love of our neighbor, was closely connected with ceremonial and national laws necessary for a church-state, a theocracy. To live as a believer, therefore, meant to accept the God-given task of the Old Testament church, bound to a certain land, a certain state, a certain sanctuary, a certain priestly tribe, certain ceremonies, etc. Now, under the New Testament, the church is no longer connected with a certain church-state, a certain land, tribe, or temple. Christ is the fulfilment and the end of the Old Testament theocracy. That is the difference. All the outward regulations, which were due to the special task of the church during the Old Testament era, are fulfilled, the rules about "food and drink and various ceremonial washings — external regulations applying until the time of the new order" (Heb. 9:10). Worship is no longer bound to certain days or places.

Luther mentions this difference between the Old and New Testaments in his Genesis commentary:

Moses had a definite command to establish the Levitical priesthood, which pertained to a definite people, definite persons, a definite place, and to a definite time up to Christ. This is the principal part of the Law of Moses . . . But when the time appointed for all these things came to an end, the sacrifices and all the Mosaic regulations came to an end. The priesthood, with its sacrifices, no longer had any validity. Nor did the kingdom, for Moses had come to an end. But the kingdom and the priesthood of Christ followed, without a place, time, or person, and "without any outward sign," as Christ says in Luke 17:20.⁵

Regarding the commandment of the sabbath day Luther writes in his Large Catechism (I:82):

Therefore, according to *its literal, outward sense*, this commandment does not concern us Christians. It is an entirely external matter, like the other ordinances of the Old Testament connected with particular customs, persons, times, and places, from all of which we are now set free through Christ.

Bible passages such as Galatians 4:1-11, Colossians 2:16-23, Romans 14, Hebrews 9:10, and Acts 15:10 underline the New Testament freedom from Mosaic regulations, and these passages are also listed in Article XXVI of the Augustana (24ff.).

Circumcision

Regarding the role of circumcision, we may notice what is said in the Apology (IV:210):

Abraham did not receive circumcision in order to be justified (Rom. 4:9-22). By faith his justification was already accomplished, but circumcision was added to give him a sign written in his body by which he might be reminded and grow in faith, and through his witness testify to his faith before others and induce them to believe.

We have to remember that the Mosaic regulations were not meant as a means of obtaining grace. They were given to a saved people, not to people who where to save themselves by keeping the laws. But the Old Testament regulations became too heavy, "a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear" (Acts 15:10); and, in accordance with our unclean human reason, Israel often misunderstood the purpose of the law and thought it might obtain grace through observing the law *ex opere operato* without faith. Article IV of the Apology (395) observes:

The majority of the people believed that they merited the forgiveness of sins by their works, and so they multiplied sacrifices and devotions. The prophets, on the contrary, condemned this opinion and taught the righteousness of faith.

Worship

In the Old Testament worship was bound to many external regulations. But in both the Old and New Testaments true worship is based upon the undeserved goodness and mercy of God. True worship is to remember God's gracious deeds, to receive His offered blessings. The Apology says:

Thus the service and worship of the Gospel is to recieve good things from God, while the worship of the law is to offer and present our goods to God. We cannot offer anything to God unless we have first been reconciled and reborn [IV: 310]. "If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand?" (Ps. 130:3). Here the psalmist confesses his sins, but he does not lay claim to any merit of his own. He adds, "There is forgiveness with thee" (v.4). Here he comforts himself with his trust in God's mercy. He quotes the promise: "My soul waits for his word, my soul hopes in the Lord," that is, because thou hast promised the forgiveness of sins I am sustained by thy promise. Therefore the patriarchs, too, were justified not by the law but by the promise and faith. It is strange that our opponents make so little of faith when they see it praised everywhere as the foremost kind of worship [IV: 58-59].

Jonah says (Jonah 2:8), "Those who forsake mercy observe

lying vanities"; that is, all trust is vain except a trust in mercy; mercy saves us, our own merits and efforts do not save us. Therefore Daniel prays (9:18,19), "For we do not present our supplications before thee on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of thy great mercy"[IV: 330-331].

Thus the difference between the Old and New Testaments concerning the law consists in this, that in the New Testament the demands of the law are not connected with outward regulations about food, days, circumcision, tithes, clothes, washings, sacrifices, etc. Christ is the fulfilment of all these things.

The Summary and True Intent of the Law

The summary and true intent of the law is the same in the Old and the New Testaments, namely, trust in the Lord and love of our neighbor. Christ is the perfect fulfilment of the whole law. Therefore God is gracious toward us "for Christ's sake," "for His own sake," "for the sake of His name." Only the one who trusts in the promised Savior has a new will to love God and his neighbor.

Luther points out that Moses' explanation of the law in Deuteronomy

really contains nothing else than faith toward God and love toward one's neighbor, for all God's laws come to that. Therefore, down to the twentieth chapter, Moses, in his explanation of the law, guards against everything that might destroy faith in God and from there to the end of the book he guards against everything that hinders love.⁶

Only a believer, a receiver of God's offered grace, is characterized by faith and love. Therefore we need the gospel about this grace *before* we can begin to keep the law. The Apology says:

We must first take hold of the promise by faith, that for Christ's sake the Father is reconciled and forgiving. Later we begin to keep the law [IV: 295].

A man keeps the law as soon as he hears that God is reconciled to us for Christ's sake even though we cannot satisfy the law. When faith takes hold of Christ, the mediator, the heart is at peace and begins to love God and to keep the law. It knows that now it is pleasing to God for the sake of Christ, the mediator, even though its incipient keeping of the law is impure and far from perfect [IV: 270].

Conclusion

We have seen how necessary it is to distinguish between law and gospel and to understand their different functions and purposes.

Without this distinction it is impossible to understand faith in the Old and New Testaments. Let us conclude with a few more quotations from the Lutheran Confessions concerning these matters:

All Scripture should be divided into these two chief doctrines, the law and the promises [Ap. IV:5].

These are the two chief works of God in men, to terrify and to justify and quicken the terrified. One or the other of these works is spoken of throughout Scripture. One part is the law, which reveals, denounces, and condemns sin. The other part is the Gospel, that is, the promise of grace granted in Christ. This promise is repeated continually throughout Scripture; first it was given to Adam, later to the patriarchs, then illumined by the prophets, and finally proclaimed and revealed by Christ among the Jews, and spread by the apostles throughout the world. For all the saints were justified by faith in this promise not by their own attrition or contrition [Ap. XII:53-54].

Since the beginning of the world these two proclamations have continually been set forth side by side in the church of God with the proper distinction. The descendants of the holy patriarchs, like the patriarchs themselves, constantly reminded themselves not only how man in the beginning was created righteous and holy by God and through the deceit of the serpent transgressed God's laws, became a sinner, corrupted himself and all his descendants, and plunged them into death and eternal damnation, but also revived their courage and comforted themselves with the proclamation of the woman's seed, who would bruise the serpent's head; likewise, of the seed of Abraham, by whom all nations should be blessed; likewise, of David's son, who should restore the kingdom of Israel and be a light to the nations, "who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities and with whose stripes we are healed" [FC-SD V:23].

We confuse law and gospel and distort the biblical doctrine of faith if we make God's mercy and grace, the object of faith, dependent on our love and our observing of the law. We have to remember that "faith precedes while love follows" (Ap. IV:141). What follows faith never is and never can be a prerequisite for God's mercy and grace, the object of our faith: "If somebody believes that he obtains the forgiveness of sins because he loves, he insults Christ and in God's judgment he will discover that this trust in his own righteousness was wicked and empty" (Ap. IV:150). To avoid the misconception that God's mercy is due in

part to our works, "we must see what the Scriptures ascribe to the law and what they ascribe to the promises. For they praise works in such a way as not to remove the free promise" (Ap. IV:188). The good works ought to be done, because we have a gracious God, not in order to make God gracious. But how can the Bible then speak about a reward for our good works? The Apology explains this phenomenon:

We teach that rewards have been offered and promised to the works of the faithful. We teach that good works are meritorious — not for the forgiveness of sins, grace, or justification (for we obtain these only by faith) but for other physical and spiritual rewards in this life and in that which is to come, as Paul says (1 Cor. 3:8), "Each shall receive his wages according to his labor" [IV: 194].

Yet God exercises his saints in different ways and often puts off the rewards for the righteousness of works. Thus they learn not to trust in their own righteousness, but to seek the will of God rather than the rewards [IV: 198].

Even eternal life can be designated as a reward. How is this possible when eternal life is a free gift without our merits? The Apology gives the answer: "We grant that eternal life is a reward because it is something that is owed — not because of our merits but because of the promise. We have shown above that justification is strictly a gift of God; it is a thing promised. To this gift the promise of eternal life has been added" [IV: 362].

FOOTNOTES

1. All confessional references in this paper are quoted from *The Book of Concord*, ed. and tr. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).
2. *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1955 ff.), 4, p. 171.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
5. *LW*, 5, p. 20.
6. *LW*, 35, p. 238-239.

The Concept of *Anfechtung* in Luther's Thought

David P. Scaer

I. Definition

Some words defy adequate translation. *Anfechtung*, as used by Luther, and its Latin counterpart, *tentatio*, may be such a word. Various English works demonstrate this fact. The English translation of Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* uses "temptation."¹ Herbert J. A. Bouman in his translation of Walther von Loewenich's *Luther's Theology of the Cross* uses "trials."² Plass in *What Luther Says* favors "affliction."³ The American Translation of *Luther's Works* uses all three, "temptation," "trial," and "affliction," plus "tribulation."⁴ Each of these English words develops one facet of Luther's *Anfechtung* and related words. "Temptation" points to the Christian's life as a period of testing by Satan. In this temptation the Christian is given the opportunity by God to overcome Satan personally, but there can be no suggestion that God is the origin of sin or provokes the Christian to sin. "Trial" suggests a probationary period before God's bestowing a great good. Through the trial God puts the Christian to the test to measure the depth and sincerity of faith and to bring it to a higher level. Thus trial points to God's control over the Christian's suffering during the *Anfechtung*. Suffering does not happen through chance. "Affliction" reflects the real suffering and pain the Christian endures during the *Anfechtung*. The Christian does not necessarily experience physical pain, but real agony in his soul about his personal salvation.⁵ "Tribulation" also refers to the Christian's suffering during the *Anfechtung* but suggests the wider dimension as affliction suffered by all Christians.

Since Luther's concept of the *Anfechtung* is a multifaceted concept, perhaps it is best left untranslated. Admittedly this is the route of theological and literary cowardice. *Anfechtung* is perhaps better understood not as one vocable in Luther's vocabulary, but as a one-word theological concept. This concept of the *Anfechtungen* can be explained summarily in the following sentences:

Through the Gospel the Christian has come to learn of a gracious God in Christ Jesus; however his life experiences present to him a God who is still wrathful and who not only

refuses to forgive sins, but reminds him of them. The hard, concrete experiences of life contradict what he had learned by faith. God on his side through the *Anfechtungen* is drawing the Christian closer to him and throughout the *Anfechtungen* always intends that they should be beneficial to the Christian. The Christian, however, interprets them as forms of God's retribution for sins and as signs of his wrath. In desperation the Christian flees to Christ for salvation. In this God has accomplished his purpose of bringing the Christian closer to himself. Though the Christian can through faith conquer one *Anfechtung* — and indeed he must if he is to survive — he must face a lifelong series of *Anfechtungen*. Resurrection is the only permanent solution. *Anfechtungen* are an aspect of faith, not as that faith trusts in God and totally relies on him for all good, but as that faith faces realities in life and in the world different from those offered in the Gospel.⁶

The *Anfechtungen* present a more intense problem for the theologian like Luther who has committed himself totally to the Scriptures as God's Word and whose intellectual knowledge of their promises⁷ is superior to that of others, simply because of an exposure through his professional life and study. What he knows about God's graciousness in Christ is contradicted by what he really experiences in this world.

II. *Anfechtungen* as Contradiction

Anfechtungen in Luther's thought appear as contradiction, since in them the Christian is confronted with the destructive forces of his adversaries over which the Gospel has informed him he already has victory. The salvation offered in faith is seemingly withdrawn. The Christian who through faith has been saved from sin, Satan, death, hell, and all other related calamities re-encounters them in the *Anfechtungen*. The opponents actually appear to be resurrected. The most horrible contradiction is that Satan and not God seems to be in control.

A. *Satan as Source of the Anfechtungen*

Every experience that leads a person to unbelief, denial, and doubt comes from Satan and not from God. God cannot be the cause of evil in the same sense that He is the cause of good. The Christian confronted by the *Anfechtungen* is left doubting about whether God or Satan is in control. So effective is Satan's might that he is called by Scripture not merely the prince of this world, but its god. While not possessing an essential omnipresence, Satan does possess an effective onnipresence by carrying out his

will through others. Luther uses the example of a ruler carrying out his will through his military forces. Satan has set up his kingdom side by side with God, and thus the Christian will confront Satan and his agents everywhere.

B. Satan Uses Means in the Anfechtungen

Like God, Satan is invisible, but works through visible means. The very *Anfechtungen* which are God's instruments to strengthen faith are Satan's to destroy it. In the *Anfechtungen* the contradictions become visible. Through the world, the flesh, and whatever afflict the Christian, Satan becomes "incarnate" and wreaks havoc. For Luther human existence for the Christian may be called Satanic, since there is no part of it exempted by Satan from use in carrying out his purposes. Evil man, fanatics, our own sin, consciences, and flesh all serve Satan's purposes. The entire world remains God's creation, but all of it can be used by Satan. Even the person of Christ is not sacred to him. In preaching, Satan presents Christ no longer as the mediator but as the object of fear and dread. This Satan does when he takes a legitimate Word of God and preaches the Law there to lead to despair. Law not only replaces the Gospel, but in Satan's hands becomes God's final Word.

