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# Propitiation in Old Testament Prophecy

Douglas McC. L. Judisch

A study in a previous issue of this journal emphasized the centrality to Old Testament theology of divine wrath and its propitiation.<sup>1</sup> Having established "propitiate" as the *usus loquendi* of *k p r*, we found the whole complicated system of animal sacrifice a monumental mechanism designed to placate the wrath of God against the sinners of the Old Testament era. We concluded, indeed, that the sanguinary sacrifices of Israel pointed forward to Messiah's propitiation of God on behalf of all men, and those who trusted in this propitiation which was to come still enjoy eternal life with God.<sup>2</sup> It was not only by means of types, however, that God sought to excite in the hearts of the ancients faith in His propitiation by the Coming One. He also used the explicit words of His prophets—although often still using imagery borrowed from the sacrificial system to discuss the future things which it symbolized.

## I. Basic Considerations

God made the point, first of all, that no mere man could assuage His wrath against even one of his fellows, much less God's anger with all humanity (Ps. 49:8-9 MT; 7-8 EV):

No man can by any means redeem his brother,  
Or give to God a ransom for him —  
For the redemption of his soul is costly . . .  
That he should live on eternally;  
That he should not see the pit.<sup>3</sup>

Rather, only God could and would propitiate Himself — a goal, of course, which could be attained only by God becoming a man and suffering Himself the full force of the divine fury aroused by the sins of mankind. In Psalm 65, therefore, David tells the Lord: "As for our transgressions, Thou dost effect propitiation for them" (the last six words representing a form of *k p r*; v. 4 MT; 3 EV).<sup>4</sup> As we have deduced already, even toward the people of the Old Testament era, even toward the unbelievers, God's attitude was conditioned by His future work. Psalm 78, in recounting the past faithlessness of most Israelites, declares (v. 38):

But He, being compassionate, effected propitiation

for guilt,  
and did not destroy;  
And often He turned away His anger,  
And did not arouse all His wrath.<sup>5</sup>  
In this translation "effected propitiation" again represents a form of *k p r*.

## II. Various Prophecies of Divine Goodwill

Yet the actual fountainhead of divine propitiation then lay in the future. Several prophecies of this accomplishment use the verb *r tz h* or the noun derived from it, *rātzōn*. The verb means "be pleased with, accept favourably," often used in the context of sacrifice, or "make acceptable, satisfy," referring to a debt or penalty.<sup>6</sup>

### A. Isaiah

#### 1. Isaiah 40.

The niphil form of *r tz h* occurs in the well-known second verse of Isaiah 40:

Speak kindly to Jerusalem;  
And call out to her, that her warfare has ended,  
That her guilt has been made acceptable,  
That she has received of the Lord's hand  
Double for all her sins.<sup>7</sup>

The idea is that God's attitude would change from wrath against guilty people to acceptance by virtue of the payment of a satisfactory penalty. The context, of course, deals with the manifestation of God in human flesh (v. 5) — the coming of the Messiah, who would be the one to pay the penalty.<sup>8</sup>

#### 2. Isaiah 49.

The noun *rātzōn* signifies "goodwill, favour, acceptance," especially the acceptance of those offering sacrifices.<sup>9</sup> In Isaiah 49 God promises the Servant of the Lord (v. 8b):

And I will keep You and give You for a testament to the  
people,  
To establish the land, to make them inherit the desolate  
heritages . . . .<sup>10</sup>



In other words, the Messiah was to become, by means of His death, the basis of a new testament meant to benefit mankind and He would thereby establish the New Testament church.

For the vicarious death of the Messiah is logically implied by the word *berīth*, usually but not aptly translated "covenant." A *berīth* is basically a guarantee, an oathbound obligation undertaken by someone to do something. Sometimes this obligation is made on condition of reciprocal action by a second party; in such cases the *berīth* is to some extent, at least, a covenant. Here, however, the reference is to the oft-repeated unconditional promise of God to bestow righteousness upon the world through the death of His Son — in other words, the new testament (Matt. 26:28; Mark 13:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 9:15-22). In this passage, indeed, the Messiah is equated with the new testament in the Father's assurance, "I will give You for a testament to the people." For not only is the Messiah the testator who dies to put His will into effect, but His righteousness is also the inheritance bequeathed to the will's beneficiaries.<sup>11</sup>

According to Isaiah 49, then, the vicarious death of the Messiah and the consequent establishment of the New Testament church was to come to pass in what is termed "a day of salvation" and "a time of favor" (v. 8a).<sup>12</sup> The usual rendition of *'ēth-rātzōn* here as "a favorable time" is much too weak.<sup>13</sup> The time in question is the point in history at which the Messiah was to change God's disposition toward man from wrath to goodwill. This connection, we may add, of divine goodwill with the effectuation of a divine testament is certified by the occasional denomination of this will as *berīth shālōm* ("testament of peace") or variations of this phraseology.<sup>14</sup> An example close at hand occurs in Isaiah 54 (7-10):

'In a brief moment I forsook you,  
But with great compassion I will gather you.  
In an overflowing of anger  
I hid My face from you for a moment;  
But with everlasting loving-kindness I will have compassion  
on you,'

Says the Lord your Redeemer.  
'For this is like the days of Noah to Me;  
When I swore that the waters of Noah  
Should not flood the earth again,  
So I have sworn that I will not be angry with you,  
Nor will I rebuke you.  
For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake,  
But My lovingkindness will not be removed from you,

And My testament of peace will not be shaken,  
Says the Lord who has compassion on you.<sup>15</sup>

This passage demonstrates, in the first place, the basic concept of *berīth* as previously enunciated, namely, an oathbound obligation undertaken by someone to do something. The unconditional and, indeed, unalterable nature of this particular *berīth* (the Messianic testament of 42:6 and 49:8) is equally patent. Striking above all, however, in the terms of this testament is the iteration and reiteration of an electrifying change in God's attitude toward man from overflowing wrath to tenderest compassion. It is plain to see that the will which Messiah's death was to put into effect is called a *berīth shālōm* because it was God's declaration of peace on mankind — by virtue of the propitiatory sway of Messiah's death upon the mind of God.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. Isaiah 61.

A case similar to the use of *rātzōn* in Isaiah 49 occurs in Isaiah 61, which is, in fact, closely related to both chapters 42 and 49. Indeed, despite the absence of the word "servant" in the pericope, Young was moved by its other similarities with the four passages of Isaiah usually denominated "the Servant Songs" to place Isaiah 61:1-3 in the same category.<sup>17</sup> In the first nine verses of Isaiah 61 we survey the Messiah's own portrait of the purpose and the results of His mission: the purpose is the establishment of the new testament (v. 8) and the proclamation of the gospel (vv. 1-3); the results are the joy (vv. 3, 7) and imputed righteousness (v. 3) of Christians, the establishment of the New Testament church (v. 4), its extension to the Gentiles (vv. 5, 6, 9), and the priesthood of all believers (v. 6).<sup>18</sup> That the speaker of these verses is the Messiah is established by the language of verse 1; it is, after all, this unique manner in which, according to His human nature, He was anointed with the Holy Spirit without measure that brought Him the title "Messiah," "the Anointed One."<sup>19</sup> And this identification of the speaker is confirmed by the self-authentication of the Messiah Himself on the occasion of the initiation of His public ministry (Luke 4:16-21).

Thus, in Isaiah 61:2 the Son appropriates to Himself the propitiatory language which we have heard the Father applying to Him in 49:8. For, in making the preaching of Law and Gospel the essence of His prophetic office, He depicts the Gospel not only as "good news," not only as the proclamation of spiritual liberty (v. 1), not only as consolation (v. 2), but also as the proclamation of God's propitiation. The New American Standard Bible translates the first four words of verse 2, "to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord," following the phraseology of the King James Version, "to proclaim the acceptable

year of the Lord." The Revised Standard Version is closer to the original text with "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."<sup>20</sup> This divine goodwill toward men is really the essence of the Messianic Gospel, since without it there could be no "good news." Like the "time" of 49:8, here the word "year" singles out a particular point in history at which the Messiah was to change God's disposition toward man from wrath to acceptance. Nor need we copy the millennialists and take one giant leap from the First Coming to the Second in the middle of the clause under discussion just because the second phrase speaks of the "day of vengeance of our God."<sup>21</sup> For the Prophet *par excellence* had to proclaim the whole truth. Consequently, He who won God's acceptance of all men has to press simultaneously the revival of God's wrath against those without trust in His propitiation (John 3:36).<sup>22</sup> No one can preach the Gospel faithfully unless he preach the Law faithfully. The antithetical parallelism, indeed, between the "year of favor" and the "day of vengeance" serves to increase the appreciation of the Messianic propitiation by the stark contrast with the divine wrath which it appeased.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4. Isaiah 60

Having studied the significance of *r tz h* and *rätzōn* in Isaiah 40, 49, and 61, one is much readier to capture the concern of *rätzōn* in the closely related chapters of 56 and 60. The point is that in Isaiah 60 God is speaking of the benefits accruing to the New Testament church from Messiah's work as He borrows imagery from such diverse sources as the sacrificial system and the construction of cities. The basis of these benefits is clearly the incarnate God (vv. 1-2) who was to be the Redeemer (v. 16d), Saviour (v. 16c), and Light of the world (vv. 1-2, 19-20). It is in this Christological context, then, that Isaiah introduces sacrificial symbolism into his prediction of the extension of the church throughout the world (v. 7):

All the flocks of Kedar will be gathered together to you;  
The rams of Nebaioth will minister to you;  
They will go up with acceptance on My altar,  
And I shall glorify My glorious house.<sup>24</sup>

In verse 10 Isaiah alters the tropology but continues to urge the same assurance:

The foreigners will build up your walls,  
And their kings will minister to you;  
For in My wrath I struck you,  
And in My favor I have had compassion on you.<sup>25</sup>

In verse 7 the New American Standard Bible uses "acceptance," in verse 10 "favor" to translate the same word, *rātzōn*.<sup>26</sup> In the latter case, the antithetical parallelism of the last two lines again (as in 61:2) makes the silhouette of Messianic propitiation stand out all the more clearly against the white-hot rays of divine wrath (here *qetzeph*).<sup>27</sup>

### 5. Isaiah 56.

God is likewise describing the conversion of people of every nation as a result of Messiah's work when He makes this promise in Isaiah 56 (vv. 6-7):

Also the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord,  
To minister to Him, and to love the name of the Lord,  
To be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning  
the sabbath,  
And those who take hold of My testament;  
Even those I will bring to My holy mountain,  
And make them joyful in My house of prayer.  
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable  
on My altar;  
For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the  
peoples.<sup>28</sup>

The penultimate line again contains the noun *rātzōn*, a more literal translation being, "Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be for acceptance on My altar"; and the sacrificial economy is again the source of the figure. The Christological significance of the statement receives confirmation in this case from the preceding verse, where those offering the sacrifices of verse 7 are called *maḥazīqīm bibhrīthī*. The new American Standard Bible renders the phrase, "everyone. . . who holds fast My covenant," but "those who take hold of My testament" does more justice to Isaiah's intention — in other words, those who would come to faith in the divine propitiation accomplished by Messiah's death. For the meaning of *berīth* has already come up for discussion, and the phrase in which it occurs here and in verse 4 is a variation on the theme sounded in the first two verses of the chapter. This theme is the blessedness of the man who "takes hold of it" (v. 2),<sup>29</sup> that is, of what the Lord calls "My salvation to come" or, more directly, "My righteousness to be revealed" (v. 1). This alien righteousness—and the salvation integrally connected with it — is nothing else than the inheritance bequeathed to the beneficiaries of the testament put into effect by the death of the Messiah. Nor do we invest the hiphil of *h z q* with an unusual

significance by referring it to faith in the effects of Messiah's death (vv. 2, 4, 6).<sup>30</sup> Isaiah uses the word similarly in 64:6 (MT; 7 EV) to speak of saving trust in the Lord in a more general way. In 27:5, indeed, the New American Standard Bible uses "rely" as a translation:

I have no wrath.  
Should someone give Me briars and thorns in battle,  
Then I would step on them, I would burn them completely.  
Or let him rely on My protection,  
Let him make peace with Me,  
Let him make peace with Me.