C. Satan as Source of Despair in the Anfechtungen

Anfechtungen are not to be regarded as simply problems or troubles disturbing human existence, capable of medical or psychiatric solution, but they are to be regarded as a direct and effectual Satanic working in a Christian's life meant to bring him to unbelief. In seeking to lead Christians into unbelief, Satan assumes the very characteristics of God Himself, including a trinitarian existence. In the image of the Creator Father, he appears as the god of this world, a title which he has earned by his apparent universal control. He appears as Christ preaching the Law. Appearing as the Spirit, he works in men's hearts leading them to such despair that they no longer have any hope for salvation.⁸ As already mentioned, he even adopts something resembling omnipresence since he is on the heels of every Christian tempting him to fall into sin. Just as God loves out of inner necessity and not just will, so Satan out of an inner necessity has no other choice but to lead Christians into unbelief.⁹ Through the *Anfechtungen* Satan works to become the object of Christian devotion.

D. Religious Questions as Means of Anfechtungen

Among pious people Satan can work effectively by using religious questions as *Anfechtungen*. As a serpent he is capable of

finding the most insignificant weakness and using it as that smallest opening by which he can enter to begin his troubling work of the *Anfechtungen*. With Eve he called into question whether God was really good. Work-righteousness is always a most dangerous form of the *Anfechtungen*, since good works in their outward form appear as opposed to sin and have indeed been commanded by God. Satan also leads the Christian to question God's goodness. Luther sees Satan as such an effective liar that he can portray a picture of God which is both religious and fictitious. This he does when he plagues the Christian with the lie that God does not really love him. The God of love which the Christian knows through the Scriptural revelation is contradicted by what appears as a God of wrath in this world. Such a perversion of God's nature is the ultimate Satanic lie.¹⁰

E. Anfechtungen and Final Destruction

If the Christian interprets the *Anfechtungen* at face value — without the revelation that in the *Anfechtungen* God is working for the personal benefit of the Christian — he will have thus believed Satan's false message and surrendered his belief in God. Nothing awaits Satan's victim except final destruction. Luther outlines the procedures of Satan in this way:

From the beginning Satan was a liar. With lies he misled Adam and Eve and since then has never ceased to lie. With the lie he brought death, and soon after that he moved Cain to kill his brother. His kingdom continues to operate under these same principles of lying and deceiving. After Satan captures his victims, there is no festive celebration for them, but he troubles them with murder, unrest, and disobedience. Then, when he has brought people into murder and misfortune, he plagues them further about their sins, until finally they are without any hope. Take for an example Judas who betrayed Christ. First, he deceived himself with lies; then his soul was plagued because he was a traitor and a murderer of his own Lord Jesus. Finally he despaired and hanged himself. Beware of Satan! He is a liar and murderer. Whoever serves and obeys him must eventually pay him as did Judas, his servant.¹¹

F. Anfechtungen Compared to Forms of Religious Self-Discipline

Later the beneficial purpose of the *Anfechtungen* will be discussed; however, since Satan is seriously and sincerely working in and through the *Anfechtungen*, they really have no

resemblance to self-imposed religious exercises either of the monasteries or of the various rules for living which have been popular from time to time among the Protestants. Such shallow understandings of the *Anfechtungen* are really impossible when the personal Satanic element in them is fully comprehended. In most systems of self-imposed religious discipline, the Christian moves up on the scale from being merely acceptable to God to a rating of high approval from Him. The progress is in some sense traceable. The modes of denial are self-chosen. Luther's understanding of the *Anfechtungen* is frequently misunderstood as the punishments for sin or for failing to follow the code imposed by self-denial.¹² In contrast, the *Anfechtungen* for Luther are not only serious, but critical, since the failure to respond in total faith to God by abandoning oneself to him leads eventually to unbelief and damnation. In the *Anfechtungen* the Christian is placed on the boundary line between faith and unbelief, between God's kingdom and Satan's.

G. Anfechtungen as the Struggle between God and Satan

Though the *Anfechtungen* are personal, fitted out individually by Satan according to the weaknesses of each Christian and his own personal knowledge of these weaknesses, they are also battles within the larger cosmic struggle between God and Satan.¹³ Each of the *Anfechtungen* repeats and contains something of Genesis 3. Though the Garden of Eden is a non-repeatable, once and for all episode, this first and hence all-controlling conflict between our first parents and Satan manifests itself in the personal *Anfechtungen* of Christians. They too are permitted by God to be tempted by Satan to test and probe the depth and sincerity of their commitment to God. Again in our *tentatio* Satan comes with his own "Gospel" disguised as God's, and with this "good news" tempts the Christian away from God. In each *Anfechtung* the struggle begins again. For the Christian the struggle is more difficult than for Adam, since today all flesh has a ready ally in Satan and cannot escape the world.

Anfechtungen reach beyond Genesis 3 into that invisible sphere where God's and Satan's forces once met and Satan's were driven out to earth to wage that battle among men, especially within the church. Thus the *Anfechtungen* of the individual Christian are only a microcosm of the cosmic struggle between God and Satan. They are a refocusing of the strife in the invisible realm, of Genesis 3, and of the battle between Satan and Christ. The divine victory in the resurrection with its concomitant theme of the *Christus Victor* will receive a more extensive discussion; however, without

the Christological understanding of the cosmic dimensions of the struggle between God and Satan, the *Anfechtungen* deteriorate into individual, inexplicable sufferings.

H. Anfechtungen as Apparent Dialectic

"Dialectic" in Christian thought refers to irreconcilable differences or contradictions and thus would seem a most appropriate description of Luther's concept of *Anfechtungen*. The saving message of the Gospel contradicts what the Christian experiences as despair in his own life. In the *Anfechtungen*, however, he must believe that through Satanic devices God is working for his benefit.¹⁴ Just as there is no real unresolved dialectic between God and Satan in the invisible realm and as there is no dialectic between Christ and Satan on the cross, so the Christian must believe that the dialectic of his present struggles, the *Anfechtungen*, will one day be resolved entirely in his favor to the detriment of Satan.

III. Appearances of the *Anfechtungen*

In Luther's theology the *Anfechtungen* can operate in the Christian's life in a variety of ways. As mentioned previously, Satan has at his disposal everything within creation. The first of these is the flesh, the human existence under sin.

A. Anfechtungen through the Flesh

For Luther the concept of *Anfechtungen* of the flesh are different than the medieval and Roman Catholic understanding of concupiscence as inordinate and inappropriate sexual desires. "Flesh" for Luther is human existence opposed to the Holy Spirit, a revival of the Pauline-Biblical view. The spirit-flesh dualism is prominent both in the preaching of Jesus and the writings of St. Paul. The spirit, that part of human existence belonging to God, understands itself as sinner justified before God. At the same time the flesh stands in constant opposition to God. The flesh, the human nature estranged from God, cooperates with the devil and the world in opposing God and His will. It hates God, languishes in self-grief, is anxious about its own existence, murmurs with impatience against God, and stirs up the conscience with concerns about the Christian's own personal acceptability before God.¹⁵

Attractive but false is the view that the *Anfechtungen* of the flesh deal with the physical side of human existence, such as sexual desires or bodily pain. Luther's anthropology is different from Roman Catholicism's with its idea that physical or material substance is the cause and abettor of sin. Luther sees struggles of

the flesh as occurring within the soul and as "spiritual" in the sense that the body need not be involved, even though the body may suffer in conjunction with the soul's struggles.¹⁶ Luther suffered headaches and woke up in drenching sweats, but he also suffered from the *Anfechtungen* even when there were no physical maladies. The world was another source of the *Anfechtungen* for Luther.¹⁷

B. Anfechtungen through the World

Luther used the term "world" to describe the creation in its estrangement from God. In its fallen state the world appears as self-existent, independent of God for its creation, and at all points tempts the Christian. Man sees himself controlled by misfortune and fate. Human destiny is manipulated by unidentifiable forces and in this process God appears absent. Man's existence is threatened by the lack of direction. *Anfechtungen* through the world can be brought about by disease and pestilence, by armed military might, or, in short, by any disruption in what is considered the ordinary course of events. Before the unexpected, faith trembles and can be lost, and again Satan can triumph. Without in any way surrendering his two-kingdom concept, in which God works both in church and state, Luther could understand the state as a Satanic world force opposed to faith. This especially was true of the papacy and the Turks, where the world under the guide of religion was opposed to faith.¹⁸ Luther also acknowledged a more direct working of Satan in the *Anfechtungen*.

C. Anfechtungen as Recognizable Opposition to God

The temptation to sin directly against God was considered by Luther as part of the *Anfechtungen*. This was especially so of the temptation to disregard God's Word as authoritative in the Christian's life. Eve had put aside God's Word for Satan's lie.¹⁹ Disregard of God's Word leads to work-righteousness, since God's gracious promises have been rejected. The gracious God forgiving sins has been turned into an angry and wrathful God accounting to believers their sins. The Christian is now left to his own devices. The message of free salvation is replaced by the Law's condemnation. The sacraments are defused of their saving power as Zwingli and the left-wing reformers had done in their anti-sacramental attitude; the spiritual power was removed from Baptism so that it would be regarded as merely water. About this idea Luther wrote:

The devil says: The Word commands that you should believe

God. Why then do you put your faith in the water. The water is nothing. It is only a sign. There is no word there, no command, but only water which a cow drinks.²⁰

When Satan's word is believed, all comfort is lost, and again he has achieved his purpose of destroying faith.

D. Anfechtungen and the Wrath of God

1. THEIR SIMILAR APPEARANCES

A great problem in Luther's theology is the relationship of the *Anfechtungen* to God's wrath. The same physical distresses come upon both Christians and non-Christians alike and the Christian is tempted to believe from appearances that he, like the unbeliever, is experiencing God's wrath, even if it is only in an historical and temporal sense. The outward afflictions of believers and unbelievers are indistinguishable from one another. The physical appearances suggest to the Christian that God is still angry with him for his sins. With this idea Satan has accomplished his ultimate goal of destroying the efficacy of the atonement for the life of faith.

A direct solution to the Christian confronted with an angry God is provided in Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the preaching of the Gospel. Here the Christian confronts *another* God, the one who through the cross has atoned for all sins. Nevertheless, Satan's force is so strong that he can pervert the Gospel understanding of the Word and sacraments or he can direct the Christian's attention away from these to himself. Man is made to stand alone and is compelled to work out his own salvation. Confrontation with the God of wrath is so horrible because the Christian flees from God, the only source of aid. God becomes so objectionable to the Christian that he resolves his dilemma by himself through a righteousness of works. The *Anfechtung* of work-righteousness is not merely adhering to a false doctrine and thus contradicting a divine revelation, but cutting oneself off from the cross which is the only solution. Without Christ and His cross the Christian is entrapped in his *Anfechtungen* with a God of wrath. Left in this condition he must face eternal destruction and may take his own life.²¹ What really damns is not the failure to articulate the article of salvation, but the personal inability to find in Christ a gracious God and thus receive relief from the *Anfechtungen*.

2. LAW AS PREACHING OF GOD'S WRATH

Wrath as *Anfechtung*, with the understanding that God does not receive the sinner, has for Luther a place in his practice of

theology — in the preaching of the Law and Gospel. Law and Gospel are for Luther a dichotomy but never in the sense that the Law is equal to the Gospel as God's last word. Where Law and Gospel are given an equivalent value in preaching by not resolving the tension in favor of the Gospel, there the fear derived from the Law and the hope springing from the Gospel stand in an unresolved contradiction. Concentration on divine wrath as central to preaching and theology demonstrates Satan's effectiveness against Christ. In this *Anfechtung* God with his condemning Law lurks to the side of the redemption of the cross. Thus Satan removes Christ from the gaze of the believer, and the sinner is faced with the majesty of God without the benefit of the mediator. Now he is left alone before the searing wrath of God and his own personal guilt. Before God's majesty and without Christ, the sinner is left without help.²²

3. A GRACIOUS GOD IN THE ANFECHTUNGEN

The answer to the affliction of the thought that God is treating the believer as an unbeliever and as an enemy by showering down upon him His wrath is Christ, in whom God reveals that He is gracious. Luther provides a precise and hence practical answer for the Christian caught in the affliction of knowing only a God of wrath. The Reformer directs these words to Christians who judge from outward appearances that God is treating them as though they were not His children:

To be sure, public calamities hit saints and prophets, too, but not as happens in the case of the godless and ungrateful — out of wrath and punishment for them, but for their salvation, to test and to try their faith, love and patience, that the godly may learn to bear patiently the hand of God in His government But the godless are plagued to punish and offend them, so that they are hardened and become worse. For they are not improved by the good and are only made worse by the evil.²³

Unless the Christian knows whether the sufferer is a believer or unbeliever, he cannot interpret the tribulation as *Anfechtung* for faith or punishment for unbelief. Luther's real concern is with *Anfechtung*. The affliction in the Christian's life should not be seen as a sign of divine wrath. Such introverted soul-searching is Satanic, as again the soul is directed away from finding salvation in Christ.

4. DIVINE DISCIPLINE, NOT WRATH, IN THE ANFECHTUNGEN

The affliction in the life of the Christian is God's discipline and not His wrath against the Christian's life. Though wrath and

discipline appear the same to men, they are different to God who works in each for different purposes. Luther compares the *Anfechtungen* with a father's discipline of his delinquent son. The father is not seeking vengeance on his son, but wants to carry out his corrective purposes through the discipline. The vineyard is pruned not for the sake of punishment, but in order to make it more productive. The tension does not exist in what God intends by the *Anfechtungen*, but in our perception of calamities as if in all of them God were accomplishing His purposes of wrath. The act appears only to the eyes of unfaith as an act of divine anger. To faith, the *Anfechtungen* as discipline proceed from His love. Here is what Luther says about such a situation:

When God sends us tribulation, Satan suggests: See there God flings you into prison, endangers your life. Surely He hates you. He is angry with you; for if He did not hate you, He would not allow this thing to happen. In this way Satan turns the rod of a Father into the rope of a hangman and the most salutary remedy into the deadliest poison. But he is an incredible master at devising thoughts of this nature. Therefore it is very difficult to differentiate in tribulations between Him who kills and Him who chastises in a friendly way.²⁴

Commenting on Isaiah 27:7, "Have I smitten him with the blow of a smiter, or killed you with the killing of a killer?", Luther clearly distinguishes God's chastening of Israel from punishment. The Reformer provides this paraphrase to show the difference:

I will not smite My Church the way someone is smitten by enemies. I will not allow it to be thus smitten, but I chasten it and chastise it. . . . Let every Christian know, therefore, that his *tribulation is not evil but good* imposed by a good God. It is not as reason and Satan argue: You are poor, cast off, and thoroughly afflicted. God is hard and unmerciful, He has forgotten you. He is your enemy and your adversary.²⁵

Luther specifically says that in the *Anfechtungen* coming upon the Christian God has no wrath. He attributes to God this paraphrase: "I have no wrath!"

The divine discipline in the *Anfechtungen* has the express purpose of making the forgiveness of sins more effective in the Christian's life. Luther makes this point quite clear:

This is the effect of the cross, that every sin and the whole body of sin may be destroyed by believing in the forgiveness, lest we fall either into presumption or into despair, but it

keeps us in the middle way, that we acknowledge our sin and call upon God.²⁶

5. DIVINE JUDGMENT AND THE ANFECHTUNGEN

Even as Satan could bring the Christian into *Anfechtungen* by a confrontation with God's majesty without Christ, he can also do it with Christ. Throughout his life Luther was terrified by Christ the Judge. Seeing Christ as a lawgiver like Moses turned grace into law and the means of grace into poison. Luther in his colorfully descriptive language calls such a Christ the hangman and executioner. Certainly Christ will appear on the Last Day as Judge; however, seeing Him today as Judge and not Redeemer was for Luther a terrible *Anfechtung*.

Seeing Christ as Judge so confuses the Christian that he does not know whether God or Satan is dealing with him. Christ who is Revealer of God appears as the tormentor of the soul. The more terrible God appears as Judge, the more appealing Satan appears as the only rescue of the soul. God appears Satanic and Satan appears more gracious. In this *Anfechtung* God the Redeemer and Satan the tormentor have switched roles. Unless God intervenes, the Christian begins to hate and blaspheme God.²⁷ As hate is the direct opposite of faith, Satan has more than achieved his purpose of destroying faith.²⁸ Christ as Judge is made by Satan to preach only the Law, so that Christians are aware only of their transgression and the subsequent damnation. Against this *Anfechtung*, where Satan is seeking to bring the Christian to the point of hating God, God "has also said, that I will also live. Mercy is greater than sin, and life greater than death."

But right here in this horrible *Anfechtung*, where Satan is seeking to bring the Christian to the point of hating God, God is saving the sinner. The Law, even placed by Satan in the hands of Christ, leaves the Christian in despair with no hope of release. In this *Anfechtung* God presents Christ the Redeemer as the only hope of sinners. Satan's preparation of the Christian for damnation has become God's preparation for salvation. The Christian brought face to face with hell is rescued for the glories of heaven.²⁹

E. Death as *Anfechtung*

Death with its finality is considered by Luther as being among the worst *Anfechtungen*. Without removing God's authority over death, Satan is the bringer of death and has more ways of bringing it about than a druggist has chemicals. Death shows just how effective Satan has been in corrupting the world with original sin. The living creation has been poisoned by Satan, the lord of death.

As he meets death, man is overcome with fear and trembling. Much preferable would be a quick death, since its suddenness would relieve man of some of its horrors.³⁰

Death as the separation of body and soul does not seem much of a problem either to Luther or some of the heathen. Death without fear would only be a sleep.³¹ Satan changes matters by first proclaiming that death should not be feared. After he has proclaimed his "gospel" of a fearless death by lulling the dying person into complacency, he begins to preach his "Law" so that not even a superabundance of good works can atone for all the sins committed. Digging into the hidden recesses of the soul, he digs up past sins and even makes good works appear as sins. In the *Anfechtung* of his death, the Christian is threatened by judgment, destruction, and hell. Here again the Christian sees God's wrath, views God as the hangman, and sees nothing but thunder and lightning. As Satan has assembled all his power for the moment of death, Luther calls this moment "*die schwerste Anfechtung*," "the most severe *Anfechtung*."³² In the Gospel, however, the Christian is released from death.

F. Predestination as *Anfechtung*

Predestination as an abstract theological truth presented Luther with the *Anfechtung* of wondering whether or not he had been predestined by God for salvation. Theologically predestination seemed at variance with universal grace and the atonement, and personally Luther felt that his own unworthiness made him unfit for God's choice. The *Anfechtung* of the feeling of personal unworthiness could again lead him to despair. Connected here was the problem of explaining how God could have permitted Adam to fall. Such an *Anfechtung* could again destroy faith in God as love. So bothered was Luther with predestination that he wished that he were not a human being, as he could do nothing to change his destiny for heaven or hell.³³ Through such fatalism the Christian could easily be convinced to lead a libertine life. By a permissive life in sin the Christian could succumb to Satan in the *Anfechtung* of predestination.³⁴

G. Life with Constant *Anfechtungen*

Though faith is engendered in the Christian without the *Anfechtungen*, it is plagued with them throughout life, with death being the worst possible moment.³⁵ As soon as one becomes a Christian, Satan plants himself at the doorstep. Until the Christian dies, he is without peace. Abraham believes God's promises and then is commanded to kill his son. He is unsure

whether God or Satan is talking to him. Luther's release from monastic life did not relieve but only increased his *Anfechtungen*. *Anfechtung* belongs to faith almost by definition, since true faith never exists without conflict. Luther is bold enough to say that the greater the Christian's faith the greater the crisis of faith. A faith determined to live without *Anfechtungen* has already come to terms of peace with Satan. The Christian should be the most concerned when the *Anfechtungen* are absent. "No temptations are the worst ones." ("Nulla tentatio — omnis tentatio.")³⁶

Luther warned that days of contentment and laziness were the most dangerous, as Satan could catch the Christian unprepared. When the Christian is content, Satan can destroy his confidence in God. The Reformer was plagued even in the solitude of sleep and would wake drenched in sweat. Even in the moment of prayer, Luther was afflicted with a sense of personal unworthiness. Satan never sleeps and, therefore, the Christian must always be on his guard against the *Anfechtungen*.

IV. General Observations on the *Anfechtungen*

A. *Anfechtungen as Experience*

Anfechtungen deal not so much with a doctrine that is revealed and then believed as with the personal attitude of the Christian who reflects upon divine revelation and his own experiences in life and is tempted to resolve the conflict on the basis of his experiences. This does not mean that for Luther *Anfechtungen* were not part of the Biblical revelation, because obviously they were. The Biblical saints, especially Abraham and St. Paul, and even Christ himself had endured afflictions. But while doctrinal truths are believed in faith, the *Anfechtungen* are personal suffering within the soul.

B. *Anfechtungen and the Fides Historica*

Luther's *Anfechtungen* were not his concerns about the historical character of Christianity. Unknown to him is the Enlightenment problem of distinguishing the report of the happening from the happening itself. He did not struggle intellectually with the proper reflection of *Historie* in *Geschichte*. Some have tried to see in Luther's *Anfechtungen* a forerunner of their own dialecticism in which intellectual certainty about religious matters is not possible. In our century Barth overcame the tension by ignoring the real questions of history and preaching the "faith" of the Bible. Bultmann and Marxsen saw the tension between history and Bible faith as a beneficial "*Anfechtung*."

Luther did not experience that kind of historical or intellectual "*Anfechtung*." He had and expressed no doubts about the authenticity and the historical character of the Biblical record. Luther's questions came in the realm of the *fides* as *fiducia* and not the *fides historica*. The *fides historica* was the assumed foundation of Christianity and personal faith. Luther's *Anfechtungen* were "psychological" in the sense of involving the question of whether or not his soul knew a gracious God in Christ Jesus. They were not intellectual in the sense that Luther doubted whether the Scriptural revelation was authentic. *Anfechtungen* take place not within the realm of the *sola scriptura*, but within the realm of *sola gratia* and, subsequently, *sola fide*.

C. *Anfechtungen as Religious*

Anfechtungen do not happen in the raw secular realm, but within the Christian context. They are religious struggles. Without their religious appearance the *Anfechtungen* would be recognizable, capable of being conquered, and not really *Anfechtungen*. In the *Anfechtungen* Satan is more the organizer than he is the creator. He uses valid religious symbols in his own new combinations to lead the Christian into unbelief.

D. *Anfechtungen as Description of the Christian Life*

Anfechtung is a proper synonym for the life of the Christian lived in faith. It is a bridge that brings the realities of revelation from the Biblical history into the personal life of the Christian. The historical realities of the Bible remain fixed within their own appointed time, but the supernatural realities — atonement for sin, faith conquest over Satan, death, and sin — transcend history and are made alive for the Christian through faith. As the Christian encounters these supernatural realities through faith, he struggles within his faith. The revelations made to the Biblical figures are unrepeatable because they preceded or were contemporaries of the accomplishment of salvation, but the *Anfechtungen* are shared by all who through faith accept the salvation accomplished long ago. As Satan afflicted the Biblical saints in their *Anfechtungen*, so he continues to afflict all those who share their faith in Christ. For as faith provides a positive bond among all believers, so the struggles of the *Anfechtungen* are a definite mark of the Christian and provide a negative bond among all Christians — a bond with each other and with Christ. Luther is so bold as to say Christ himself has already gone through all sufferings now endured by Christians.³⁷

FOOTNOTES

1. Pieper, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 188-189, has a rather extensive quotation from Luther on his concept of *tentatio*. Perhaps this one sentence is characteristic of the entire citation: "For as soon as the Word of God blooms forth through you, the devil will visit you, make a real doctor of you, and by his affliction will teach you to seek and love God's Word" (p. 188).
2. Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, tr. Herbert J.A. Bouman (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), pp. 154-159. Here both the Latin *tentatio* and German *Anfechtung* are used side by side.
3. Edwald M. Plass, *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), I and III.
4. *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Publishing House, 1955-1972), 16, p. 286.
5. Francis Pieper may be representative of any number of theologians who see Luther's *Anfechtungen* during his struggle for salvation through works during his Roman Catholic period as internal and his *Anfechtungen* after his discovery of free grace as external, *op. cit.*, page 189. The evidence indicates that for Luther throughout his life the *Anfechtungen* were internal. He did not seem terrified by political and military efforts against him. Perhaps it is embarrassing to see that Luther throughout his life struggled with himself about his doctrine of justification and its disruption of the church.
6. Paul Buehler, *Die Anfechtungen bei Martin Luther* (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1942), p. 7.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
10. *Loc. cit.*
11. Quoted in Buehler, *op. cit.*, p. 18 (English translation by essayist).
12. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 107-111, 221.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 28. (See note 6.)
17. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
23. Plass, *op. cit.*, I. 26.
24. *Ibid.*, I. 12.
25. *LW* 16, p. 214.

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26. *LW* 16, p. 215.
 27. Buehler, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
 28. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
 29. *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.
 30. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
 31. *Loc. cit.*
 32. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
 33. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.
 34. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
 35. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
 36. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
 37. *Ibid.*, pp. 128-32.

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Theological Observer

MARTIN H. SCHARLEMANN

Dr. Martin H. Scharlemann, professor emeritus of New Testament at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, died on 23 August 1982. His church and his nation joined together as he was laid to rest with military honors in Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis.

Our church has lost an uncommon man. It would be easy to list his high achievements: professor of New Testament exegesis at St. Louis since 1952; author of numerous articles, pamphlets, and the instructive book, *Stephen: A Singular Saint*; decorated chaplain in the Air Force (since 1966 holding the rank of Brigadier General); and many more.

Scharlemann's achievements, and the honors bestowed upon him, were many, and all of them testify to the excellence of the man as a thinker and as a leader. Perhaps like no one else in recent history Scharlemann represented the Missouri Synod before the scholarly and civic public; and in both arenas he — and our church through him — was respected. However, I wish to accent three themes which loom large in my memory of Professor Scharlemann and which, in my opinion, especially mark the character of the man.

(1) Scharlemann was foremost a Christian *thinker*. He understood Christian theology as mission to the minds of men. This accounts for his constant exhortation to “know what’s going on” and his intensive confrontation with major currents of thought in our day. For him theology was not dedicated only to the preservation of tradition and confession, but it was dedicated to carrying that confession to the world of intellectual doubt and error and fighting in the arena of the mind for the gospel’s sake. For this reason Scharlemann was a tough teacher; he tolerated no nonsense in the classroom and was rigorous in his grading. But like the good military man he was, he knew the classroom to be a “boot camp” for the task in the pastoral trenches. For many years Scharlemann was in the front lines fighting for the gospel on uncertain and novel soil. There the issue of the fight is not always clear, and I suspect this is what occasioned much of the criticism which also marked Scharlemann’s career.

(2) Perhaps precisely because he saw theology as mission Scharlemann could not divorce his function as exegete from his function as preacher. The Biblical text is the very form of the prophetic and apostolic proclamation, and therefore to uncover the meaning of the text is to lay bare the proclamation; indeed, it is to proclaim. This Scharlemann understood, and therefore for him the end of all Biblical exegesis was the sermon. He remains the only exegetical professor I ever had who demanded a sermon outline as part of our assigned exegetical papers. His book, *Preaching the Parables*, especially exemplifies this wedding of mind (exegesis) and act (preaching). Scharlemann was himself one of the best preachers I ever heard — no doubt because he had really interpreted the text. The person of this exegete-preacher was prophetic in condemning the facile separation between the “theoretical” and the “practical,” still all too often made. He liked to paraphrase I Peter 1:13: “Roll up the sleeves of your minds; get ready for work!” But that work was always God’s work, addressing Law and Gospel, proclaiming repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Scharlemann was a great seminary professor because he could with a cogent harmony unite the concerns of the scholar with the concerns of the pastor.