Here the Lord specifically urges faith in His "protection" from His own wrath — that is, in His self-propitiation of the Messianic period whereby He could actually say, "I have no wrath."<sup>31</sup> The peace, then, which He invites men to make with Him is simply the acceptance of the peace which He has already made with them. At the same time, however, the Lord warns us that His justice requires Him to relight the fires of His fury to incinerate those who remain His angry enemies.

## B. Ezekiel

Up to this point we have been focusing attention upon prophecies of Isaiah which speak of the future "goodwill" of God by employing the verb *r tzh* or the noun *rätzön*. Space is insufficient to prosecute a similar study of all the Old Testament prophets. A glimpse at the twentieth chapter of Ezekiel, however, might serve to show that Isaiah is not alone in the use of these words to the same end. By the time, of course, that one reaches his twentieth chapter, Ezekiel has already prepared us in many and various ways for a proper appreciation of his propitiatory prediction there. Had one the opportunity to pause at any spot along the path by which Ezekiel leads the reader, the last four verses of chapter 16 would surely retard his steps a while. There the Lord promises to replace the Mosaic *berith* invalidated by the apostasy of Israel (who has "despised the oath," v. 59) with a new and eternal testament (vv. 60-63):

'Nevertheless, I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your sisters, both your older and your younger; and I will give them to you as daughters, but not because of your covenant. Thus I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall

know that I am the Lord, in order that you may remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth any more because of your humiliation, when I have forgiven you for all that you have done,' the Lord God declares.

Several points are worthy of note here. In the first place, Ezekiel agrees with Isaiah in equating the execution of the new testament with God's propitiation of Himself. The phrase quoted above from the New American Standard Bible (v. 63), "when I have forgiven," represents an infinitive of *k p r*; "you," *lamedh* with a second person singular suffix.<sup>32</sup> Thus, a literal rendition would be "in My propitiating for thee" or "by My propitiating for thee." Secondly, the entity whom God is addressing here is the apostate people of Jerusalem (v.2). Thus, God's propitiation of Himself does not depend upon faith in Him but instead logically precedes faith. That is to say, God placates His wrath against men and thereby provides them with something to believe. Likewise, He executes a divine testament in favour of the faithless and then invites them to receive through faith the inheritance which He has bequeathed them. Thirdly, the *kol* of the last verse underlines the comprehensiveness of the divine propitiation predicted here. God was to still His rage against men with respect to *all* the sins which they have committed.

In Ezekiel 20 itself the Messianic King (v. 33) speaks not only of His future condemnation of faithless Israel (vv. 34-38), but also of His making the new testament in her favor (v. 37). To describe the New Testament church verses 40 and 41 blend a metaphor derived from the cultus with imagery drawn from the reunion of exiles:

'For on My holy mountain, on the high mountain of Israel,' declares the Lord God, 'there the whole house of Israel, all of them, will serve Me in the land; there I shall accept them, and there I shall seek your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your holy things. By means of a soothing aroma I shall accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered; and I shall prove Myself holy among you in the sight of the nations.'<sup>33</sup>

The verb *r t z h* occurs in both verses. The phrase *berēah-nīḥōah* at the beginning of verse 41 explains how it is that a just God could accept into His presence those whom flames of fury ignited by sin ought to consume. The propitiatory import of this "smell of pacification" has received previous attention in connection with the ancient sacrifices, its usage showing that the sacrifice of various animals

assuaged the wrath of God against individuals, nations, and even the human race as a whole.<sup>34</sup> The New American Standard Bible confuses Ezekiel's thought here by rendering the prefixed *beth* "as," producing the clause, "As a soothing aroma I shall accept you."<sup>35</sup> The prophet's intention emerges with crystal clarity when we translate literally: "By means of a smell of pacification I shall accept you." Since Ezekiel is speaking of the Messianic era, when animal sacrifice would necessarily cease,<sup>36</sup> he is clearly intimating the antitype by naming the type. He is referring, in other words, to the propitiation symbolized by the aroma of the Old Testament sanguinary sacrifices, namely, the vicarious satisfaction. It is by means of Messiah's death, then, that we become acceptable to God.

### III. Isaiah 53

An Old Testament passage which makes this same point by means of a similar metaphor drawn from the cultus is Isaiah 53:10. Isaiah 53, the holy of holies of Old Testament prophecy, stresses more than any other prediction the vicarious value of the Messiah's suffering and death.<sup>37</sup> Following an assurance of the personal sinlessness of the Servant of the Lord (v. 9), verse 10 proceeds in this manner:

Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him;  
he has put him to grief;

When he makes himself an offering for sin,

He shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days. . . .<sup>38</sup>

The word translated here as "an offering for sin" by the Revised Standard Version is *'āshām*, which is the technical term rendered "guilt offering" in the prelude to this study.<sup>39</sup> We have already seen how Leviticus 5 attributes propitiatory power to the literal *'āshām*, since it symbolized and mediated the propitiation to be effected by the Messiah.<sup>40</sup> Here in Isaiah 53 conversely *'āshām* is used figuratively to refer directly to the one *intrinsic* propitiation of which all others were only types and vehicles. There is much significance, moreover, in the particular variety of sacrifice mentioned here. For the guilt offering comprehended a restitution made to God by an individual person to compensate for wrongdoing and so to satisfy the demands of God's justice. Indeed, the ceremonial code required a compensation equal to 120 percent of the amount involved in the sin — an additional fifth of the value (Lev. 5:16; 6:4-5).<sup>41</sup>

Delitzsch deals in some detail with the significance of *'āshām* in Isaiah 53:10, and the theology of *Heilsgeschichte* which vitiates his treatment of many Messianic prophecies is not so apparent as usual.<sup>42</sup> He argues, in the first place, "that the *'āshām* paid by the soul



of the Servant must consist in the sacrifice of itself, since He pays it by submitting to a violent death; and a sacrifice presented by the *nephesh* (the soul, the life, the very self) must be not only one which proceeds from itself, but one which consists in itself."<sup>43</sup> After delineating some of the distinctions between the guilt offering and other sacrifices (especially its closest relative, the sin offering), Delitzsch points to the prominence of the priest in the ritual of the guilt offering.<sup>44</sup> For in each case the guilt-ridden Israelite had to make restitution in accord with the priest's evaluation and in terms of the shekel of the sanctuary (e.g., Lev. 5:15). While his idea of the priest as the continual representative of the offerer in the sin offering is fallacious, Delitzsch correctly sees the priest in the guilt offering as the representative of God:

The trespass-offering was a restitution or compensation made to God in the person of the priest, a payment or penance which made amends for the wrong done, a *satisfactio* in a disciplinary sense. And this is implied in the name; for just as *hattā'ih* denotes first the sin, then the punishment of the sin and the expiation of the sin, and hence the sacrifice which cancels the sin; so *'āshām* signifies first the guilt or debt, then the compensation or penance, and hence (cf. Lev. v. 15) the sacrifice which discharges the debt or guilt, and sets the man free.<sup>45</sup>

Each of the different varieties of sacrifice points, of course, to some particular aspect of their common antitype which would otherwise receive less attention from the members of the Old Testament church.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, although failing to stress the propitiatory significance of the *'āshām*, Delitzsch hits quite near the mark when he concludes:

An idea, which Hofmann cannot find in the sacrifices, is expressed here in the most specific manner, viz. that of *satisfaction* demanded by the justice of God, and of *poena* outweighing the guilt contracted (cf. *nirtsāh*, ch. xl. 2); in other words, the idea of *satisfactio vicaria* in the sense of Anselm is brought out most distinctly here, where the soul of the Servant of God is said to present such an atoning sacrifice for the whole, that is to say, where He offers Himself as such a sacrifice by laying down the life so highly valued by God (ch. xlii. 1, xlix. 5).<sup>47</sup>

One might add, moreover, that calling the Servant's self-sacrifice an *'āshām*, and thereby implying the payment to God of a *superabundant* compensation for human offenses, would seem to run counter to the idea of a limited atonement or, indeed (since the *'āshām* is still a sacrifice), a limited propitiation.

In Article XXIV of the Apology Melancthon appeals to Isaiah 53:10 as proof that the work of Christ alone assuages the wrath of



God, while our works play no part in the drama of propitiation (23):

Isaiah interprets the law to mean that the death of Christ is a real satisfaction or expiation for our sins, as the ceremonies of the law were not; therefore he says (Isa. 53:10), "When he makes himself an offering for sin [*hostiam*, sacrificial victim], he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days." The word he uses here (*'asam*) means a victim sacrificed for transgression. In the Old Testament this meant that a victim was to come to reconcile God and make satisfaction for our sins, so that men might know that God does not want our own righteousness but the merits of another (namely, of Christ) to reconcile him to us. Paul interprets the same word as "sin" in Rom. 8:3, "As a sin offering [*De peccato*] he condemned sin [*peccatum*]," that is, through an offering for sin [*hostiam*]. We can understand the meaning of the word more readily if we look at the customs which the heathen adopted from their misinterpretation of the patriarchal tradition. The Latins offered a sacrificial victim [*hostiam*] to placate the wrath of God when, amid great calamities, it seemed to be unusually severe; this they called a trespass offering [*piaculum*]. Sometimes they offered up human sacrifices, perhaps because they had heard that a human victim was going to placate God for the whole human race. The Greeks called them either "refuse" or "offscouring." Isaiah and Paul mean that Christ became a sacrificial victim [*hostiam*] or trespass offering [*piaculum*] to reconcile God by his merits instead of ours.<sup>48</sup>

In this translation of the passage by Tappert, Melancthon's *hostia* is sometimes rendered "an offering for sin" and sometimes more generally "a sacrificial victim," but the line of thought is still patent and cogent.<sup>49</sup>