(3) Finally, Scharlemann was a thinker for the *church*. In the rarified atmosphere of academia and professional theology the temptation to succumb

to scholarly trends or to absolutize one's own favorite themes is constant. But all of that was far from Scharlemann's concern. He was too engrossed in the story of God's redemptive history to be deceived by counterfeits. He knew himself to be a beneficiary of that history, and so all of his energies were dedicated to the service of that history. He was aware that he stood with the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and saints. His service was one with theirs. This is to say, Martin Scharlemann was a *churchman*, a *vir ecclesiasticus*. He knew himself to be a member of the Body of Christ, and he measured all that he did by the standard of the church's edification. Some may point to the famous Scharlemann apology at the Cleveland Convention (1962). But the real story is not that he apologized but that in doing so he subordinated himself to the church he served. A man who does that is worthy of honor and respect. And in a real sense Scharlemann sacrificed his last years for the church's welfare. His loyalty to the Missouri Synod during and after the tumultuous events of 1974 was not without its personal and professional cost for him. But I never heard him express a word of doubt that all had happened that the church might be made secure and strong. If he ever had doubts, they were apparently lost in his prayers that God direct his thoughts and acts. But however that may have been, without question the church is safer for his having been a member of it and a soldier in its service.

The church is sometimes slow in recognizing its own heroes. While it may have been too slow in coming, it was nevertheless out of great appreciation for his service that last May Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, voted Martin Scharlemann the degree of Doctor of Divinity, *honoris causa*. We need to recognize those who have been the church's teachers. But especially do we give glory to the King of Heaven for having preserved Martin in the way and bringing him to the end. We are all more blessed for it having been so.

William C. Weinrich

THE PATRISTIC AND BYZANTINE REVIEW

The American Institute for Patristic and Byzantine Studies has announced the inauguration of a triannual review "devoted to patristic theology and eastern church history," under the editorship of Constantine N. Tsirpanlis. The same organization sponsored a symposium on October 7 under the theme of "God and the World in the Cappadocians." The first issue contains articles on Gregory the Great, Christian love, the structure of the church in the liturgical tradition of the early centuries, and a bibliography for eastern orthodox theology between the years 1970 and 1980. Lutherans, who do much of their theology *vis a vis* the Roman Catholic Church, can benefit by the eastern church's concern with the preservation of the early church's theologians, a virtually unvisited area for most. In announcing the appearance of a new theological journal, it is difficult to avoid calling attention to the editor's endorsement of universalism in a book review (pp. 73-75). Individual copies are five dollars. Correspondence can be addressed to The Patristic and Byzantine Review, R.R. 1, Box 353-A, Minuet Lane, Kingston, New York 12401. The review is a welcome scholarly contribution to an often neglected area of church studies.

David P. Scaer

THE CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF
CONFESSIONAL LUTHERAN SEMINARIES (ACLS)
CAMBRIDGE, SEPTEMBER 6-9, 1982

The ACLS was founded in Oberursel, Germany, in August 1980 at the conclusion of a theological conference called by the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany on the campus of the Lutheran Theological Seminary. In early September 1982 representatives from confessional Lutheran seminaries met in Cambridge for the first officially called conference of the ACLS. Seminaries from all continents, with the exception of Australia, were represented to discuss the general theme of theological education. The ACLS developed from a growing desire to bring seminaries of the churches committed to the Lutheran Confessions into a closer relationship with one another. Other denominations have had similar associations to help their theological institutions throughout the world, but contact among confessional Lutheran seminaries has been only on a one-to-one basis. The general theme of the first conference was theological education. Conference essays included: "The Gospel of Matthew as Theological Training Document," Dr. David P. Scaer, Fort Wayne; "Martin Luther's Academic Training," Dr. Wilbur Kreiss, Paris; "Theological Education before and after the Time of Martin Luther," Dr. Manfred Roensch, Oberursel, Germany; "Principles and Reflections on Theological Education," Dr. Detlaff Lehmann, Oberursel; "Training of a Confessional Lutheran Pastor in Asia," Dr. J. Gamaliel, Nagercoil, India; "Theological Training of the Pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil," Dr. Rudi Zimmer; "Theological Training of the Pastor in the Confessional Lutheran Seminary in the U.S.A. and Canada," Dr. Karl Barth, St. Louis; "Theological Training of the Pastor in the Lutheran Church in South Africa," Dr. E. Weber; "Theological Education of the Pastors in the Confessional Lutheran Churches in the German Democratic Republic," Dr. Gottfried Wachler; and "The Role of Religious Publications in Theology," Dr. H.L. Poetsch, Hannover, Germany.

The conference also adopted "A Statement of Purpose for the Association of Confessional Lutheran Seminaries" which is to be circulated among the member churches and their supporting churches for advice and comment. The statement reads as follows:

The ACLS shall center on issues of common interest to the seminaries as the centres of theological education for their respective churches. Since the 1950's and the 1960's, Lutheran churches who have shared a common confessional heritage and interest have used various avenues to share their concerns in working for the common goal of loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions. We believe that also the seminaries of the ACLS have an obligation to each other under their mutual subservience to the Holy Scriptures as God's word and their allegiance to the Lutheran Confessions. These seminaries, joined by confessional subscription, have a commitment to express and foster their confessional commitment and loyalty. The seminaries are entrusted by their respective churches with the preparation of the church's clergy and are thus responsible to a large degree for the theological directions of their churches. The Association recognizes the responsibility given to others by the respective church bodies, e.g., in the area of church relations. Since the confessional Lutheran faith is one faith and not many, it behooves the seminaries to maintain this unity among themselves. Our seminaries are not united by ecclesiastical organization but

by the common confessional commitment. They are also united by the goal of assisting each other in the divinely given task of preparing men for ministry.

To attain these purposes the seminaries (1) shall share information among themselves and keep others aware of developments at their respective institutions; (2) shall exchange professors and students in accordance with provisions of their church bodies; (3) shall conduct meetings to discuss theological issues of common concern to their institutions and their church bodies; (4) shall assist in arranging for research projects of concerns of certain of its member seminaries; (5) shall exchange faculty theological journals and lectures; (6) inform each other about curriculum; (7) shall inform each other about teaching methods according to the particular disciplines and the textbooks used; and (8) shall inform each other in regard to moral, ethical, educational and confessional requirements for admission and graduation.

To reach these purposes certain concrete action must be taken: (1) Information may be shared through newsletters or through a cooperative publication. (2) Material assistance (e.g., books) shall be provided sister seminaries where possible. (3) Meetings shall be announced as early as possible, perhaps several years in advance, to make them as accessible to as many as possible.

A chairman and secretary shall be chosen and shall serve between meetings as the executive committee. The former shall be responsible as the convener of the next meeting, and the latter shall share information through newsletters and other publications.

Copies of this resolution shall be shared with the faculties of the seminaries, their supporting boards, and their church leaders for study and response.

In other action the seminary representatives accepted the offer of Dr. Poetsch to use the international Lutheran periodical *Gospel-Evangelium*, printed in Germany, to publish the essays from the conference and to share information from the member seminaries on a regular basis. One of the pressing needs among confessional Lutheran seminaries is the dissemination of theological work, assisting each other by sharing library resources. The smaller seminaries in East Germany and the Third World do not have the funds to obtain all the textbooks necessary for a Lutheran theological education. To provide a sense of worldwide confessional Lutheran unity, the exchange of professors and seminarians is encouraged.

The next ACLS conference has been tentatively scheduled for September 2-5, 1985, at a place to be announced after determination by the chairman. The three-year notice is intended to provide professors of the seminaries in Asia and Africa opportunity to adjust any planned leaves to make attendance possible at the next ACLS conference. The host of this year's conference was the Reverend Ronald Feuerhahn of Westfield House, the theological training center of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England. That church's chairman, Dr. George Pearce, also welcomed the group and discussed relations with the International Lutheran Conference. Continuing as ACLS chairman is Dr. Manfred Roensch and as secretary the undersigned. Correspondence concerning the ACLS and its statement of purpose may be directed to the secretary.

David P. Scaer

EVANGELICALS AND WINE — SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE

Scattered reports indicate that some congregations are giving serious consideration to substituting grape juice for the traditional wine in their communion services. Among the reasons for opposing this change, one is separating ourselves from Protestant fundamentalists, who have raised refraining from wine to a positive Christian virtue. Apart from exegetical, historical, and doctrinal considerations, wine should be used as a testimony of Christian freedom. This would be the Luther-like thing to do.

Addressing this issue from a scholarly perspective is Norman L. Geisler in his essay "A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking" (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, January-March 1982, pp. 46-56). Geisler, a respected evangelical scholar, comes out against wine-drinking in the concluding paragraph, curiously entitled "Why Christians Need Not Drink Wine." The reasons offered here are hardly Biblical, but revive old-time memories of the essentially non-theological arguments offered by the right wing of American religion. To argue restraint from drinking wine on the grounds that America is an alcoholic culture might also mean abstinence from food, especially if it could be shown that America was more gluttonous than alcoholic. Total abstinence from wine is offered as a more consistent policy. Does Dr. Geisler mean to suggest that consistency would also on the other side require only alcoholic beverages? His other argument, that we have "plenty of wholesome, nonaddictive beverages" which the ancients did not have, might suggest that we also ban coffee, cola, and tea.

Aside from Dr. Geisler's personal Protestant preferences, however, his essay is especially valuable for those who are toying around with the idea of placing grape juice in communion chalices. After examining Geisler's exegetical evidence, they might have second thoughts. A teetotaling Baptist, Geisler sees nothing else but wine being used in the early church communion services. The Corinthian drunkenness was caused, at least partially, by the communion wine. Even if new wine was used, it "was just as fermented as old wine." This point is supported by Hosea 4:11, where both old and new wines are able to bring about drunkenness. Nor does Geisler dispute that Jesus turned the water into actual wine at Cana. Perhaps unknown to some is the fact that the wine of the ancient world was mixed with water — for example, one part wine to twenty parts water (Homer) or three parts water (Ion). Thus, the wines of early church communion services may have been considerably less alcoholic than many modern sacramental wines that boast a twelve percent alcoholic content. It is not surprising that Geisler, a Baptist, does not direct his attention to the practice of communion, since his denomination cannot be considered sacramental in its theology. Lutherans thinking of putting grape juice in the communion chalice are not going to find any evidence that Jesus or the early church used grape juice in the sacrament. Even a wine-abstaining Baptist confirms this point.

David P. Scaer

Homiletical Studies

PENTECOST SUNDAY

Genesis 11:1-9

May 22, 1983

In verse 1 "one language" refers to speech in which particular words have the same meaning for all people. Migrating "from the east," that is, eastward, they found a plain — the Tigris-Euphrates valley east of Mt. Ararat. No stones were available in this area; so clay was baked in kilns and made into bricks. These in turn were held together by an asphalt-like substance that was available in the region. Building a city and a tower was no sin in itself (v4). The sin lay in men attaching their own name to the structure: "Come, let us build ourselves a city and tower." "These words are evidence of smug hearts which put their trust in the things of this world without trusting God . . ." (Luther). Instead of calling upon the name of the Lord (4:26), they planned to make a name for themselves. Instead of spreading through the earth as God had commanded (9:1), they defied God by gathering in one place. The same perversity of heart which is at the root of individual estrangement from God motivated people's joint endeavors. The Lord is said to come down (v5), conveying the idea that from God's viewpoint the gigantic structure was no more than a tiny molehill that required observation at close range if it was not to be overlooked. Luther comments on verse 6 that this is "a sort of complaint from God, who is amazed and grieved at the great arrogance of men." God must curb wickedness to prevent chaos. To keep control of His creation God now used language to cause confusion. But the root cause of the confusion was human sin which prevented a constructive filling of the earth and brought instead fragmentation and division into hostile groups (vv7-8). "Babel" (v9) is a play on the verb *balal*, "to confuse."

The central thought of the text is that God brings anti-god aspirations to naught by His judgments. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers will exalt God's name rather than their own. The problem is that we so often exalt ourselves. The means to the goal is that God, by uniting us to Himself through Christ, has made it possible for us to exalt His name.

Introduction: The confusion that once resulted from people speaking different languages is symptomatic of confusion about their relationship to God. That confusion God dealt with in the text.

God Brings Order Out of Confusion

- I. By cutting short efforts to exalt our own name.
 - A. The tower builders sought to make a name for themselves (v4).
 1. In direct defiance of God's command to fill the earth ("lest we be scattered," v4).
 2. In a perversity which ignored the bounds of their creaturehood ("a tower with its top to the heavens," v4).
 3. In a rebellion which could only lead to chaos. Observe the chaos that results when we make a name for ourselves without regard for God - jealousy, enmity, violence, war.
 - B. God takes drastic measures to cut short human efforts at self-enhancement.
 1. God knew what the tower builders were doing (vv6-7). He is still aware of human presumption.
 2. The disruptive dispersion was God's way of reminding the tower

builders that He was to be honored, not they.

3. God comes "down" to us in events such as sickness, accidents, and the forces of nature to remind us that He is the Master of our destiny. When, instead of honoring God, we seek to make a name for ourselves, God has ways of cutting our efforts short and thereby bringing some order out of our confusion.

But God has another more effective way of bringing order out of our confusion.

II. By exalting His name.

- A. In mighty acts of judgment like the confusion of languages.
 1. Intended to show the futility of doing our own thing.
 2. Intended to elicit dependence on God.
- B. In gracious acts of mercy like the sending of the Holy Spirit (Jn 15:26).
 1. The Spirit makes known that God united heaven and earth and joined people to Himself, not by a tower of bricks but by Jesus Christ.
 2. The message of what God did in Christ the Spirit makes intelligible in every language (Ac 2:11,38).
 3. When by the power of the Spirit we receive the message of forgiveness, God is exalting His name and bringing order out of our confusion. There is no need to be confused any longer about who we are and what our purpose is. We are people whom God has created, redeemed, and renewed. Our purpose is to exalt His name by trusting and honoring Him.

Conclusion: God is not a God of confusion but of order. Pentecost tells us that God brought and is continuing to bring order out of the confusion of Babel.

Gerhard Aho

THE FESTIVAL OF THE HOLY TRINITY

Numbers 6:22-27

May 29, 1983

The Festival of the Holy Trinity, which has been observed on the First Sunday after Pentecost since medieval times, holds a central position in the traditional Lutheran church year as the bridge between the "semester of our Lord" (the first half of the year, which celebrates various events in the life of Christ) and the "semester of the church" (the second half of the year — the "Trinity" or "Pentecost" season). Luther Reed (*The Lutheran Liturgy* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1947], p. 519) states the case as concisely as possible: "Coming at the conclusion of the historic celebrations, Trinity Sunday . . . provides a fitting climax to the first half of the year and lends a dogmatic foundation for the Sundays in the second half with their messages concerning the teaching of our Lord as exemplified in the life of the church." In a day when the doctrinal and liturgical innovators of American "Lutheranism" seek to downplay the traditional adoration of the Holy Trinity as much as possible (cf. *CTQ* 41:3 [July, 1977], p. 49) it is the duty and privilege of true Lutheran pastors to celebrate this festival with gusto — expounding the doctrine of the Trinity with careful clarity and stressing its centrality to the life of the church. In pursuing these twin goals the preacher would do well to refer his congregation to the collect and preface of the day and to the ecumenical creeds (the Apostolic, the Nicene, and, above all, the Athanasian). Also of great usefulness is the First Article of the Augsburg Confession where the term "person," in speaking of the Trinity, is defined as "not a part or a quality in another but that which subsists in itself."

The "Aaronic benediction" is the only benediction specifically commanded by God (v22), although the New Testament church, of course, observes this ceremonial commandment as a matter of Christian liberty. Its common name derives from the restriction of its public use to "Aaron and his sons" (v22), the incumbents of the office of the public ministry in the Old Testament church (cf. 1 Chr 23:13). The synodical rubrics, therefore, rightly restrict its public use to the incumbents of the office of the public ministry in the New Testament church, the called and ordained servants of the Word of God. This benediction is not a mere wish but, like the absolution, actually relays the blessing of God to His people (vs 23,27). This truth is especially emphasized by God's statement that the benediction serves to "put My name upon the people" (v27), so that we are sealed again (as we originally were in baptism) as children of God. This same truth, moreover, is symbolized by the way in which the Lutheran pastor lifts up open hands toward the congregation as he speaks these words (a custom inherited from the Old Testament public priests — cf. Lv 9:22) and then concludes by making the sign of the cross on the people. The Mozarabic Liturgy incorporates the Aaronic benediction at a point previous to the reception of the sacrament, but Luther followed the tradition of the Old Testament church (cf. Lv 9:22) in placing this benediction so appropriately at the end of the service, making this comment: "I believe that Christ used something of this kind when He blessed His disciples as He ascended into heaven."

It is the proper name of God which is used three times in the benediction (vs24-26) as well as in the introductory verse (22). This *tetragrammeton* (so called because of its four consonants) denotes God as the only self-existent being (Ex 30:14-15), and since it is a proper name, its use often indicates a personal relationship between God and the people with whom He uses it. Most modern scholars believe that this name was originally pronounced "Yahweh," but we cannot be sure because the Old Testament church, prompted by a pious sense of awe, was hesitant to speak the name and so read the word '*adonai*' ("Lord") whenever the *tetragrammeton* occurred in Scripture. The New Testament church has observed the same custom, following the example of our Lord Himself and His apostles. (Traditional English versions translate the *tetragrammeton* as "LORD" using four capital letters, in order to distinguish it from '*adonai*', translated simply as "Lord.")

The threefold repetition of the *tetragrammeton* in the Aaronic benediction clearly refers to the three persons of the Holy Trinity (whose worship was as integral to the faith of the Old Testament church as to our own). Each of the three statements relates to the particular person to whom the Scripture ascribes the main role in the *opus ad extra* concerned. Thus, verse 24 speaks of God the Father, who leads in the bestowal of blessings in general, including the work of preservation. Verse 25 speaks of God the Son, who plays the main role in the work of redemption. The word "face" is often used figuratively to refer to one's self-manifestation to others — here God's self-manifestation to mankind in the promised Messiah, who is a divine light shining in the midst of spiritual darkness (cf. Jn 1:4,5,9,18; 2 Cor 4:6). The vicarious obedience, suffering and death of the God-man is the basis of the divine grace (undeserved favour) which issues in the forgiveness of sins (cf. Jn 1:14,16-17). Verse 26 speaks of God the Holy Spirit who has a particularly prominent part in the work of sanctification (in the broad sense). The word "face" ("countenance" is actually the same word as is translated "face" in the previous verse) again signifies a self-manifestation. Thus, the first clause relates to the Holy Spirit's communication, through the means of grace, of the divine grace earned by the Messiah's substitutionary work. The word

shalom ("peace") refers not to a *feeling* of peacefulness in the Christian, but rather to a wholeness which involves reconciliation with God and which the Holy Spirit establishes through the creation of faith in the human heart. (The word *sim* would be translated more exactly as "establish" than as "give.") Thus the final clause of the Aaronic benediction relates to the individual appropriation of salvation through the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Ro 5:1,5).

In preaching on such a text the pastor must, of course, make it clear to his hearers that the external works (*opera ad extra*) of the divine persons are indivisible. Likewise, he must emphasize that the internal relationships (*opera ad intra*) of these persons rule out the modalist idea of theologians in some "Lutheran" churches that the divine persons are three different *ways* in which God has revealed Himself. (See F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, I, pp. 415-424.)

Introduction: This one Sunday out of all the Sundays of the year is especially set aside as the Festival of the Holy Trinity. Paraments of white and gold adorn the altar, pulpit, and lectern. Special hymns are sung, special passages of Scripture are read, and special prayers are addressed to God. Yet all the Sundays of the year are "Trinity Sundays." Every Sunday service is dedicated to the worship of the Triune God, and every Sunday service ends with the Aaronic benediction stated in the text. This blessing recalls and relays to us each week

God's Work for Us

- I. The Work Ascribed Especially to God the Father
 - A. Who is the First Person of the Holy Trinity (Ecumenical Creeds, AC I).
 1. Of one essence with the Son and the Holy Spirit.
 2. Yet a person distinct from them.
 - B. Who is the source of all blessings (v24a; Jas 1:17).
 1. Material blessings (SC: Creed, I), especially
 - a. Creation (Mal 2:10)
 - b. Preservation (v24b; Ps 103:13).
 2. Spiritual blessings, especially
 - a. Sending His Son into the world (Jn 3:15).
 - b. Sending His Spirit into human hearts (Ga 4:6).
- II. The Work Ascribed Especially to God the Son
 - A. Who is the Light of the world (v25a; Jn 1:4-5,9; Nicene Creed).
 1. For He is eternally begotten by the Father.
 - a. Receiving His being from the Father.
 - b. Yet existing from all eternity.
 2. For He, alone of the three divine persons, has become man (Synodical Catechism, p. 32).
 - B. Who is the source of divine grace (v25b; Jn 1:14, 16-17).
 1. Which we need above all things.
 - a. The ancestors of our race failed to adore the Holy Trinity as the One True God.
 - (1.) They sought to place themselves on His level (Gn 3:5).
 - (2.) They proved ungrateful for all previous blessings upon them (Gn 1-2).
 - b. We all have likewise failed to adore the Holy Trinity as the One True God.
 - (1.) From the time of conception.
 - (2.) In many and various ways.
 2. Which He earned for all people.
 - a. By means of His vicarious obedience.
 - b. By means of His vicarious suffering and death.

III. The Work Ascribed Especially to God the Holy Spirit

- A. Who is the Third Person of the Trinity (Ecumenical Creeds).
 1. Proceeding from the Father and the Son.
 2. Yet existing as a distinct person from all eternity.
- B. Who testifies to the saving work of the Son (v26a; Jn 15:26).
 1. Through the proclamation of the gospel.
 - a. In the reading of Holy Scripture, the words of which He taught to the prophets and apostles (1 Cor 2:13; cf. the witness of the Pentecost events, recalled last Sunday, to the infallible inspiration of the apostles in the performance of their teaching office).
 - b. In the sermons which the pastors of orthodox churches preach on the basis of Holy Scripture.
 - c. In the absolution.
 - d. In the benediction concluding the service (vs 23,27).
 2. Through the administration of the sacraments (Jn 3:5-6; Tt 3:5).
- C. Who thereby makes people whole (v26b).
 1. Creating faith in the saving work of Christ Jesus (1 Cor 12:3; Ga 4:6).
 2. Reconciling to God people who previously were inimical to Him (Ro 5:1,5; 8:7).
 3. Enabling us joyfully to adore the Holy Trinity as the One True God (Ps 73:25,26).

Douglas McC. L. Judisch

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

I Kings 8:41-43

June 5, 1983

The pericope is the fifth portion of seven particularized portions articulated by Solomon in his dedicatory prayer upon the completion of the temple in Jerusalem. The text concerns itself with the hearing of prayers offered by people foreign to Israel. Many people were drawn to Solomon's court from all over the world. The "call upon" implies something more than a token courtesy of a visitor to Israel's "deity."

The name of God had become known through deeds of omnipotence. "The strong hand and the outstretched arm are connected together as a standing expression for the wondrous manifestations of the divine omnipotence in the guidance of Israel" (C.F. Keil). God's intervention is integrally connected to the covenant promises and the ultimate deliverance through the fulfilment of those promises in the Messiah. And so "the name of the Lord" is always used in the Scriptures to denote the working of God among His people or in His kingdom.

These prayers result from faith through the working of God in the lives of the petitioners. The naming of the Lord's name over the nation, temple, or the like presupposes the working of God within it and denotes the confession and acknowledgement of that working. "The name of Jehovah will be named over the temple when Jehovah manifests His gracious presence within it in such a manner, that the nations who pray toward it experience the working of God within His sanctuary" (Keil).

Introduction: The name of God is associated with the actions of God. God's name becomes virtually synonymous in Scripture with the manifestations of His

grace and power. To call upon the name of the Lord means to recognize and to trust that God has power to heal and deliver. The powerful and saving name of God is proclaimed and celebrated in that place where God has promised to meet and dwell among His people, in the sanctuary of God's house. Solomon's petition calling upon God to hear when a "foreigner . . . comes and prays towards this house," is, in effect, a witness to the fact that God has worked faith in the hearts of these "foreigners" through the spread of His name in the world. God's name has power — power to draw people, power to claim people.

The Name of God Has Power

- I. God's name draws people.
 - A. People hear of God's great works.
 1. God has done great things on behalf of His people.
 2. God's great acts are rehearsed and celebrated among His people, especially in their worship (v42) — including the prescribed ritual, ceremonies, sacrifices of the Old Testament, which all pointed forward to Jesus Christ (Col 2:16).
 3. God's name spreads because of His acts of deliverance (v42).
 - B. People are drawn to God.
 1. Drawn to the house "called by Thy name" (v43).
 2. Drawn for His "name's sake."
 3. Drawn out of a need to speak their petitions to Him (v43).
- II. God's name claims people.
 - A. People come in accordance with God's will.
 1. God wants His name to be known among all men (v43).
 2. God desires others besides Israelites to fear Him (v43).
 3. God desires His house to be the house called by His name (v43).
 - B. People are brought to faith by that name of God.
 1. Faith in that God who has power to help.
 2. Faith in that God who has power to save.
 3. Faith in that God who acts with power in response to their petitions.

Conclusion: The more the church proclaims the name of God — His acts of deliverance on behalf of His people — the more will people be drawn to Him and through that name be given His name as members of the family of God through Jesus Christ.

Norbert H. Mueller

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

I Kings 17:17-24

June 12, 1983

Elijah speaks judgment upon Israel and her King Ahab. He is forced to go into exile, first to the brook Cherith, where he is fed by God through a raven; secondly, to Zarephath, a Sidonian village, where a widow is charged by God to care for His prophet. The widow, her son, and Elijah live under the promise that the bowl of flour and the jar of oil will not fail until God breaks the drought by sending rain.

The family delivered from hunger by God's miraculous intervention is struck by the sickness and ultimate death of the widow's son. Literally, "no breath remained in him." Elijah, who had come with a message of life, now is viewed as a messenger of judgment. The age-old question of the relationship of sin and suffering is brought sharply into focus. Elijah's words of response (v20) contain

no reproach of God, but express heartfelt compassion for the sufferer and spring from the living faith of a heart poured out to God in confident assurance that He will give aid. Elijah uses his body as an instrument to bring the boy back to life, just as in other cases of miracle there was an imposition of the hand.

The death served as a medium for the manifestation of the glory of God (cf. Jn 9:3). The miracle served to authenticate the messenger and the message of that God who is not merely the God of the Jews but the God of the Gentiles also (Ro 3:29; 15:8-12).

Introduction: God's goodness and judgment are at work in the world, also in the lives of those who know Him not, to prepare a way for the reception of His saving Gospel. Through Elijah God demonstrated His power over the calamity of nature and the personal tragedy of death, both symptoms of sin in the world, and drew a widow in faith to Himself as her God and Savior. Elijah, moreover, like all the prophets, proclaimed the coming of the Christ, seeking to bring people to faith in Him as the one who conquers sin and gives life to all who believe.