That the Messianic propitiation predicted in Isaiah 53:10 would be complete is apparent from three facts. In the first place, we have already seen that such is the implication of the word *āshām* itself, by virtue of its reference to one of the Old Testament sacrifices in general and, more particularly, to a sacrifice involving superabundant restitution.<sup>50</sup> Secondly, the closing clauses of the verse show God's approval of the Messiah's propitiatory work by means of His resurrection and propagation of the church:

He will see His offspring,

He will prolong His days,

And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand.<sup>51</sup>

The third indication is the first clause of the following verse (11a):

As a result of the anguish of His soul,

He will see it and be satisfied. . . .<sup>52</sup>

The last verb *s b* ("be sated, satisfied") shows that God would find the Messiah's death sufficient or more than sufficient to compensate for the sins of others, more than sufficient to satisfy the demands of God's justice upon us.<sup>53</sup> This vicarious satisfaction necessarily implies the cessation of the divine anger aroused by "our transgressions" (v. 5); the raging fire of God's wrath would burn itself out on the Messiah's corpse.<sup>54</sup>

If we inquire concerning the scope of this propitiation, verse 6 is of particular import:

All of us like sheep have gone astray,  
Each of us has turned to his own way;  
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all  
To fall on Him.<sup>55</sup>

The language is universal in reference. All men are sinners, and God imputed to the Messiah all sins of all men. Indeed, Isaiah emphasizes the concept of universality by the striking station of *kullānū* ("all of us") as the first and last words of this verse, sentries to guard its gates against the escape or abduction of any man from walls which surround the entire world. Part II of the Smalcald Articles, therefore, rightly treats this verse as proof that Jesus Christ "alone is 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29)" (I:2).<sup>56</sup> This imputation of the sins of all mankind to the Messiah, moreover, is clearly tantamount in scope to propitiation in the theology of the Lutheran Confessions. For Article XX of the Apology adduces this same verse of Isaiah as self-evident proof "that Christ was given to us to be a propitiation for our sins" (XX:5).<sup>57</sup> The confessional exegesis correctly interprets Isaiah 53:6 in accord with its context — in conjunction with verse 10. It is for all sinners that the Messiah was to "make Himself a guilt offering." Thus, He would propitiate God on behalf of the whole world.

### Conclusion

A study, then, of the concept of propitiation in Old Testament prophecy serves to confirm the conclusions which we previously drew from its language and typology: (1) The wrath of God and His propitiation are pivotal elements in the theology of the Old Testament. (2) The concept of divine propitiation lies at the heart of the elaborate sacrificial system of the Old Testament. (3) The sanguinary sacrifices had propitiatory power, but only because they symbolized the pro-

pitiation self-sacrifice of the Messiah and mediated its effects. (4) The Messiah, who would be both God and man, was to propitiate God for all sins on behalf of all sinners by means of His sinless life and vicarious death. (5) Only those people of the Old Testament era enjoy eternal life with God who trusted in the propitiation of God which the Messiah was to accomplish. Through faith in the divine propitiation which Christ has now accomplished we too already possess this same eternal life; and so we look forward eagerly to joining our spiritual forefathers in the celestial rest and glory where they have sung for millennia the praises of the Lamb that was slain to quench the wrath of God.

## ENDNOTES

1. "Propitiation in the Language and Typology of the Old Testament," *CTQ*, 48(1984), pp.221-243.
2. Ibid.
3. The form translated as "his soul" (v. 9 MT; 8 EV) by the NASB actually has a plural possessive suffix, showing the generic reference to mankind in general.
4. The NASB has "Thou dost forgive them," but gives "cover over, atone for" as a more literal translation in the margin.
5. The NASB text gives this rendition: "But He, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; and often He restrained His anger. . . ."
6. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., " *r t z h*," in *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), hereafter abbreviated BDB, p. 953.
7. The NASB translates the third line with less exactitude: "That her iniquity has been removed."
8. This understanding of the context is confirmed by the identification in the New Testament (including the claim of the Baptist himself) of the "voice" of verse 3 with the immediate precursor of Christ (Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23).
9. BDB, "*rātzōn*," p. 953.
10. The NASB has "covenant of the people" in place of "testament to the people" and "restore" in place of "establish," although the margin does provide "establish" as a more literal translation.
11. Douglas McC. L. Judisch, "Isaiah 42:1-7," *CTQ*, 46 (1982), p. 311, in which I discuss the occurrence of the same clause in the first of the four passages commonly called the "Servant Songs" (42:1-9; 49:1-13, containing the verse under consideration now; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12).
12. The NASB reads, "In a favorable time I have answered You, and in a day of salvation I have helped You," indicating by the capitalization of the second person pronoun that it is the Son whom God is here addressing.
13. The KJV has "an acceptable time"; the RSV is the best version in this case

- with "a time of favor," which then corresponds well with the "day of salvation" in the preceding and parallel clause.
14. See BDB, "shālôm," pp. 1022-1023, which locates "peace with God" especially in a covenantal relation (p. 1023).
  15. The NASB text begins this passage with "For" rather than "In" and uses "outburst" in place of "overflowing," "covenant" in place of "testament." In the first two cases, however, the more literal translation occurs in the margin.
  16. See Douglas Judisch, "Luke 2:1-20," *CTQ*, 47 (1983), p. 255, where I observe that *eudokia* ("good will") in the song of the angels (v. 14) "refers to God's gracious desire to save people from eternal death . . . For this reason Isaiah, in the traditional Christmas Old Testament reading (9:2-7, used also in the gradual), had called the divine child whose birth the angels announced (cf. Is. 9:6 with Lk. 2:11) the 'Prince of Peace,' of whose peace there would be no end (Is. 9:7; cf. Is. 26:3, 12; 54:10; 57:19; 66:12)."
  17. Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), p. 225.
  18. Douglas McC. L. Judisch, "Isaiah 61:10-11," *CTQ*, 46 (1982), pp. 307-308.
  19. Cf. my remarks on 42:1, "Isaiah 42:1-7," p. 310.
  20. The RSV, then, identifies the *lamedh* prefixed to the Divine Name as possessive, but its classification as a *lamedh* of interest or specification would seem to make no difference to the significance of the phrase (cf. Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline*, second ed. [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976], pp. 48-49).
  21. Ryrie, for example, states: "The ministry of Messiah at His first coming is described in verses 1-2a and at His second coming in verses 2b-3." Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 1104. Similarly, Payne, while allocating the first words of verse 2 to the first coming (p. 298), sees the fulfilment of the following phrase in "the battle of Armageddon, and God's corresponding deliverance for Israel" (p. 295). J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy: The Complete Guide to Scriptural Prediction and Their Fulfillment* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973).
  22. Pieper uses this phraseology: "Holy Writ expressly declares that since Christ by His vicarious satisfaction is the Propitiation for the sin of the whole world, only faith can save and only unbelief can actually condemn sinners. . . . But where unbelief reigns, all other sins again assume their condemnatory character. . . . Retribution overtakes only those who decline to avail themselves of the first and original will of grace that God for Christ's sake has toward all men." Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, tr. Walter W. F. Albrecht, III (Concordia Publishing House, 1953), pp. 548-9.
  23. BDB, "nāqām," p. 668. This noun, like the feminine *neqāmāh*, almost always signifies vengeance taken by God, referring only thrice to human vengeance.
  24. Kedar and Nebaioth were Arabian peoples, both descended from sons of Ishmael (Gen. 25:13; 1 Chron. 1:29). BDB, pp. 614, 871.

25. That the urban renewal of verses 10-11 is figurative is apparent from verses 18-20 *pace* millennialist interpreters. Payne (*op. cit.*, p. 302), for example, sees the fulfilment in "the privileged status and future world dominance of Israel," while Ryrie (*op. cit.*, p. 1102), in line with common dispensational practice, abandons the pivotal principle of a single intended sense, to say of Isaiah 60: "This chapter describes the glory of Jerusalem and Israel in the millennial kingdom (including previews seen in the return from Babylon)." A New Testament parallel to Isaiah 60:10-11 is Ephesians 2:11-22, in which the propitiatory work of Christ is the basis of the extension of the New Testament church, again described in figures derived from the construction of buildings. See Douglas Judisch, "Ephesians 2:13-22," *CTQ*, 46 (1982), pp. 62-65.
26. Both the NASB and the RSV evidently follow the KJV in the translation of *rāṭzōn* in these two verses (Is. 60:7, 10).
27. BDB, "*ṣāṭzaph*" and "*zetzeph*," p. 893. The noun almost always refers to divine wrath (only twice to human wrath).
28. The translation diverges from the NASB in the translation of the last phrase of verse 6, as indicated below.
29. The NASB translates the hiphil of *ḥ z q* as "who takes hold" in this case as opposed to "who. . . holds fast" in verse 6, the former being the preferable rendition.
30. BDB, "*ḥāzaq*," pp. 304-305. The basic meaning of the qal is "be or grow firm or strong," but the most common meaning of the hiphil is "take or keep hold of," sometimes physically and sometimes figuratively.
31. As to the connection with the Messianic era, the words, "I have no wrath," are spoken by God *bayyōm ḥāhū*, "in that day," which is the time of the developments predicted in verses 1, 12-13.
32. Cf. "Propitiation in the Language and Typology of the Old Testament," pp.222-224.
33. The translation diverges from the NASB only in changing "As" at the beginning of verse 41 to "By means of," as indicated below.
34. Cf. "Propitiation in the Language and Typology of the Old Testament," pp.225-226.
35. The NASB margin does, however, give "With" as a more literal translation.
36. Cf. "Propitiation in the Language and Typology of the Old Testament," p.240.
37. Christ Himself stressed the reference of the passage to Him (Luke 22:37) and therefore maintained the silence at His trial so puzzling to Pilate (Matt. 27:12-14, etc.; Is. 53:7). The New Testament church has, of course, found the chapter an apologetic treasurehouse from its earliest days (Acts 8:32-35).
38. The NASB diverges in various ways from this RSV rendition; the third line runs: "If He would render Himself as a guilt offering."
39. BDB, "*āshām*," p. 79. Sometimes, however, the term "trespass offering" is employed instead (e.g., Ryrie, p. 164).
40. "Propitiation in the Language and Typology of the Old Testament," p.226.
41. Cf. 1 Samuel 6 as an interesting analogue provided by the pagan theologians of Philistia (vv. 3, 4, 8).

42. Cf. Douglas Judisch, "Postmillennialism and the Augustana," *CTQ*, 47 (1983), p. 161.
43. Franz Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, tr. James Martin, 2 vols. in 1 (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, rep. 1975], VII), II, pp. 331-332. He rejects the attempt of J. C. K. Hofmann to rid himself of a troublesome proof-text of the vicarious atonement by identifying the people, rather than the Servant Himself, as the one who offers the Servant as an *'āshām* in the sense that it treated Him, says Hofmann, "just as if it had a pricking in its conscience so long as it suffered Him to live."
44. *Ibid.*, p. 333, where Delitzsch states that "in general we find that, in the case of the trespass-offering, instead of the altar-ritual, concerning which the law is very brief (Lev. vii. 1-7), other acts that are altogether peculiar to it are brought prominently into the foreground (Lev. v. 14 sqq.; Num. v. 5-8)."
45. *Ibid.* In actuality, in every sacrifice the priest represented, not the offerers, but God satisfying the demands of His justice for the punishment of these sinners by means of His sacrifice of His own Son.
46. Delitzsch, pp. 333-4: "Every species of sacrifice had its own primary idea. The fundamental idea of the *'ōlāh* (burnt-offering) was *oblatio*, or the offering of worship; that of the *shelāmīm* (peace-offerings), *conciliatio*, or the knitting of fellowship; that of the *minchāh* (meat-offering), *donatio*, or sanctifying consecration; that of the *chattā'ih* (sin-offering), *expiatio*, or atonement; that of the *'āshām* (trespass-offering), *mulcta* (*satisfactio*), or a compensatory payment. The self-sacrifice of the Servant of Jehovah may be presented under all these points of view. It is the complete antitype, the truth, the object, and the end of all the sacrifices. So far as it is the antitype of the "whole offering," the central point in its antitypical character is to be found in the offering of His entire personality (*prospora tou sōματος*, Heb. x. 10) to God for a sweet smelling savour (Eph. v. 2); so far as it is the antitype of the sin-offering, in the shedding of His blood (Heb. ix. 13, 14), the 'blood of sprinkling' (Heb. xii. 24; 1 Pet. i. 2); so far as it is the antitype of the *shelāmīm*, and especially of the passover, in the sacramental participation in His one self-sacrifice, which He grants to us in His courts, thus applying to us His own redeeming work, and confirming our fellowship of peace with God (Heb. xiii. 10; 1 Cor. v. 7), since the *shelāmīm* derive their name from *shālōm*, *pax*, *communio*; so far as it is the antitype of the trespass-offering, in the equivalent rendered to the justice of God for the sacrileges of our sins."
47. *Ibid.*, p. 334, where Delitzsch concludes his discussion of *'āshām* with a reference to the verb of which it is the object in Isaiah 53:11: "As the verb most suitable to the idea of the *'āshām* the writer selects the verb *sām*, which is generally used to denote the giving of a pledge (Job xvii. 3), and is therefore the most suitable word for every kind of *satisfactio* that represents a direct *solutio*."
48. Jaroslav Pelikan, tr., "The Apology of the Augsburg Confession," *The Book of*

- Concord*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 253. For the original Latin context of the words which I have inserted in brackets see *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, fifth ed. (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1963), pp. 355-356.
49. The classical usage of *hostia* is quite general: "an animal sacrificed, a victim, sacrifice." Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, eds., *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), p. 867. The basic meaning of *piaculum* is narrower: "a means of appeasing a deity" and hence "sin-offering, propitiatory sacrifice." *Ibid.*, pp. 1373-1374.
  50. Cf. "Propitiation in the Language and Typology of the Old Testament," p.226.
  51. The "good pleasure" of the NASB is a translation of *hēphetz*, "delight, pleasure" or, concretely as here, "that in which one takes delight"; cf. BDB, p. 343.
  52. The word "it" is supplied by the NASB to provide an object of the verb in English. The KJV ties together the components of this clause even more closely: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." The RSV follows this same line of thought: "he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied."
  53. BDB, "s b'," p. 959.
  54. Indeed, this divine pacification is already implied by the third clause of verse 5: "the chastisement of our peace was upon him" (KJV). For in the context of the visitation of God's wrath upon His Servant rather than on mankind, *shelōmēnū* surely refers to God's attitude toward men, the pronominal suffix indicating the object of "peace" rather than its subject (as the RSV and NASB take it).
  55. The NASB is more dramatic in its final clause than the KJV (followed by the RSV), which reads: "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."
  56. Theodore G. Tappert, tr., "The Smalcald Articles," in *The Book of Concord*, p. 292, where Romans 3:23-25 and 4:25 are also cited.
  57. Pelikan, p. 227, the Latin word being "*propitiatio*."





# Luther and Moltmann: The Theology of the Cross

Burnell F. Eckardt, Jr.

Since he borrowed two key expressions from Luther, "theology of the cross" and the "crucified God," it might easily be supposed that Moltmann's theology is similar, by and large, to Luther's. It is true that both focus upon the crucifixion and its effects as the locus of theology, but since the interpretation of this event radically differs from Luther to Moltmann, they actually have very little in common. To one, "theology of the cross" means something altogether different than to the other.

## I. Luther's Theology of the Cross.

For Luther, the key to understanding not only theology, but reality in general, is in the cross. There we see what we would not naturally expect to see. Man's love is naturally directed toward the attractive. It is attracted by what appears good to it. But in the cross, the love of God is directed toward the unattractive, toward sinful humanity.

Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good. Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive.<sup>1</sup>

The crucifixion is the demonstration that reality cannot be interpreted in light of empirical evidence. The empirical evidence is that the dying Christ is defeated in the crucifixion. In reality, however, Christ is there victorious, the conqueror of evil. God is manifested to us on the cross, where He is suffering for us, though our natural inclination is to look for God in His glory, that is, in His creation and the marvel of His works.

For Luther, the cross is opposed to glory; suffering is opposed to works. God accomplished the redemption of the world through the suffering of Christ, not through works of creation. So also man is justified not by his works, but through faith in the suffering of Christ. Furthermore, a man's own suffering is, in view of the cross, good for him, and his works are worthless. Luther speaks of the "evil of a good deed," explaining that

it is impossible for a person not to be puffed up by his good works unless he has first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until he knows that he is worthless and that his works are not his but God's.<sup>2</sup>

The key to the theology of the cross, therefore, lies in applying the cross to reality as its material principle. By "the cross," Luther means the suffering of Christ as His redemptive act, an event which appears to be a tragedy, but which is in fact the grandest event God ever performed. The theology of the cross is therefore theology which is guided by the knowledge that God's activity on our behalf is not what we as humans can perceive. The divine perspective is invisible to us. This is a crucial point of the theology of the cross. Luther labels those who fail to understand this truth unworthy to be called theologians.

That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened. . .

That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.<sup>3</sup>

He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.<sup>4</sup>

Luther alludes to Exodus 33:23 in discussing the "backside" of God. The theologian of glory attempts to look directly at God's majesty by recognizing such things as "virtue, godliness, wisdom, justice, goodness, and so forth" as true greatness and as central to theology. But, says Luther, "the recognition of all these things does not make one worthy or wise." Rather, we must look, as did Moses, upon God's backside, at "suffering and the cross."<sup>5</sup> Luther weaves the suffering of Christ with the suffering of the Christian in such a way that he speaks of each interchangeably with the other. Both are beneficial for like reasons. Both serve the Christian's eternal good, the former in a primary way, and the latter in a secondary way. The Christian's "cross" is shown by the theology of the cross to be beneficial to him, in the same way that the theology of the cross shows that the cross of Christ is beneficial.

The joining of two apparent opposites, suffering and good (or benefit), is seen in the cross. So also, in the realm of a person's experience and life, the applying of the theology of the cross entails the corresponding joining of two apparent opposites, the individual's suffering and the individual's benefit. Thus suffering, which appears evil, is

actually good, since in the case of Christ it is victory. Suffering in the Christian's life is in fact explained by Luther not only as beneficial, but as necessary.

He who has not been brought low, reduced to nothing through the cross and suffering, takes credit for works and wisdom and does not give credit to God. He thus misuses and defiles the gifts of God. He, however, who has been emptied [cf. Phil. 2:7] through suffering no longer does works but knows that God works and does all things in him.<sup>6</sup>

Paul Althaus explains Luther's theology well:

The cross is opposed to . . . the theology of glory, and that in two senses, as the cross of Christ and as the cross of the Christian. The theology of the cross works with a standard exactly contrary to that of the theology of glory and applies it both to man's knowledge of God and to man's understanding of himself and of his relationship to God. This standard is the cross. This means: The theology of glory seeks to know God directly in his obviously divine power, wisdom, and glory; whereas the theology of the cross paradoxically recognizes him precisely where he has hidden himself, in his sufferings and in all that which the theology of glory considers to be weakness and foolishness.<sup>7</sup>

The theology of the cross and the theology of glory are contrary to each other because of the cross and humiliation of Christ, which the theologian of glory fails to take into consideration. In His humiliation, Christ changed places with humanity. That is, He took upon Himself the sins of the world while giving to sinners His righteousness. Luther exhibits a keen awareness of this transfer, as, for instance, in the *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses*, where he explains it succinctly:

He took upon himself our sins [cf. Isa. 53:12]. Christ himself is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" [John 1:29]. All the righteousness of Christ becomes ours.<sup>8</sup>

Because the theology of glory fails to consider this transfer of righteousness from Christ to the sinner, which is the central effect of the cross, it perceives reality in the opposite perspective. That is,

A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.<sup>9</sup>

The cross negates the negative effect of sin on one's perspective. Sin reverses one's perspective, so that he "calls evil good and good evil." But on the cross, the good Christ *became* evil (i.e., "became sin"), and those who believe this realize that they in turn have become righteous (i.e., by the transfer of Christ's merits). Since the cross "turns the tables," so to speak, they are thereby re-turned, for they had been

turned first by sin:

The element which makes one a theologian of the cross, which reverses his perspective to see reality properly, is faith. It is faith (and faith alone) which makes one capable of perceiving God properly, from His visible "backside," and which prevents one from attempting to behold "the invisible things of God" as though they were visible. For this reason, Luther views faith and its maintenance as of principal importance. He continually emphasizes the importance of faith, going as far as to say that

it ought to be the first concern of every Christian to lay aside all confidence in works and increasingly to strengthen faith alone and through faith to grow in the knowledge, not of works, but of Christ Jesus, who suffered and rose for him.<sup>10</sup>

It is faith which brings the perspective of the theology of the cross to a person. Faith gives him a new, reversed, and proper perspective. Faith and its preservation is for Luther the task of theology.

Here lies the reason Luther's theology is highly sacramental, for it is by the sacraments that faith is maintained and preserved. It is also on account of Luther's high regard for faith that he opposed the practices of Rome, for he believed that the sale of indulgences (and the like) was working as a detriment to faith.

This ignorance and suppression of liberty very many blind pastors take pains to encourage. They stir up and urge on their people in these practices by praising such works, puffing them up with their indulgences, and never teaching faith. If, however, you wish to pray, fast, or establish a foundation in the church, I advise you to be careful not to do it in order to obtain some benefit, whether temporal or eternal, for you would do injury to your faith which alone offers you all things.<sup>11</sup>

For Luther, faith and the theology of the cross are inseparable, as opposite sides of the same coin. Faith is the operative element in the theology of the cross. The theology of the cross is the resultant theology developed from true Christian faith.