God Acts in Judgment and Deliverance

- I. The sign of judgment.
 - A. God's judgment is evident.
 1. Israel's apostasy brought the desolation of famine to the region.
 2. The whole creation groans in travail under God's judgment.
 3. Our suffering is a result of sin and God's judgment.
 - B. The ultimate sign is death.
 1. The widow considered herself to be under judgment.
 2. Death is but a symptom of this judgment.
 3. The ultimate kind of death — separation from God — is to be without hope and without God in the world.
- II. The sign of deliverance.
 - A. The evidences of God's intervention.
 1. Elijah was sent to the widow.
 2. He was perceived to be a man of God.
 3. Elijah, like all the prophets, proclaimed salvation through the coming Christ.
 - B. The ultimate sign of deliverance.
 1. The symptom of judgment was overcome; death occurred so that the glory of God might be revealed.
 2. The miracle validated the message and the messenger as coming from God.
 3. Faith was engendered and confessed by the widow. She was drawn to the ultimate deliverance.

Conclusion: Sin is an everpresent reality in our lives. We see sin's power in every experience of sickness, heartache, and death that we encounter. Our comfort is that God intervenes in this human condition in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, who conquered sin and death and gives us life now and eternally.

Norbert H. Mueller

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

II Samuel 12:1-10,13

June 19, 1983

It would prove beneficial to the worshippers to make use of Psalm 51 somewhere in the service, preferably after the sermon. The Fifty-first Psalm is the personal and spiritual reaction of David to that which transpired in the text.

Introduction: Imagine the reaction of mighty King David to Nathan's "Thou art the man" (v7)! It was possible that the same indignant rage that David was ready to unleash against the "rich man" (v5) he would now unleash against the prophet Nathan. But such a reaction did not happen. Instead, we can conclude from Psalm 51 that David would have been ready to chant a *Te Deum* for the change God had brought into his life through the prophet Nathan. What happened in the text reminds you and me:

I Need to Chant a *Te Deum* for the "Nathans" in My Life

- I. Identify those who are the "Nathans."
 - A. Specifically, the one(s) specially called by my Lord through His church (i.e., my pastor).
 - B. Generally, people within the universal priesthood of all believers (i.e., members of my family, members of my household of faith, etc.)
- II. Nathans pointed David to his sin and its forgiveness.
 - A. At first David would not confess his sin.
 1. Nathan's previous preaching did not curtail David's adulterous scheming and murderous actions.
 2. David's own conscience did not curtail him.
 - B. God used the parable Nathan told to elicit from David a confession of his sin (v13) and so to rekindle his faith in its forgiveness.
 1. Absolution was pronounced (v13b; Ps 51:1-4).
 2. Restoration was assured (v13b; Ps 51:12).
 3. Pardon was guaranteed (v13b; Ps 51:9-13).
- III. "Nathans" point us to our sins and their forgiveness.
 - A. At first we may try to hide our sin.
 1. The Law hurts — crushing, convicting, convincing.
 2. We are slow to admit our sins because we think of Jesus more as a Lawgiver than as a deliverer from the Law.
 - B. When at last we, like David, confess our sins, God strengthens our faith in their forgiveness.
 1. Absolution is given.
 2. Restoration is assured.
 3. Pardon in Christ is bestowed.

Conclusion: In ancient times when a king's courier brought him bad news concerning the state of the kingdom, the king sometimes had the courier put to death. Such kings could not separate between the bad news and the bearer of the bad news. As people of a Heavenly King we are able to separate between the news and the bearer of the news. It takes courage for someone to speak to us the bad news about our sins. But when that news leads to confession and absolution we have reason to chant a *Te Deum* for the "Nathans" in our life.

Robert R. Krueger

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Zechariah 12:7-10

June 26, 1983

Introduction: The text describes the victory which our God has now achieved through the work of Jesus Christ. In a time when the people of God were plagued with false shepherds Zechariah foretells a day when the true Shepherd was to come and achieve a victory of eternal significance for His people. Our text gives us opportunity to

Celebrate the Feast of Victory

- I. A victory made possible by God's power.
 - A. God's power protects His church.
 1. God exercises His power through His Son, "the angel of the Lord" (v8), who by His incarnation became the warrior for God's people.
 2. God's power is such that no enemy, neither evil men nor Satan's hosts, can prevail against the church (v9).
 - B. God makes known His power to the whole church.
 1. Those with position and privileges will not be able to boast that their own power achieved the victory (v7b).
 2. The feeblest and the lowliest, too, will experience God's power (vv7-8).

There is no reason for one segment of the church to exalt itself over another; one group is not more deserving than another.

- II. A victory made possible by God's grace.
 - A. Grace was revealed in the death of Christ.
 1. The people of Jerusalem killed Christ because they detested him (Zch 11:8).
 2. Christ permitted them to pierce Him because He is the Good Shepherd (Zch 11) who had come to give His life for the sheep.
 - B. Grace is revealed in the effects Christ's death has on people.
 1. Many who pierced Christ mourned over Him later, weeping bitterly in repentance (v10; Jn 19:37).
 2. God continues to pour out His grace on us through His word and sacraments. We repent daily of the sins that caused His death and receive Him in faith as our divine Shepherd.

Conclusion: Let us celebrate the feast of the victory of our God. We share in His victory, for we experience His power and grace.

Robert R. Krueger

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

I Kings 19:4-21

July 3, 1983

The account of Elijah's inner struggle and God's direction for his ministry would be an appropriate text for a pastor's installation. Yet it is appointed as a sermon text in congregations of which few will be installing a pastor on this day. We want to preach to the needs of our hearers, none of whom are prophets like Elijah and only a few of whom might be pastors not in a pulpit themselves. Yet all of us can easily experience the loneliness and dejection of Elijah as we are surrounded by a world which bows to and kisses the Baals of this generation. To

keep the attention of the hearer on one theme, the outline utilizes Elijah's cave experience more than the calling of Elisha, though the latter has been incorporated.

Introduction: We often regard the prophets of old as having a relationship with God that never wavered, and we berate ourselves when our faith is not strong. Elijah had his lapses, and so do we. But God does not desert us. As He revealed Himself to Elijah, He also assures each of us

You Are Not Alone

I. Our cry of desolation.

A. Elijah felt alone.

1. He had acted on God's behalf against evil (1 Kgs 17-18). He predicted a drought as judgment, eradicated the prophets of Baal, and foresaw refreshing rain. It appeared evil's influence was broken.
2. But Jezebel sought his life (1 Kgs 19:1-3). Instead of basking in victory, Elijah fled into the wilderness. We sense bitterness. He had been jealous for the Lord's cause, but the result has been Israel's apostasy to the extent that he finds himself alone and threatened with death (v14). Where is God?

B. As God's people, we can experience isolation.

1. Our nation is not as Christian as we often regard it. Studies reveal only sixty percent claim church membership. How many of them worship regularly? People bow down to the Baal of materialism and kiss the god of self-indulgence (v18). The desires of the flesh are manifest (Ga 5:19-21).
2. We can experience isolation. We stand up for our Christian faith and principles and can be rebuffed, if not belittled. If harassment is intense, we might flee from the situation, mind our own business, become convinced that we are alone, that even God does not care (1 Kgs 19:9-11).

II. Is answered by God.

A. God's mission in our life continues.

1. Elijah was given new direction. God asks him why he is hiding, listens to his miseries (vv9, 13), but then reveals His intimate presence (vv 11-12) and sends Elijah back into his world on a new mission to effect God's will (v15-17).
2. God also has purpose for our lives, even in a sinful world. We do not influence the world when we hide from it. We also face the question, "What are you doing here?" (v13) and we hear Jesus' bidding, "Follow Me" (Lk 9:57-62). We are to know His will and do it. We are to proclaim His Gospel and live in it.

B. We are not alone.

1. God is with us. Not always in the spectacular, the strong wind, the earthquake, but in the gentle, firm voice which in Baptism certifies that we are His, which in the Sacrament of the Altar assures us we are forgiven, which in the Scriptures gives up direction, strength, and eternal hope in Jesus Christ.
2. We are with others. Elijah was informed of 7,000 fellow-believers (v18). Elisha became his companion (v21). We join with fellow-Christians and together support one another and carry out God's mission. Our mutual fellowship in Christ fends off loneliness.

Conclusion: God loves us no less than He loved Elijah. He fills our lives, too, with His presence. We are not alone.

Luther G. Strasen

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Isaiah 66:10-14

July 10, 1983

This text from the final chapter of Isaiah projects the reader beyond the events of Isaiah's days. Isaiah had exposed Judah's basic sin, that of a wrong attitude and relationship to God. He warned the nation of its inevitable collapse, but also promised that a godly remnant would be preserved. From that remnant would come blessings as the Messiah effected world-wide redemption and final glory for His Church.

"Jerusalem" refers to "the place of the name of the Lord of hosts" (Is 18:7), the place where God dwells (Is 8:18). This Jerusalem is the kingdom of God's redemptive presence. It is His Church, where we who are His people live in His power now and in the hope of His presence in eternal glory. It was not, then, the purpose of God to eradicate His people, but to build a new Jerusalem on the foundation of a righteous and faithful remnant. Thus, Isaiah pictures God Himself self nurturing and comforting Jerusalem.

Introduction: Hebrew writers more often used concrete terms than abstract ones. Isaiah wanted to convey God's continuous, strong presence with His people and does so in the concrete terms of a mother's bountiful care for her child. His prophecy still leads us to

Rejoice in God's Care

- I. Rejoice that God does not leave us.
 - A. God did not allow "Jerusalem" to perish. Judah deserved destruction because of its rejection of God (Is 1:4). Yet God promised that a remnant would survive (Is 1:9). Those who mourn for Jerusalem can rejoice (v10). God will not forsake the place of His presence (Is 49:14-15), His church.
 - B. God does not forsake us. Our sins call for condemnation (Ga 6:7-8), but Jesus proclaims God's presence: "The kingdom of God has come near you" (Lk 10:9). We are inhabitants of God's spiritual Jerusalem. We rejoice that He has claimed us to live in His presence and care.
- II. Rejoice that God prospers our lives.
 - A. We are nourished (v11). As children are nursed by a mother, even so we also receive spiritual nourishment from God in the close, totally dependent relationship we have with Him in Jesus Christ. As members of His spiritual family, living in His Jerusalem, we are sustained by God's acceptance and forgiveness.
 - B. We are comforted (vv12b-13). God's promise is that He will care for us. Now God Himself is pictured as a mother who delights in her child. He gives us all we need, carries us through life, comforts us during difficult times. He gives us spiritual prosperity, and we rejoice in His gifts and care.
- III. Rejoice that God gives us future hope.
 - A. Evil will be subdued (v14b). The hand of the Lord — His power — will uphold His people even as He vents His righteous anger against His enemies. God will come to judge (vv15-16).

- B. We will live in God's presence forever (v14a). God will give life to what was dead. We will see His victory. We will rejoice in His eternal presence and care.

Conclusion: We do not wait for heaven to rejoice. God is present now and cares for us now. Our joy begins now and will be complete when we celebrate in God's eternal Jerusalem (Rev 21:2).

Luther G. Strasen

THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Deuteronomy 30:9-14

July 17, 1983

The commandments and statutes (v10) were not too hard (v11) for the Israelites to keep because God had spoken in simple, straightforward language which even the uneducated could understand. Nor were God's commandments "far off" (v11). God had not kept them hidden in heaven or somewhere beyond the sea but He had condescended to have them put down in writing. But God brought His commandments even nearer to the Israelites; He put them in their mouth and heart (v14). Luther explains that for the Law to be in the heart the Law must be loved, which is impossible for us to do by our own powers. Yet the Law can be fulfilled only if it is loved. Luther asserts that "by this text Moses directs the people to another Word to come, which, when received in the heart, causes His commandment to be loved. It is as if He said, 'You will not fulfill My commandment when you hear it, but only if you love it with the heart. This you will not do unless the Word has been preached with the mouth and believed in the heart. So my commandment will become neither too difficult nor too distant.' " Luther is referring to the word of the Gospel which is preached by the mouth and then believed as a result of hearing. Paul refers to this Old Testament passage in Romans 10:6-8.

The central thought of the text is that we can do what the Lord has commanded because His Law is in our heart. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers will be moved by love for God and His Law to do what God commands. The problem is that we often regard the Law as an annoying encumbrance rather than a delight. The means to the goal is that God Himself by the hearing of the Gospel changes our hearts so that we are able to love God's Law.

Introduction: We Lutherans hear so much about being saved by grace through faith without the deeds of the Law that we may overlook the need to keep the Law. While we do not have to keep the Law of God to be saved, we are to keep it. God through Moses encourages the Israelites and us to keep His Law when He says: "This commandment . . . is not too hard for you . . . you can do it."

God's Commandments Are Not Too Hard for Us

- I. God has made them known.
 - A. He made his commandments known to Israel.
 1. He did not lock them up in heaven but gave them to Moses on two tablets of stone. He also spelled out for them clearly and specifically many civil and ceremonial commandments.
 2. These commandments were read to the people publicly so they would always know what God wanted them to do.
 - B. God has made his commandments known to us.

1. While we have been freed from the civil and ceremonial regulations given to the Israelites (Col 2:16), God's moral law, the Ten Commandments, is still binding for us.
2. The Ten Commandments have been explained to us in Sunday School, in confirmation classes, and in sermons. They are a sure guide to what is right and wrong.
3. God has laid down moral absolutes: "Do this. Do not do that." The commandments are not too hard for us because we are not ignorant of what God would have us do.

But the knowing will not empower us to do them. Above all, what keeps the commandments from being too hard for us is that

II. God enables us to love them.

- A. We can love God's commands only when our hearts have been changed.
 1. A heart-change occurs when we hear the message of God's love for us in Christ, and that message creates faith in our heart (Ro 10:8-10).
 2. Faith in Christ produces love for God and His law, and a heart that loves God's law will be impelled to keep it (Dt 32:6).
- B. With hearts changed by the Gospel we can now use God's Law properly.
 1. We can acknowledge the Law's validity as accuser without despairing, for we continually find refuge in Christ.
 2. As we let God's Law guide us in doing God's will, we see the commandments as a loving Lord's urging to follow paths of righteousness on which He abundantly propers us (v9).