## II. Moltmann's Theology of the Cross

For Moltmann, as for Luther, the cross must be central to Christianity. It is "the test of everything which deserves to be called Christian."<sup>12</sup> But in contradistinction to Luther, Moltmann rejects the language of atonement,<sup>13</sup> and prefers to think of Jesus' death primarily as an event in which Jesus was abandoned by God. And Jesus, being Himself the second person of the Trinity,<sup>14</sup> was also abandoned as God. Moltmann exhibits here what has been termed a "radical

kenotic Christology."<sup>15</sup> The Son is rejected by the Father and thus becomes utterly destitute on the cross. This event unites Him with all the destitute and rejected of the world's humanity. Jesus becomes the God of the destitute by abandoning His "divine identity" at the cross.<sup>16</sup> He thus identifies Himself with all the forsaken, poor, "godless," and homeless in the world.

Moltmann rejects the traditional "two-natures" doctrine of Christ, saying that it was merely an attempt to preserve God's incorruptibility in keeping the divine nature from humiliation. Moltmann argues that—since, according to the two-natures doctrine, the human nature has no personality of its own and yet Jesus suffered specifically in His humanity—His personality, according to this doctrine, did not suffer.<sup>17</sup> In rejecting this doctrine, Moltmann holds that God actually suffered in His divinity, that God's divinity was humiliated. In this way, God becomes the God of all the humiliated of humanity.

Moltmann's theology may fairly be called panentheistic. He himself labels it as such.<sup>18</sup> This orientation is basic to his concept of the "trinitarian history of God."<sup>19</sup> God is "becoming."<sup>20</sup> Thus, God is not so much a being as an event, in the process of being completed.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, in order for someone to be "Christian" and united with God, that person's *medium cognoscendi* cannot properly be called "faith" in the traditional sense, for faith is trust in a being. Rather, it is *identification* with God through suffering. Though Moltmann frequently speaks of "trust" and "faith," he does not employ these terms in a traditionally theological way. He uses them more as terms which denote an understanding of the responsibility one has toward the world's homeless.<sup>22</sup> He speaks of the call to follow Jesus not as the call to believe in Him, but as "the commandment of the eschatological moment,"<sup>23</sup> that is, the commandment to engage in the activity of bringing the eschatological moment, the completion of God and His creation, to pass.<sup>24</sup> Since God is a God of suffering, through the cross, identification with Him is by joining in suffering.

Christian identity can be understood only as an act of identification with the crucified Christ, to the extent to which one has accepted the proclamation that in him God has identified himself with the godless and those abandoned by God, to whom one belongs oneself.<sup>25</sup>

Moltmann is not advocating a type of asceticism here. Jesus' call is to suffer, but not in isolation. Rather, in joining the struggle for emancipation of all who suffer in the world, one joins the crucified God,

"identifies" with Him. In this way the history of God moves toward eschatological fulfilment, the future hoped for, and he who suffers for those who are suffering is taken up into it.

This action involves a risk of one's own identity, a crisis of identity, so to speak, an "existential testimony which is ready for sacrifice," since it is a giving of one's self to the struggle on behalf of the alienated and oppressed. In this action, "a man abandons himself as he was and as he knew himself to be, and, by emptying himself, finds a new self." This is the essence of Christian life, "to take one's cross upon oneself in imitation of the one who abandoned his divine identity and found his true identity in the cross (Phil. 2)." <sup>26</sup> As we might therefore expect, Moltmann is opposed to a view of faith which seeks to maintain itself and its creeds. This faith he calls "pusillanimous." Faith must risk itself in order to be active.

He who is of little faith looks for support and protection for his faith, because it is preyed upon by fear. Such a faith tries to protect its 'most sacred things', God, Christ, doctrine and morality, because it clearly no longer believes that these are sufficiently powerful to maintain themselves. When the 'religion of fear' finds its way into the Christian church, those who regard themselves as the most vigilant guardians of the faith do violence to faith and smother it. <sup>27</sup>

More radical Christian faith can only mean committing oneself without reserve to the 'crucified God'. This is dangerous. <sup>28</sup>

The one who does not follow this course is, and again Moltmann borrows Luther's terminology, a "theologian of glory" who "secretly creates for himself free room for activity in his own interest which will allow him to love what is like." <sup>29</sup> Moltmann, as Luther, sees the theology of glory and the theology of the cross as diametrically opposed to one another. Moltmann sees the former as seeking its own interests and the latter as seeking the interests of the world's homeless and alienated. The task of theology is therefore "becoming a theology of the cross" <sup>30</sup> which seeks the psychological and political liberation of man from the forces of oppression in the world.

Christian theology... must adopt a critical attitude towards political religions in society and in the churches. The political theology of the cross must liberate the state from the political service of idols and must liberate men from political alienation and loss of rights. <sup>31</sup>

Christians will seek to anticipate the future of Christ according to the measure of the possibilities available to them, by breaking

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down lordship and building up the political liveliness of each individual.<sup>32</sup>

### III. Comparison and Analysis.

Though Luther and Moltmann both focus their theological attention continually on the cross, their respective theological systems are radically different from each other, since Moltmann places a different interpretation on the meaning of the cross and so superimposes an altered definition on Luther's term, "theology of the cross." It is true that Moltmann sees suffering as a sign of theological health,<sup>33</sup> and Luther sees the responsibility of the Christian as rendering "love and support to Christ in his needy ones."<sup>34</sup> But beyond this similarity, there is little these two theologians have in common.

Luther's view of the cross may be considered similar to that of Anselm although, while Anselm tended to stress primarily Christ's substitution for sin (the negative side of the atonement),<sup>35</sup> Luther tended to stress the transfer of Christ's righteousness to the unrighteous (the positive side).<sup>36</sup> This, for Luther is the main thing accomplished on the cross. Moltmann, on the other hand, sees the cross as an event taking place entirely in God—as God's self-abandonment.<sup>37</sup> It is an event which is part of God's process of becoming. As such, it is not a completed event, but an event which can only be called complete in an eschatological sense.

The reason for these differing interpretations lies in the difference between Luther's and Moltmann's concepts of God. To Luther, as to traditional Christianity, God is a being. He is the Creator and is perfect and complete in every way. Not so, however, for Moltmann. Since Moltmann considers God more as an event, he sees God as perfect only in an eschatological sense. In this sense it would perhaps be more accurate to call God eschatologically perfected!<sup>38</sup> It is in this context that Moltmann speaks of the "trinitarian theology of the cross."<sup>39</sup> The Trinity is still being perfected at this point in time, and since Moltmann is panentheistic, he holds that God will be perfected only when creation is perfected. Therefore, the cross is for Luther an activity which has nothing to do with God's internal perfecting, since He is already perfect and complete. But, for Moltmann, the cross is the key element in God's process of being perfected.

Because of these differing interpretations, Luther's theology of the cross is a system which shapes his interpretation of reality, while Moltmann's is one which seeks to shape reality itself. In Luther's theo-



gy, the event of the cross is seen as completed, and thus faith in this completed event is stressed as the task of theology. Stress on works is seen as detrimental to the Christian, for this tends to minimize the completed work on Calvary.<sup>40</sup> In Moltmann's system, however, since the cross-event is still carrying on, something more than faith is still required, in order that this event may, in the eschaton, be completed. Moltmann thus stresses works over faith. He refers to "political theology," "orthopraxy," and terms which emphasize *doing over believing*. At this point, he is clearly Luther's enemy.

Moltmann minimizes faith and stresses works; Luther stresses faith and speaks of the evil of works improperly understood. But Luther does not minimize works (though he has been accused of doing so), for he indeed places high regard on works, in their proper perspective. He sees works as a necessary outgrowth of faith, not in the sense that they *ought to* follow faith, but that they invariably *do*.

It is impossible for it [faith] not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them.<sup>41</sup>

Moltmann does not agree. He allows for the possibility of faith existing without works.<sup>42</sup> Therefore he stresses works, presumably to insure that they accompany faith, that faith may not be "pusillanimous."<sup>43</sup> This also sets him against Luther, for Luther's concern is that the faith of the Christian be preserved, while Moltmann's concern is that faith "risk" itself and that works be accomplished. He speaks of "identifying" with Christ where Luther speaks of faith. But this "identifying" is none other than doing those things which involve suffering for the cause of the world's homeless. As such, it is a type of work. Moltmann's theology therefore speaks of works where Luther's speaks of faith.

Both indeed speak of the benefit of suffering, but while Luther speaks of it as beneficial because it drives one's attention away from himself to the cross and faith, which alone bring the merit of Christ, which alone justifies, Moltmann speaks of suffering as beneficial because suffering itself is, in a way, meritorious. For Luther, ultimately, suffering drives one to faith while, for Moltmann, it drives one to works. Moltmann calls suffering virtuous and thus "looks upon the invisible things of God [including virtue] as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened."<sup>44</sup> This position makes him, according to Luther's system, a theologian of glory.



## ENDNOTES

1. Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," *Luther's Works*, 31, *Career of the Reformer*, I, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957), p. 57.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
7. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), p. 27.
8. Luther, "Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses," *Luther's Works*, 31, p. 190.
9. Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," p. 53.
10. Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," *Luther's Works*, 31, p. 347.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 370.
12. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, tr. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden [from the German *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, published by Christian Kaiser Verlag, Munich, second ed., 1973] (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 7.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 306. Moltmann makes substantial use of Freudian psychology in criticizing what he often calls the "pusillanimous" faith of conservative, fundamentalist Christianity.
14. Moltmann is actually somewhat of an adoptionist here: "The earliest titles which say who Jesus is come from the experience of the appearances of Jesus and have their foundation in the resurrection event. By his resurrection Jesus was made Christ, Son of God, Kyrios, by God. *Formulas of adoption* were used for this act: by his resurrection Jesus was adopted as the Son of God (Rom. 1.4)." *Ibid.*, p. 179. See also p. 123.
15. David P. Scaer, "Theology of Hope," in *Tensions in Contemporary Theology*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Alan F. Johnson (Chicago: Moody, 1976), p. 213.
16. Moltmann, *Crucified*, p. 16.
17. Here Moltmann seems to exhibit a shallow conception of what *unio personalis* entails. He interprets the doctrine as holding that the divine nature is the center of Christ's person (and implies that therefore the human nature must in this understanding be outside the center): "If this divine nature in the person of the eternal Son of God is the centre which creates a person in Christ, then it too suffered and died." *Ibid.*, p. 234.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 277. Moltmann's view of the cross allows him to be panentheistic, while at the same time making an attempt to deal with the problem of evil. Moltmann exhibits Hegelian tendencies in his view of the Trinity. In including evil in his system, however, he adds an element with which Hegel does not deal. See pp. 245-247.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 274.
20. Moltmann, *The Theology of Hope*, tr. by James W. Leitsch (New York: Harper

- and Row, 1967), p. 106.
21. Moltmann, *Crucified*, pp. 247, 255.
  22. *Ibid.*, p. 307.
  23. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
  24. Moltmann could easily be called a type of Zionist at this point.
  25. Moltmann, *Crucified*, p. 19.
  26. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
  27. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
  28. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
  29. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
  30. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
  31. *Ibid.*, p. 327.
  32. *Ibid.*, p. 329.
  33. *Ibid.*, p. 315.
  34. Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods," *Luther's Works*, 35, *Word and Sacrament*, I, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), p. 54.
  35. See Anselm of Canterbury, "Why God Became Man" in *Why God Became Man and the Virgin Conception and Original Sin*, tr. Joseph M. Colleran (Albany, New York: Magi, 1969), esp. pp. 139-141.
  36. Luther, "Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses," *Luther's Works*, 31, p. 190.
  37. See Moltmann, *Crucified*, pp. 146-153.
  38. The resurrection of Christ is interpreted by Moltmann as a series of visions received by the "eyewitnesses" of that eschatological future and the completion of God. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
  39. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
  40. "The inner man . . . needs neither laws nor good works but, on the contrary, is injured by them if he believes that he is justified by them." Luther, "Freedom," p. 358.
  41. Luther, "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans," *Luther's Works*, 35, p. 370.
  42. Moltmann, *Crucified*, p. 59.
  43. This is not unlike practices currently prevalent, ironically, in church bodies which purport to reject Moltmann and uphold Luther.
  44. Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," p. 52.

# Theological Observer

## INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS OF 1984

### Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas

The 39th General Meeting of the S.N.T.S. (Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas) was held from August 20 through August 24 in Basel, Switzerland, at the University. It began with a business meeting on the first evening and continued for the next three days with a series of full-length main papers (the first being the presidential address of the newly inducted president, Dom J. Dupont), short main papers, and (simultaneous) short papers. In addition, each full day saw a two hour meeting of 14 seminars, with each participant choosing one seminar for the duration of the meeting, from offerings such as "Paul and Israel," "Inhalte und Probleme einer neutestamentlichen Theologie," "The Johannine Writings," "The Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament," "Textual Criticism," and the group I attended, "Symbols, Metaphors and Models in the N.T.," which dealt with Structuralism and Reader-Response Criticism. Included on the first full evening was a gala reception in the Basel Munster (Cathedral) by city and university dignitaries, and the four days concluded with an afternoon trip to a Roman site near Basel comprising Augst—a former colony of Roman veterans which flourished from 15 B.C. to 260 A.D.—and Kaiser Augst—a fortress on the Rhein which served as a bridge defense from 300 to 400 A.D. All proceeded unbelievably smoothly, and, it should be said without hesitation, this was due principally to the hard work and fine organization of Prof. Dr. and Mrs. Boe Reicke.

The highlights of the four days are almost too numerous to recount, but the following stand out: the main paper by Hans Weder (Zurich), "Gesetz und Sünde: Gedanken zu einem qualitativen Sprung im Denken des Paulus," an imaginative, illustrated-by-overhead-projector [sic!] treatment of Paul and the Law in Romans 5:12-20, which none in our circles would have disputed; the short main paper by Barbara Aland, "Die neutestamentlichen Funde auf dem Sinai," a first-hand analysis of recently discovered Biblical and lectionary manuscripts in the St. Catharine's Monastery in the Sinai (with information on new uncials 0285 and 0289); the short (simultaneous) paper by Jack Kingsbury, "The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen in Matthew: Some Literary-Critical Observations," a sound—indeed, rather tame—narratological enquiry which elicited many heated responses, revealing that most N.T. scholars are incapable of taking the text of a Synoptic Gospel seriously as it stands, without raising questions about *Vorlagen*, Synoptic interrelationships, etc.; a display, not only of the first and second editions of Erasmus' Greek N.T., but also and especially of the Greek manuscripts which were used both in its compilation and in its corrections, along with the main short paper of H.J. de Jonge (Leiden), which argued persuasively that in 1516 Erasmus intended to produce, not a Greek edition of the N.T., but a new Latin edition, with the Greek text added to demonstrate his translation's accuracy; the short (simultaneous) paper of P. F. Beatrice (Padua), "Apollon of Alexandria and the Origins of Jewish-Christian Baptism Encratism," which argued, bizarrely, that Apollon was Paul's main opponent at Corinth, his "thorn in the flesh" in 2 Corinthians 12, and the original source of second century encratism; meeting and speaking personally with scholars who were hitherto merely names or bibliographical entries (especially rewarding was participation in a conversation between Peter Stuhlmacher and Joseph Fitzmyer on justification and the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue).

Mention must also be made of a significant event which took place on the last evening of the General Meeting at the *Gemeindehaus* of the local Lutheran congre-

gation in Basel. At a small reception, the outstanding *Festschrift* edited by our own William C. Weinrich was presented by William Farmer (who was instrumental in facilitating the final stages of publication) to Prof. Dr. Bo Reicke upon his retirement from his professorial chair at the University of Basel. In attendance were (in addition to Frau Reicke, family members and Pfarrer and Frau von Schroeder) B. Metzger, J. Carmignac, F. F. Bruce, W. Rordorf, J. G. D. Dunn, B. Orchard, J. Kingsbury, G. N. Stanton, R. Fuller, and other scholars too numerous to mention. Dr. Weinrich was unable to be present and was represented, however inadequately, by this author. The next general meeting of the Society will be in Trondheim, Norway, in August of 1985.

### Society of Biblical Literature

The 1984 International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature was held in Strasbourg, France, August 16 and 17, several days prior to the General Meeting of the S.N.T.S., which began on August 20 in Basel. This was the second international meeting of the society, an American-based organization, the first having been held in Salamanca, Spain, in 1983. In general, the meeting was of good quality and worthy of attendance. Fine papers were presented, and an opportunity was given to meet scholars known heretofore by name only. Notable lectures were: George Beasley-Murray, "John 3:3,5: Baptism, Spirit and the Kingdom of God in the Fourth Gospel," an outstanding piece of exegesis by an important participant in the Lutheran-Baptist dialogue (the paper provided a foundation of sorts for a Baptist acceptance of infant baptism); Charles Homer Griblin, "Until Times for Nations are Fulfilled (Luke 21:24c)," a sound literary analysis by a Roman Catholic theologian of Luke's version of Jesus' "Little Apocalypse" (cf. Mark 13); Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Place of P in the Generation of the Flood Narrative," a fresh and lively presentation which revealed how standard critical theories of the Pentateuch are currently being revised; Eduard Schweizer, "Christologies after Rudolf Bultmann," a fine synthetic survey of the current theological scene.

It must be said, however, that the SBL International Meeting was not up to standards set by the General Meeting of the S.N.T.S. On the one hand, almost all papers were "simultaneous" (presented concurrently with other papers), with the result that all too frequently unpleasant choices had to be made. On the other hand, no name-tags were used, and no social activities, except for a very basic, final banquet, were arranged, so that it was quite a bit more difficult to meet the people and to discuss ideas than it was in Basel. It was also a disappointment that Kurt Aland, who was scheduled to lead the afternoon N.T. session on August 16, did not appear. No doubt, organizational improvements will be made, even at the next meeting, which is scheduled, tentatively at this time, for Amsterdam in 1985.

James W. Voelz

# Homiletical Studies

## TRINITY SUNDAY

John 3:1-17

June 2, 1985

John alone of the Scripture authors mentions Nicodemus, and then three times: our text, 7:50-51, and 19:39. Out of the "many other signs . . . these have been written that you may believe" (20:30-31). The question before us then is: How do the Nicodemus accounts point us to Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and, through Him, to life? The "eternal life" of 3:16 does not mean "everlasting 'this life,'" but rather "a new quality of life." Note that the three "How can this be?" questions of Nicodemus have much the same sense as Luther's "What does this mean?" After all the commentary on 3:3, two points stand out. First, both translations, "born again" and "born from above," should be acknowledged. Perhaps "born anew" comes close. Compare the Greek of 3:3 with 3:31, 19:11, 2 Cor. 5:17; Ga. 4:9; Tt. 3:5; 1 Pe. 1:23. Second, there is room to read this rebirth as God's one-time activity in Christ repeatedly brought to the individual Christian life. Note the *pneuma-pneumatos* in verse 8, and consider Gn 2:7; Eze. 37:9-10; Jn 20:22; 2 Tm 3:16. John picks up *Martevia* (vll) in 3:31-36; 5:31-47; 8:12-20. The judgment—redemption theme of this text is also treated in 5:22; 8:15; 9:39; 12:47. Jesus could assume (3:14) that Nicodemus was familiar with Nu 21:5-9. Today's preacher cannot make the same assumption of his congregation.

*Introduction:* The odds in this life are long. There is little chance the boy starting in flag football will ever play in the NFL. The man starting a small business is glad to survive without much hope of becoming another IBM. The mortician expects our business sooner or later. The odds against man by himself in his spiritual life are even worse. It is very good news, then, that

### GOD CHANGES THE ODDS IN OUR FAVOR

- I. Natural man is doomed (v 6a, 13a).
  - A. Nicodemus perfectly represents the aristocratic, well-intentioned but unenlightened Judaism of his day, and the best of men in our time. The best Nicodemus could do was to move
    1. From the darkness of night (v 2),
    2. Through the intrigue of politics (7:50-51)
    3. To the gloom (half-light, mostly-dark) of the grave (19:39).
  - B. Our best efforts also are doomed (Is 64:6).
    1. We neither understand nor can control earthly things (v 8).
    2. Even less do we, on our own, believe heavenly things (vv 9-12, Is 64:6b).
- II. Jesus came to change the odds for us (v 13).
  - A. God the Father did not want us to perish (v 16).
  - B. Jesus did not come to condemn us (v 17a).
  - C. Jesus came to bring eternal life (vv 15-17).
    1. "Eternal life" is not just everlasting "*this*life".
    2. Those "born anew" in Christ have a new quality of life (v 3b, 5b, 6b).
- III. Jesus' method was to absorb the consequences of our former odds.
  - A. Jesus did His work in the light (Jn 18:20).
  - B. He came into our darkness (v 2a, Jn 13:30b).
  - C. He even went to the darkness of the cross (v 14).

1. Where snakebite would have killed us (Nu 21:5-9).

2. Jesus absorbed the venom, even died of it for us (Gn 3:15b and 2 Cor 5:21).

*Conclusion:* When all odds were against us, Jesus came from the life of heaven into our darkness that we might be born anew into His light.