God's love stimulates our love for God and neighbor and enables us to fulfill the Law (Ro 13:10).

Conclusion: Impelled by the love of God we can do it; we can keep God's Law. God's commandments are not too hard for us.

Gerhard Aho

THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Proverbs 8:22-35

July 24, 1983

Chapter 8 is the climax of the Book of Proverbs and, indeed, the wisdom literature in general, of which this book is a prime example. For the Divine Wisdom which Proverbs 8 describes in more detail than any other passage in the wisdom literature is the source of all true wisdom, and the spiritual apprehension of this Divine Wisdom is the goal of the whole corpus of wisdom literature. Almost all modern exegetes assume that the Divine Wisdom who speaks in Proverbs 8 is merely an instance of poetic personification — a rhetorical device employed to describe an attribute of God. The orthodox church, however (as taught by Athanasius, Luther, Calov, Fuerbringer, etc.), has always heard her Lord Himself speaking to her in Proverbs 8, recognizing the Divine Wisdom there as an actual hypostasis, the Second Person of the Trinity, the preincarnate Savior. That the ancient interpretation (prevalent already in Old Testament times) is correct follows from a number of considerations, such as the following: (1) that such an extended figure of thought would not be appropriate to the wisdom genre, (2) that the attributes of God cannot be said to be acquired or begotten (v 22), even in a figurative sense, (3) that the wisdom of God does not take precedence over His other attributes (v 22), (4) that the Wisdom speaking here is distinguished from the wisdom which He possesses (e.g., v 14) and dispenses (e.g., vs 10-11), and (5) that such an interpretation is

confirmed by various New Testament passages (e.g., Jn 1:1-4; I Cor 1:24,30; Col. 1:3; Lk 11:49-52 compared with Mt 23:34-36). The use of several feminine grammatical forms is no objection to the Messianic identification of the Divine Wisdom of Proverbs 8, since, for one thing, grammatical gender is not equivalent to sexual nature in Hebrew (and other languages). The use of such forms results from the feminine gender of the word *hokhmah* ("wisdom").

After His introduction, then, in the first three verses, God the Son is the speaker in the remainder of Proverbs 8. In verses 4-14 He declares Himself the fountainhead of all true wisdom (see especially v 14). In verses 15-16 He assumes responsibility for the preservation of order in the world through the governments instituted by Him. In verses 17-21 He proclaims the imputation of His righteousness and promises other spiritual blessings to those who trust in Him (see especially v 18). In verses 22-31 the Divine Wisdom reveals Himself as the eternally begotten delight of God the Father and the Father's agent in the creation of the universe. The KJV and NASB translation of *qanani* as "possessed me" is certainly superior to the "created me" of the RSV. The basic meaning of *qanah*, however, is "get," and a better rendition of the form here would be "has begotten Me" (compare the similar significance, "I have given birth," in Eve's expression of Messianic hope, Gn 4:1). Verses 22-23, therefore, underscore in this way the Father's eternal generation of the Son: "The Lord has begotten Me from the beginning of His way, a time prior to His works from long ago. From eternity have I been established, from the first, from times prior to the earth." The eternal generation of the Son is likewise denoted by the *po^lal* of *hul* ("I have been brought forth") in verses 24 and 25. His participation in the work of creation as the agent of the Father earns Him the title of *'amon* in verse 30; "master-workman" is the best interpretation (cf. Jn 1:1-4; Col 1:15-17; He 1:1-4; Re 3:1-4). It is the intense devotion to His creatures ("My delights with the sons of man") asserted by verse 31 that ultimately led the Divine Wisdom to become a man Himself in order to bring life once again to those who deserve eternal death (v 36). In verses 32-34, therefore, the Divine Wisdom proclaims Himself the only way to blessedness (cf. Ps 2:11). For those who find Him through faith find eternal life, since in this way they obtain *ratzon* ("goodwill, favor, acceptance") from the Lord (v 35). This acceptance by God is, of course, based upon the vicarious satisfaction accomplished by the Divine Wisdom when He had come into the world which He created.

Introduction: In healthy cultures the aged are regarded with honor as the repository of wisdom, a wisdom gained from their own experience in life and the tradition inherited from preceding generations. The teeth to emerge last, therefore, are called "wisdom teeth." Traditionally people have said, "With age comes wisdom," and have urged in disputes, "Let older and wiser heads prevail." The aged are not necessarily wise, but certainly the superlatives of age and wisdom combine in the Wisdom of God who speaks to us in Proverbs 8, one whom we recognize as none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. For, in conjunction with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, this Divine Wisdom is, of all beings in existence,

Oldest and Wisest

- I. This Wisdom of God is infinitely old.
 - A. That is, according to His divine nature.
 1. For He is eternally begotten by God the Father.
 - a. Receiving His being from the Father ("has begotten," v 22; "have been established," v 23; "have been brought forth," vs 24-25).
 - b. Yet existing from all eternity ("from the beginning of His way," v 22; "from eternity," "from the first," v 23).

2. For He participated in the creation of the universe.
 - a. Scripture and the creeds ascribe the work of creation especially to the Father (Nicene Creed, I).
 - b. Scripture and the creeds, however, describe the Son as the Father's agent in the work of creation (vs 2-31; Jn 1:1-4; Col 1:15-17; He 1:1-4; Re 3:14; "by whom all things were made," Nicene Creed, II).
- B. Although not according to His human nature.
 1. Which He assumed in the womb of one of His creatures.
 2. Which He assumed in response to the sin which has infected all other human beings.
- II. The Wisdom of God is infinitely wise.
 - A. According to His divine nature.
 1. His wisdom is without defect or limits (vs 8-14; Ro 11:33).
 2. His wisdom is apparent even in the things created by Him (vs 27-30; Ps 104:24; Ro 1:20).
 - B. According to His human nature.
 1. Which He assumed despite the foolishness of all other human beings.
 - a. He created human beings with perfect wisdom-knowing only that which is good (cf. Gn 2:17).
 - b. Human beings became and remain fools seeking a "wisdom" contrary to the wisdom given by God.
 - (1) Adam and Eve sought such a wisdom in the forbidden fruit (Gn 2:5-6).
 - (2) Their descendants continued to seek such a "wisdom" (Ro 1:21-22).
 - (3) We still seek such a "wisdom" (evolutionary science, the attribution of errors to Scripture, charismatic claims to post-apostolic revelations, and the daily attempts of us all to rationalize transgressions of God's Law).
 2. Which He assumed, indeed, in response to the foolishness of all other human beings (cf. v 31).
 - a. Denying to His human nature temporarily (in the state of humiliation) the full and constant use of the divine attributes — including limitless wisdom (Col 2:3) — which were permeating it by nature of its union with His divine nature in the incarnation.
 - b. Living with perfect wisdom (keeping God's law perfectly) in our place (vs 20-21).
 - c. Suffering in our place the punishment which our foolishness deserves and so satisfying the divine wrath aroused by our sins (v 35).
 - d. Allowing subsequently to His human nature (in the state of exaltation) the full and constant use of the divine attributes permeating it — including limitless wisdom (Col 2:3) — on behalf of us, His fellow humans.
 - e. Dispensing His righteousness and all its effects to us (vs 18-19) through the gospel of the cross.
 - (1) Which appears foolish to the "wise" of this world (1 Cor 1:18-31).
 - (2) Which is actually perfect wisdom (vs 32-34).

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Genesis 18:20-32

July 31, 1983

Traditionally the subject of prayer was discussed on the Fifth Sunday after Easter, known by the Latin name of Rogate. The new three-year series of homiletical texts has reserved the subject of prayer for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost. Prayer, however, is a topic appropriate for any Sunday of the church year and is a Christian activity in which all children of God should engage daily. The admonition of St. Paul was: "Pray without ceasing." The saints of God, whether we observe them in Holy Writ or as their activities and lives are recorded in the annals of church history, have been men and women of prayer. Scripture contains many exhortations to prayer, many wonderful promises of answers to prayers, and many beautiful examples of prayers and of answers to prayer. There are different types of prayer: confession, praise, thanksgiving, and intercessory. Today we wish to consider:

The Bible's First Intercessory Prayer

- I. What prompted this prayer by Abraham?
 - A. God encouraged Abraham to pray.
 1. As the heavenly visitors concluded their visit, the Lord revealed to Abraham his intentions concerning Sodom and Gomorrah (vs 17-22).
 2. The Lord dealt with Abraham as a friend. The patriarch was taken in God's complete confidence. God made known His intention to punish the wicked cities. In a similar way God in His Word has revealed many important matters to His Christians which the hostile world does not know.
 3. Abraham immediately thought of the "righteous" in Sodom (v 23) — he thought especially of Lot. We too should be moved to sympathetic intercession by the bodily and spiritual distresses of other people. Constantly there are opportunities created by world conditions to pray for other people, in America and other parts of the world.
 4. The Lord frequently promised that He would spare Sodom if, there were fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, or even ten righteous people in Sodom. This promise encouraged Abraham to plead repeatedly and to become bold in his request (vs 24-32).
- II. What were the outstanding features of Abraham's prayer?
 - A. Abraham prayed as a child of God. He was aware that only the Lord's grace permitted him to pray in the way he did (vs 27,30,32).
 - B. Abraham's love toward others was outstanding. He was vitally interested in others.
 - C. Abraham's intercessions were bold. He demonstrated boldness of faith. We need not hesitate to ask great things of God.
 - D. Abraham's persistence is impressive. Again and again he dared to ask God for what might have appeared to be impossible for a righteous God to permit. We do not have to become discouraged when our first prayers are not answered at once.
 - E. Abraham appears to have been confident that the Lord would show mercy to Sodom and Gomorrah.
- III. What were the results of this first intercessory prayer?

- A. God dealt with the Sodom and Gomorrah in accordance with His holiness and justice.
 1. Abraham did not go beyond asking for less than ten righteous. Even the patriarch realized that it would be improper to ask for more consideration.
 2. God today is revealing his righteous anger against all wickedness of nations. The church must emphasize the guilt of America and of other nations when they fail to observe basic laws of the moral code. This is what the Old Testament prophets did.
- B. God saved Lot and his family. Two angels were sent to Sodom to fetch Lot's family. The angels even took them by the hand and led them forth when they wanted to tarry.
- C. God certainly will not fail to guard and protect those whom He has made His own through Christ. Often He stays the doom of the world for the sake of the elect. He still desires to pluck the brands from the burning.

Conclusion: Today, just as in Abraham's day, God answers intercessory prayers in whatever way is in the best interests of His people. We who have become God's friends through Christ can boldly plead with God in intercessory prayer.

Raymond Surburg

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Ecclesiastes 1:1; 2:18-26

August 7, 1983

The Book of Ecclesiastes belongs to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Approximately half is in poetry and half in prose. This is a Biblical book that has been greatly misunderstood. Some scholars have claimed that here we have a book written by an anonymous writer who was immersed in pessimism, skepticism, materialism, fatalism, and even nihilism. The view has been expressed that Ecclesiastes shows the influence of Greek philosophic thought. However, a fair reading of Ecclesiastes will not support these radical ideas, completely foreign to what one would expect to find in a book inspired by the Holy Spirit. Ecclesiastes belongs to the canon of the Old Testament, of which Paul said it was "God-breathed" (2 Tm 2:15).

The author of this book is identified in 1:1 as "the son of David, king of Jerusalem." Internal evidence confirms the traditional view that Solomon is meant by the phrase. The following descriptions in the text coincide with what is known about Solomon from the historical record in 1 Kings: (1) the author's unrivaled wisdom (1:16); (2) his wealth (2:8); (3) his extensive building projects (2:4-6); (4) his collection of proverbs (12:9).

Throughout its twelve chapters the book of Ecclesiastes shows two opposite life-views. First he states how a natural man looks at the world around him apart from God and shows how the man living "on the earth" and "under the sun" reaches the conclusion, "All is vanity" (read 1 Cor 2:14). Solomon speaks from the vantage-point of his own careful research in the course of his career (cf. Ec 1:13-14). However, the author writes as one to whom God has revealed Himself, and so he also sets forth the Christian outlook on life. The Christian has hope for the future, as may be seen from 3:14: "whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever." The contrast in this book is between those who live "under the sun" and exclude God and those who live with their sights upon God who is "above the sun." This pattern of alternating perspectives continues throughout the book. In ascer-

taining the meaning and purpose of Ecclesiastes 12: 13-14 must be determinative of the book's purpose. With 1:13 the reader is ready to be introduced to Christ. "As the law was designed to lead men to Christ, so this book was written to lead those living "under the sun" to the Son" (cf. He 1:1).

Introduction: At the conclusion of the Sermon of the Mount Jesus told the parable of the two men, one who built his house on rock and the other his structure on sand. When the storms came and the winds blew, the house built on sand was washed away, while the other stood against the fury of the storm. Jesus sets forth two different ways of life; those building the houses of their lives on His teachings were like the man who built his house on a rock. Jesus taught his contemporaries that there were two roads which people may take in life — a narrow one and a broad one. Already Solomon in the tenth century B.C. was setting forth a similar truth under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in Ecclesiastes. The text explicates this teaching. Today we consider Solomon's instructions concerning

Two Different Philosophies of Life

- I. The way of the world — living from a perspective "under the sun," with no higher plane than this earth.
 - A. Experimentation with mirth, amusements, and wine ultimately ends in a feeling of vanity (2:1-11).
 - B. The accumulation of riches and gratification of aesthetic tastes ultimately will disappoint (2:4-6).
 - C. The realization that death nullifies everything attempted leads to a sense of futility, i.e., "vanity of vanities."
 1. At death man must leave all he has accumulated, not knowing whether a wise man or a fool will inherit it and enjoy it (2:13-14).
 2. Lack of information as to who will enjoy a person's accomplishments and toil makes for vexation and insomnia (2:22-24).
- II. The way of the wise — looking "above the sun," focusing on God.
 - A. Enjoy life. Eating and drinking should be recognized as a gift of God (2:22-24).
 - B. Surrender to God's decisions. Take them as they come (2:26).
 - C. Be satisfied with the talents that God has given you. Do not expect anything better. If man endeavors to build timeless pyramids through wealth, wisdom, pleasure, or achievement, he is doomed to futility.
 - D. Fear God, i.e., love God and be aware that at death the spirit of the Christian returns to his Maker (12:7).
 - E. See God alone as the one who bestows wisdom (2:26), which includes the wisdom of the plan of salvation in Christ Jesus.