Warren E. Messman  
Rushville, Indiana

## SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 2:23-28

June 9, 1985

In nine instances in Mk 1:21 through 3:12, Jesus not only claims deity, but shows the power of deity. He demonstrates His power as Servant over a demon, disease, leprosy, paralysis, a publican, the old religion, the Sabbath (our text), deformity, and demons. Jesus accepts implicit responsibility for His disciples' behavior. Our behavior when we claim discipleship still reflects on Jesus. But more, Jesus takes this opportunity to teach what had been forgotten about God's rest. Meditate on Gn 2:2-3; Ho 6:6; Mt 12:11-12; and Dt 5:12-15. The Sabbath is intended for physical and spiritual blessing. See Ps 95:11, Mt. 11:28; Ga 4:9-10; He 4:1-13. Jesus cites David not as mere precedent, but to reestablish two principles: first, the Sabbath is for man, not vice versa; and second, certain work is permissible even on the Sabbath, i.e., works of mercy and necessity, Dt 23:25. Review Luther's explanation of the Third Commandment. If we, like the Pharisees, pervert the Word of God, we deny Christ who both authored and used the O.T. throughout His ministry. It is easier to follow the letter of the Law (though we do not!) than it is to exercise the thought required by love. The priest fed David and his men because he recognized that his moral obligation superceded the ceremonial regulation. Jesus put every institution on notice that it was made for people, not people for the institution. See Lenski for help with the Abiathar-Ahimelech "controversy."

*Introduction:* What are we doing here this morning?

### DO WE KEEP THE SABBATH OR DOES THE SABBATH KEEP US?

- I. We enslave ourselves to the Sabbath when we regard the letter of the Law as inviolable at the expense of God's intention.
  - A. The Pharisees tried to hold Jesus' disciples to an interpretation of the Law that went beyond God's intent, v 24.
  - B. Sometimes we concern ourselves more with "right" doctrine or "right" liturgy than with true worship, Ho 6:6.
  - C. We can misuse the Sabbath on weekdays too.
    1. A people more concerned with its own congregation than the community or the hurting in our world denies Christ.
    2. When we insist on our rights but neglect our responsibilities, we deny Christ.
    3. When we are more interested in being loved than in loving, we deny Christ.
- II. God intends the Sabbath to keep us.
  - A. Jesus reaffirmed that the Sabbath was made for man, v 27a.
    1. Jesus served His disciples by defending them.

2. Jesus used David (vv 25-26) to demonstrate two points:
    - a. The Sabbath is made to serve man.
    - b. Certain work is more important than regualtion.
  - B. The Sabbath is intended for our physical and spiritual blessing.
    1. Our bodies need a period of daily and weekly rest, Gn 2:2-3.
    2. Weary souls need rest too, Mt 11:28.
    3. We also remember the Sabbath day when we do necessary work on the Sabbath (such as police, fire, or medical work) in a manner that glorifies God, Mt 12:11.
    4. We also remember the Sabbath when we do works motivated by love, even on the Sabbath itself, Mt 12:12.
  - C. The Sabbath serves us when we celebrate sins forgiven. We "rest" in forgiveness, ours for the sake of the Son of Man who served us.
- Conclusion:* Which will be discussed more around the dinner table today: how the pastor preached, or how the people celebrated?

Warren E. Messmann

### THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 3:20-35

June 16, 1985

When Jesus' friends ("his own people," NASB) saw Him working so zealously that He was not able to attend to His bodily needs, they considered Him "beside himself" (v 21), bereft of His reason. "Even his brothers did not believe in him" (Jn 7:5), but they were concerned about Him and wanted to rescue Him from the importuning crowd.

The scribes' authoritative judgement (v 22) was absurd. If Jesus were casting out demons by Satan's power, Satan's kingdom would be divided against itself, which would be suicidal for Satan. Jesus compares Satan to a strong man who must first be bound if his house is to be plundered. Jesus is the one who binds Satan, spoils his kingdom, and leads sinners who have been under Satan's power to repentance and salvation. Satan is Christ's enemy and is not in league with Him. Therefore, the scribes must understand that Jesus is casting out devils by the power of God and that in Him the kingdom of God has come among them.

Having reasoned with the scribes, He warns them (vv 28-30) that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven (v 29). In attributing to the chief of evil spirits works of Jesus that were obviously being empowered by the Holy Spirit, the scribes were close to, if they were not already, calling the Holy Spirit an unclean spirit. The Holy Spirit alone works repentance, but if He is called a demon repentance is not possible. When the Holy Spirit working through the Word is recognized as God's Spirit and a person deliberately blasphemes Him, the Spirit's power to change that person has been nullified. Such a person's eternal damnation is sealed.

In verse 31 Mark resumes the story about Christ's relatives from verse 21. To what extent the charge of the scribes against Jesus influenced His relatives to restrain Him is difficult to say. In any case, when Jesus is informed of His relatives' desire to speak to Him, He utilizes the untimely interruption to teach an important truth. Jesus is not ashamed of His earthly relationships, but He emphasizes that there is a higher relationship which hinges on doing God's will, that is, God's gracious will,

which is that we repent and believe the Gospel.

The central thought of the text is that we do God's will when, by the working of the Holy Spirit, we believe in Jesus as the conqueror of Satan for us.

*Introduction:* Ties of flesh and blood bind family members. Love and companionship bind husbands and wives. Common interests and like-mindedness bind friends. In every relationship there are bonds that hold people together. It is so also in our relationship with Christ.

### FAITH IS THE TIE THAT BINDS US TO CHRIST

- I. Faith in Christ as the conqueror of Satan.
  - A. Jesus demonstrated His power over Satan.
    1. He drove out evil spirits (Mk 3:11).
    2. When He died and rose from the grave (v 27; Col 2:15; 1 Jn 3:8), Jesus delivered us from Satan's power and opened the way to a faith relationship with Himself as the conqueror of Satan.
  - B. Satan still tries to bind us.
    1. By leading us to think, along with Christ's relatives, that too much zeal in religion may be an indication of mental instability.
    2. By leading us to misjudge, along with the scribes, the cunning and strength of Satan.
  - C. Yet because Christ plundered Satan's house, we can now be brothers and sisters of Jesus.
    1. Jesus leads us who were bound by Satan to repentance and faith.
    2. Satan is marking time until his final judgment on the Last Day. He cannot take from us our faith in Christ.
- II. Faith worked in us by the Holy Spirit.
  - A. By the power of the Spirit we daily do God's will (v 35).
    1. The will of God is that we believe in Jesus as our brother and the conqueror of Satan (v 34; 1 Tm 2:4).
    2. We do God's will when we let our faith be nurtured by the Spirit through God's Word and the Sacraments.
  - B. We guard against blaspheming the Holy Spirit (vv 28-30).
    1. Blasphemy of the Spirit takes place if we reject what we know to be true, namely, the Spirit's testimony to Christ in the Scriptures.
    2. It is the unforgivable sin to reject against our better knowledge the Spirit who alone can work faith.

*Conclusion:* By Spirit-wrought faith we have come into a relationship that is higher and nobler than any earthly relationship. We are brothers and sisters, not of Satan (God forbid!), but of Jesus Christ, the Lord!

Gerhard Aho



## FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 4:26-34

June 23, 1985

The parable in verse 26-29 emphasizes that the seed (God's Word) produces fruit by its own power and in its own time. We can trust the seed to work and not worry about it. We cannot make the Word more effective than it is. Luther says, "The Kingdom of God comes indeed of itself without our prayer." Where the Word has been sown, there will be a harvest. The harvest is at our death or at Christ's final coming, whichever occurs first. We can patiently trust the seed to do its work and bide God's time for the harvest.

The second parable (vv30-32) stresses the contrast between the insignificant beginning of the kingdom of God and its surprising ending. Rome was oblivious to the kingdom Christ brought, and the Jewish leaders were blind to it. The religious leaders could not conceive of God's kingdom in the person of a child born in a stable who later as a man associated with public sinners. Furthermore, Jesus' followers were uneducated fishermen. Yet from these insignificant beginnings the kingdom grew to encompass not only Jews but Gentiles in many parts of the world. The contrast is between the small seed and the great bush.

Taking the two parables together, as the text does, the central thought is the growth of the Word of the kingdom.

*Introduction:* Where there is life there is growth. Even after physical growth stops human beings need to keep on growing intellectually and in other ways. Growth is necessary to experience life at its fullest. Growth is a feature also of God's kingdom and specifically of the Word of that kingdom. The parables in the fourth chapter of Mark's Gospel, beginning with the parable of the sower, focus on God's Word. The text points out that

## THE WORD OF GOD GROWS

- I. The Word grows gradually.
  - A. As the seed is sown (v 26).
    1. Pastors and also lay-Christians sow the seed of the Word.
    2. The sowing goes on whatever God's Word is proclaimed and taught. Gradual sowing is necessary for gradual growth.
  - B. As the plant develops.
    1. We can prepare the ground and nurture the plant, but the seed grows of itself, mysteriously (v 27b).
    2. We may sometimes get discouraged because the growth is so gradual, but growth there will be (Is 55:11). Therefore, we can relax (v 27a) and let the Word work according to its own schedule.

While learning to be patient with growth that is gradual, we must also face up to the fact that
- II. The Word grows inconspicuously.
  - A. The Word is as inconspicuous as a mustard seed in the beginning stages of its growth (v 31).
    1. The great and the powerful in Christ's day gave little notice to the Word growing in their midst.
    2. Those who wield power and influence in the world today are indifferent for the most part to the growth of the Word.

B. So inconspicuous is the Word's growth that we are often not aware of anything taking place.

1. The sinners with whom Christ associated and the disciples whom He called often gave little evidence of spiritual growth.
2. We cannot see faith, nor do we always see the various stages of growth (v 28). Conversions are not necessarily spectacular, nor do we always perceive growth in love and patience in ourselves and in others.

At the same time, there is evidence of rather impressive growth.

III. The Word grows impressively.

A. The Word that was sown in a little corner of the world has spread to many nations.

1. The Word has produced a great bush with large branches in which all sorts of people find refuge and rest (v 32).
2. The worldwide church attests to the growth power of the Word.

B. The Word will continue to grow until it produces a harvest (v 29).

1. We shall see this harvest on the Last Day.
2. Then there will be a great gathering of ripened grain, of redeemed souls, for the heavenly gardener.

*Conclusion:* We need never discount the power of God's Word. The Word of God grows gradually, inconspicuously, but also impressively.

Gerhard Aho

## FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 4:35-41

June 30, 1985

This well-known pericope, contained also in Matthew and Luke, leads us directly to the purpose of Mark's Gospel: to confess that Jesus is Lord. The three miracles recorded in Mk 4:35-5:43, the stilling of the sea, the vanquishing of the Gerasene demoniac, and the raising of Jairus' daughter show that Jesus is Lord over nature, demons, and death.

Two pitfalls must be avoided: The interpreter can get caught up in trying to explain the cause of the "fierce gust of wind" on the sea, as though purely natural causes could explain this phenomenon in the basin-like topography of the Sea of Galilee. The other danger is that this whole text is viewed merely as an allegory of Christ and the Church — attractive as that may be. Of course, Mark uses symbolic objects to teach, but he uses them to teach faith (justification) rather than to model life in the Church (sanctification).