Conclusion: The two philosophies which Solomon sets forth are still very much with us. How empty and meaningless it is to live merely "under the sun"! How satisfying and purposeful to look "above the sun"!

Raymond Surburg

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Genesis 15:1-6

August 14, 1983

Francis Pieper states: "In Lutheran theology the article of justification is the central, chief article by which the Christian doctrine and the Christian Church stands and falls (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*). It is the apex of all

Christian teaching" (*Christian Dogmatics*, II, pp. 512-513). Let us not conclude from this, however, that "justification by faith" is exclusively New Testament theology. Pieper goes on to say: "In the Old Testament, too, the Christian doctrine of justification occupies the central position" (*Ibid.*, p. 513). The text presents this truth most clearly. Regarding the fifteenth chapter of Genesis, H.C. Leupold writes: "In a very particular sense this is a monumental chapter, monumental in the testimony that it bears to saving truth. It is for this reason that Paul alludes to a word from this chapter when he established the truth concerning salvation (Ro 4:3; Ga 3:6). It is nothing short of amazing to find in the patriarchal age so clear-cut an answer to the question: How can a man be justified in the sight of God? The way of salvation was one and the same in the old covenant as well as the new" (*Exposition of Genesis*, I, p. 470). It is only appropriate, therefore, that a sermon on this pericope should focus on the important doctrine of justification by faith.

Introduction: We are living in an "I did it my way" kind of society. We have been programmed by modern technology and the media to believe that we can do all things by our own reason and strength. The world would have us believe that we can shield ourselves from the pitfalls of life and be our own determiners of future rewards. The Scriptures speak otherwise. Both Old Testament and New attest to the fact that

The Lord Is Our Shield and Great Reward

- I. The Lord is our shield in every time of need.
 - A. He shields in times of danger.
 1. Abraham may have feared retaliation from the kings he had recently engaged in battle (cf. Gn 14), but the Lord said, "Fear not . . ." (v1).
 2. We often fear the unknown pitfalls of life, but the Lord says, "Fear not . . ."
 - a. "Your sins are forgiven . . ." (1 Jn 1:9).
 - b. "I am with you always . . ." (Mt 28:20).
 - c. "Don't be anxious about tomorrow . . ." (Mt 6:25ff).
 - B. He shields in times of sorrow.
 1. Abraham grieved over the fact that in his old age he had produced no offspring to be his heir (vv2-3).
 - a. The Lord assured Abraham that one of his own offspring would indeed be his heir (v4).
 - b. The Lord also repeated His promise to Abraham that his descendants would be numerous — like the stars in the sky (v5).
 2. The Lord speaks to us in our sorrows to bring us solace and peace.
 - a. He invites us to cast all our cares upon Him (1 Pe 5:7).
 - b. He promises that if we remain faithful unto death we will receive the crown of life (Re 2:10).
- II. The Lord is our great reward in time and in eternity.
 - A. We are His now — by faith.
 1. Abraham believed and it was counted to him for righteousness (v6).
 2. We believe and it is counted to us for righteousness (Ro 4) and, accordingly, we receive the rewards of faith for this life.
 - a. We have peace with God (Ro 5:1).
 - b. We have a good conscience toward God (He 9:14; 10:22).
 - c. We have the assurance of God's protection and guidance (He 13:5; Ro 8:28).

- B. We are His forever — by faith (through Abraham's Seed we have the sure hope of eternal life, Ga 3).
1. We have become the children of God (Ga 3:26).
 2. We triumph in death (1 Pe 1:3; 1 Cor 15:55-57).
 3. We are heirs of heaven (Ga 4:7).

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THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Jeremiah 23:23-29

August 21, 1983

The portion of Jeremiah's book from which the text is taken contains the prophet's pronouncements against Israel's unfaithful leaders, whether they be kings, prophets, or priests, who were subverting rather than promoting God's plan of universal salvation. Specifically, the words of the text are directed at Israel's spiritual leaders. "Instead of standing in awe of the Lord of heaven and earth, from whom no man can hide himself, they glibly mouth each other's lying dreams and the deceit of their own heart rather than speaking God's word faithfully, which by contrast is like fire . . . and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces." (*Concordia Self-Study Commentary*, p. 513).

Norman Habel, in his commentary on Jeremiah, summarizes the verses under consideration as follows: "A fourth unit (verses 23-32) . . . deals with the contrast between prophetic dreams and the direct Word of God. The opening questions are directed to those prophets who foolishly believe that they can escape God's scrutiny, as though He were a local deity with limited areas of control rather than the Lord of the heavens, whose eye can penetrate everywhere, even into the heart (cf. 17:10). These false prophets had been speaking in Yahweh's 'name,' that is, they claimed to represent Yahweh exactly. They maintained further that they received their communications from God by dreams (as distinct from visions seen when one is awake). Dreams are purely subjective, retorts Jeremiah. They express personal opinions, not God's direct Word. The prophet is at liberty to relate his dream if he wishes, but he has no right to pass it off as a sure word of God. Honesty (faithfulness) not hypocrisy (deceit) must characterize a prophet. A dream is like 'straw' when compared to the Word, the real 'wheat.'"

Introduction: There are all manner of preachers today who thrust their own brand of theology on poor, unsuspecting souls. Claiming special revelation from God or a special gift of interpretation, they mislead their hearers into believing that that which is of their own invention and for their own personal benefit is really the message of God's Word. Jeremiah, who also confronted teachers in his day that were passing off as God's truth their own lying dreams, would warn all who proclaim God's Word, whether formally or informally, that it is their obligation to

Speak God's Word Faithfully

- I. We who preach are motivated to do so when we remember that God's Word is true.
- A. The Word of God is the source of truth (Jn 17:17; Eph 1:13; 2 Tm 2:15).
 - B. Those who claim to speak for God must speak His Word, not their own.
 1. He is everywhere (vv23-24); He knows those who lie in His name (vv25-28).

2. He warns us to shun those who speak not the truth (Dt 13:1-3; Mt 24:23-24).
- II. We who preach are motivated to do so when we remember that God's Word has power.
 - A. The Word is like a hammer (v29b).
 1. It has the power to condemn (Ro 5:16; 6:23).
 2. It has the power to crush.
 - a. In time (Jr 50:23).
 - b. In eternity (Mt 8:12; 24:51; 25:30).
 - B. The Word is like fire (v29a).
 1. It has the power to judge (v29a; Dt 4:23-24).
 2. It has the power to cleanse (Is 6:6-7).
 3. It has the power (*dynamis*) to save (Ro 1:16).

Conclusion: May God continue to raise up faithful proclaimers of His Word in every time and place who will speak His Word. God's Word is absolutely true and therefore utterly reliable. God's Word has impressive power and therefore accomplishes what God intends.

Ronald W. Irsch

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Isaiah 66:18-23

August 28, 1983

The text brings to a close Isaiah's prophecies, in many of which the Lord speaks directly to His New Testament church. Here Isaiah pictures the risen, ascended, reigning Christ carrying on His work of salvation by sending out His New Testament messengers to the Old Testament priesthood. Through Isaiah God pronounced His verdict on the nation that had been chosen to be His own: I know their works and their thoughts. Hundreds of years later he would say to Sardis: "I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead" (Re 3:1).

Introduction: As this sermon study is being written the Sinai Peninsula is being given back to Egypt. Israel had hoped to hold it for itself. God's once special people are no longer His special people. God's Old Testament nation has ceased to possess His promises of nationhood and a land of its own. But salvation in Christ can still be preached to all nations and to all people — the Jews, the Orientals, the people in distant lands and on the islands of the seas. That is why

This Is Our Important Moment in God's Eternal Plan

- I. Hundreds of years before Christ it was Isaiah's privilege to preach the saving truth.
 - A. Most of his hearers were unbelieving members of God's chosen people.
 1. They trampled God's courts and lifted up bloody hands in a mock worship (Is 1:12-15).
 2. Yet Isaiah was permitted constantly to invite them to return to the Lord (Is 55:6-11).
 3. He even predicted the exile and the return of Israel to its own land (Is 45:1-6).
 4. At the close of his book he must show the hopelessness of their situation.

- B. A remnant remained faithful to the Lord through the Gospel preaching of this man of God.
 - 1. He had wonderful words of comfort for them, telling them God was their saving God (Is 40:1-5).
 - 2. He preached the saving truth to them throughout his ministry (Is 53).
 - 3. He assured the faithful that God who had created heaven and earth would go with them into captivity to watch over them (Is 41:8-11; 42:5ff; 43:1ff).
- II. We are the church of which Isaiah spoke in his final word of prophecy.
 - A. God has blessed us with ministers who know God's saving truths.
 - 1. We have the "gospel" of Isaiah and of Christ Himself and of His apostles.
 - 2. We are constantly training more men to serve in our seminaries.
 - B. Our New Testament Church is composed of members who know the Lord (Jr 31:31-34).
 - 1. God has blessed us abundantly with caring, loving people like yourselves.
 - 2. He has blessed us with the earthly means as well as the spiritual to carry on our mission endeavors.
 - 3. He will go with us to the "ends of the earth" to bring His saving gospel to people who even now have not yet heard His Word.

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FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Proverbs 25:6-22

September 4, 1983

Verse 1 of this chapter points to Solomon as the author. It is, therefore, important to read of Solomon's request for wisdom to rule his people, when the Lord showed His willingness to bless the new king (1 Kgs 3:5-9). Also read God's answer in the next verses and the description of his wisdom (1 Kgs 4:29-34). Note also Jesus' parable on choosing a seat at a wedding (Lk 14:7-11), His parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Lk 18:9-14), and Paul's use of the last words of the text (Ro 12:17-21).

Introduction: Psychology is one of the common areas of concentration in college and university curriculums. We all are interested in why we behave as we do. Solomon in the text gives us Christian psychology at its best when he records

The Words of a King with Christ in His Heart

- I. Solomon teaches us to respect authority for our own good.
 - A. It is Solomon, the wise king, who said it first.
 - 1. He showed the wisdom God had given him by respecting the authority of God in his own life.
 - 2. He truly wanted his subjects to live happily under authority in their lives.
 - B. The Spirit of Christ was in him as he said it.
 - 1. Christ, the Master Teacher, taught the same truth to His disciples.
 - 2. He, the true Son of God, was Himself an example of His teaching.
 - C. Both of these, the king and his King, are saying it to us today.
- II. Solomon teaches us to seek peace with our neighbor for our own good.
 - A. Again, it is Solomon, an earthly king, who said it.

1. He knew, by searching his own heart, how easy it is to blame the neighbor for one's own mistakes.
2. He truly wanted his subjects to live in peace for their own good. By putting others down, you may end up at the bottom of the heap. Singing while others weep is heartless. What are we without a heart?
- B. Christ's wisdom again shines forth, especially in His commandment to love others as He loves us.
- C. Both are giving us the best advice for a life of peace.
- III. Solomon teaches us to love our enemies for our own good.
 - A. Solomon for years practiced what He preached.
 1. We have a description in the Word of his wise dealings with others. Honey is better than vinegar, which stands for sour or ill-tempered speech.
 2. We see in his later life the enmity he aroused in others when he turned from the Lord to his heathen wives.
 - B. In Christ we have the perfect Teacher.
 1. He even prayed for His enemies on the cross.
 2. He taught His disciples to follow His example.
 - C. Both the king and his King can help us to do the same.
 1. Solomon, by his bad as well as his good example.
 2. Christ, by His assurance that we can do even this with His help.

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SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Proverbs 9:8-12

September 11, 1983

In this ninth chapter first Wisdom and then Folly are described. Both invite men to a feast. In verses 1-7 Wisdom's invitation is tendered.

Introduction: The Lord has told us that we believers have life, real life. Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life." We Christians have the inside story. This fact is not always easy to remember, to believe with all our heart. Paul saw that the Corinthians had the temptation to forget this truth. So he wrote them: "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called . . ." This Scripture reassures us we are

Today's Truly Wise

- I. Who they are (vs10-12).
 - A. They fear the Lord (v10).
 1. Recognize His prior importance.
 2. Stand in awe of His wrath against their sin (He 10:31).
 3. Respect His great love manifest in Calvary (He 2:3a).
 4. Fear to displease Him (Pr 8:13a).
 - B. They are blessed (vs11-12).
 1. They really live now (Jn 10:10b).
 2. They live forever hereafter (Jo 3:36a).
 3. "Wisdom is its own reward" (v12).
- II. How they grow (v9).
 - A. They are not satisfied merely with the fundamentals (He 6:1ff).
 - B. Love of God bids us "grow in grace" (2 Pe 3:18).
 - C. Paul desired to know Christ ever better (Php 3:8-10).

- D. Spiritual growth comes through
 - 1. Regular, every-Sunday worship (Ac 2:42).
 - 2. Bible study (Jn 5:39).
 - 3. Every-day Bible examination (Ac 17:11).
 - III. How they share (v8).
 - A. Wise people will feel constrained to share their wisdom, since others are missing so much (Ac 4:20).
 - B. Wise people expect some rebuff, since others are spiritually blind (v8a; 1 Cor 2:14).
 - C. Wise people will not allow such rebuffs to discourage them, since they remember that the Spirit is mighty (v8b).
- Conclusion:* Wise people are always thankful and show it by sharing.

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