*Introduction:* We all confess that "Jesus is my Lord." Yet our lives display inadequate evidence of such a faith. This is due to our flesh always warring against our spirit, as well as to the fact that Jesus' lordship is largely veiled. That veiledness is uncovered in today's text. With the world of nature howling against the disciples, and us, Jesus discloses His lordship. As a result, we, like the disciples, exclaim:

## WHO THEN IS THIS?

- I. He is the Lord of nature.
  - A. He created nature.
    1. His Word and Spirit were the agent (Jn 1:1-3; Gn 1:1ff; Pr 8:22ff).
    2. He is the firstborn and head of creation (Col 1:15ff).
  - B. He redeemed nature.
    1. He tasted death for every man (Ps 8:4-5; cf. He 2:6-8).
    2. His blood was sprinkled on earth for an atonement to free nature from captivity to sin and mortality (Ro 8:19-23).
  - C. He is the provider for all.
    1. Sunshine and rain in due season to all (Mt 5:45).
    2. Everything depends upon Him for sustenance (Mt 6:25ff).
    3. He intervenes to muzzle storms and still the seas (v 39).
- II. He is the Lord of Scripture.
  - A. He discloses Himself in grace to believers.
    1. Though seemingly asleep He can be wakened (vv 38-39).
    2. His hiddenness instills fear (v 39).
    3. He rescues by rebuking faithlessness and revealing Himself the Master of the elements (i.e.f. "silenced" and "muzzled" with Mk 1:25, "demon muzzling").
  - B. He is the fulfiller of Scripture.
    1. He is the prophetic end and the shaper of all Scripture and history (Re 1:4,8).
    2. All scripture is witness to His suffering and glory (Jn 5:39; 1Pe 1:11).
    3. He unveils His real glory in the Scriptures; nature is but His mask.
- III. He is my Lord.
  - A. He unveils His power daily, especially in the midst of peril. (The early Christians remembered this account in their persecutions.)
  - B. He releases His grace in daily forgiveness (1 Jn 1:7).
  - C. He disciplines me, often with affliction, to keep me His own (He 12:5ff).
  - D. I confess His Lordship through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3).

*Conclusion:* The goal of this sermon is to elicit the confession, "Lord Jesus!" I can confess this only with a Spirit-wrought faith. Hence, "Lord, increase my faith!"

G. Waldemar Degner

## SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 5:21-24a, 35-41

July 7, 1985

The last verse of this text (Mk 5:43) poses two problems. The first portion states: "And He charged them much that no one should know this." This is the so-called "Messianic Secret," which confronts us throughout this Gospel beginning with 1:44. For a detailed review of alternative answers to this problem see Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983). In summary, Jesus did not want the "pearls" of the Gospel to be cast to the swine (Mt 7:6); He wanted the Good News proclaimed only to those readied by repentance. The "key" to the secret is in Mk 8:31ff, where first the sufferings and death of Christ are mentioned, and then the individual cross-bearing of the follower is stressed. To

those who live in impenitence and without faith the Gospel is hidden; at best, it is spoken in parables so that hearing, they do not understand (see Mk 8:17f). To the "hardened heart" there is no reception (Mk 6:52).

The second part of v 43 states: "and He commanded that something should be given her to eat." People have viewed this as a kind of anti-gnostic appeal or as an editorial addition. It is far better to take the command as genuine. It is a loving touch of which only the Master Healer would think a midst the excitement and confusion of events. Together with healing and life He also sustains the body with food. The Lord of life performs a deed of compassion and a deed which provides a pledge of His conquering power over the combined forces of death and unbelief.

*Introduction:* We think of death as an event at the end of our life. Seldom do we consider it a process that is going on continuously. St. Mark aligns the powers that are hostile to God to show their inter-relationship-the storm at sea (Mk 4:35ff), the Gerasene demoniac (5:1-20), the woman with the issue of blood (5:25-34), and finally the raising of Jairus' daughter-as a climactic progression of distortions of God's purpose. In the midst of these hostile powers the lordship of Christ stands forth. In this text Jesus is

### THE LORD OF LIFE WHO RESTORES LIFE

- I. The lost life is described.
  - A. The image of God has been destroyed.
    1. In the Gerasene demoniac the very ego of man is warped; it is bent on self-destruction. The divine likeness of creation is destroyed so that alien powers are now at work (Mk 5:1-20).
    2. God gives all of the sons of Adam over to death (Ro 5:12ff), even those raised in a godly environment such as Jairus' daughter.
  - B. Sin's power is evident.
    1. Sin's power is seen in every form of rebelliousness, disease, and every perversion of God's order. The wages of sin end in death (Ro 6:23). Note the noise makers and weepers in the text as they illustrate the desire of man to cover up what is wrong.
    2. The power of sin rules the unconverted man (Ro 6:12ff). This is personalized in James 1:14f: lust in man becomes pregnant and gives birth to sin; sin grows up only to become death.
- II. The Lord of Life makes alive.
  - A. He gives the life of faith that seeks wholeness.
    1. As in Jairus, the life of faith is manifest in coming to and in praying for wholeness; in seeking only a touch of the hand of Jesus (v 23).
    2. Where there is a life of faith there is acknowledgement of human need and confession of unworthiness to "bother the Teacher" (v 35).
    3. In the midst of the tumult of the noise-makers and professional weepers faith latches on to the Word of life (vv 38-40).
    4. Faith reasons this way: Where sin abounds, grace abounds even more; where condemnation convicts, God's righteousness acquits; where death reigns, life superabounds (Ro 5:15-17; Is 40:2).
  - B. Faith-life attains the restoration that Christ came to bring.
    1. Jairus' daughter is raised by the divine command (v 41).
    2. Real life now begins.

*Conclusion:* God give us such a radical faith!

G. Waldemar Degner

## SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 6:1-8

July 14, 1985

*Introduction:* Sometimes we envision the ministry of Jesus in terms of strong responses of faith and crowds of people following Him. Indeed, at times He took special note of a strong faith. Not long before the events mentioned in our text Jesus spoke to the woman healed of an issue of blood saying, "Daughter, your faith has made you well" (Mk 5:34; see also Mt 8:10). In contrast to such beautiful responses we need to be aware also of the negative responses to Jesus' ministry. The text relates such a response in Christ's home town of Nazareth.

## UNBELIEF STANDS IN THE WAY OF JESUS' BLESSING

- I. Unbelief has its roots in envy and pride (vv 1-3).
  - A. The question, "Where did this man get all this?" betrays an envy which will not admit that Jesus had a greater depth of knowledge than they who had the same education and environment.
  - B. The pride of many would not allow them to believe that one who had grown up among them could be more important than they.
    1. Because we are instructed and confirmed in the Lutheran Church are we sometimes offended because someone implies that we should grow in knowledge and in faith and in ability to serve?
    2. Are we jealous or envious of those in teaching and leadership positions? Do we forget that God speaks to us through sinful people?
  - C. In their unbelief many could not accept Jesus as the embodiment of the true God (v 3). How could Mary's son be the Son of God? (cf. Luther's explanation of the Third Article).

*Transition:* These thoughts and attitudes caused many to "take offense at Him" and robbed them of the blessings Jesus meant to bestow.

- II. Unbelief has sad results (v 5).
  - A. Among the many who were offended a few did believe and were healed. However, the general unbelief of His hometown people prevented Him from bestowing more such blessings.
  - B. The even greater work Jesus wished to do among them was to draw them into His kingdom. For them He was living. For them He would die. For them He would empty the tomb on Easter morning. The saddest result of their rejection of Him was not their lack of physical healing, but their lack of spiritual healing in their relationship to their God. Their sins separated them. Jesus wanted to heal them of this separation, but was prevented by their unbelief.
  - C. So He went to other towns and villages and later sent His disciples to these towns.

*Conclusion:* As we take our place in the ministry of our Lord under His chosen ministers, we are warned against pride and envy and the awful consequences of unbelief. Yet rejection is not a signal for us to stop our ministry but an inducement to bring the Gospel to others.

Rudolph A. Haak  
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## EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 6:7-13

July 21, 1985

*Introduction:* Every Christian who has said "yes" to the Lord Jesus before God and his fellow Christians on the occasion of his confirmation has also said "yes" to the great commission—to "make disciples" of all nations. The text give a clear vision of the task and invites

## OUR INVOLVEMENT IN MINISTRY

- I. Travel light (vv 8-9).
  - A. It is well to have a minimum of physical encumbrances when carrying out the Lord's mission. Thereby we avoid preoccupation with ourselves and can devote our energies to the task of ministry.
  - B. Traveling light indicates trust in the Lord's provision.
  - C. It provides an opportunity for a ministry of sharing among those to whom we are sent.
- II. Be concerned with relationships to people and their relationship to the Lord (vv 10-11).
  - A. Do not go shopping for the best place to stay. Be gracious and thankful for a sincere and cordial reception. Since you are God's representative a warm reception is already an attitudinal expression toward God.
  - B. Do not force yourself or your message upon people (v 11). God does not force His love and grace upon people. It is the "Gospel" that we proclaim.
- III. Our ministry is to the whole person (vv 7, 12, 13).
  - A. Preach repentance. Dare to identify sin as sin and help people to renounce it. Point them to Jesus—to His life to remove guilt and provide righteousness; to His death to take away the fear of punishment for sin; to His resurrection to give us victory over sin!  
Cast out the evil spirit. No person can do this on his own. But Jesus has given us authority over them (v 7). With authority and vigor, in the name of Jesus, cast out the spirit of selfishness, of lust, of greed, of jealousy, of hate.
  - C. Minister to the physically sick in the way the Lord directs you. Pray for and with the sick and dying.

*Conclusion:* Again today the Lord seeks our involvement in ministry. We have already said "yes" by virtue of our membership in His church. What will we say to Him today? What will be our involvement? Will it be daily prayer for people by name? Will it be increased financial support? Will I talk to my son or daughter and encourage?

Rudolph A. Haak  
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## NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 6:30-34

July 28, 1985

"Compassion" (*splanchnizomai*, v 34) is one of those words on which an entire sermon could be preached and still not have its full meaning exhausted. This verb occurs 12 times in the N.T., all in the Synoptics and all having Christ as the subject. The word comes from the noun *splanchnon* which originally meant "the inward parts, or entrails, especially the heart, lungs and liver;" considered the site of man's deepest passions. The metaphorical meaning of "compassion, mercy, feel pity" is found only in the writings of Judaism and the N.T. (DNTT).

The compassion of Christ exerts itself as the controlling theme of this text. The twelve disciples had come back from their mission (vv 7-13) exhausted, yet excited. Using good psychology, Jesus hears them out. He senses their need for the rest and He takes them away to a quiet place. But a greater need soon presents itself to which Jesus responds with compassion. The crowds that hounded Him were spiritually destitute, "like sheep without a shepherd." Jesus selflessly gives Himself to the needs of His disciples on the one hand and to the needs of the crowd on the other. People often picture Jesus the way many see a pastor, as someone too busy to be bothered. "He's got so many other things to do, so many other people to help, He certainly couldn't be concerned about my problem." But Jesus is concerned. We have a compassionate Lord who knows our needs, feels for us, and does something to help.

*Introduction:* It has been quipped that one of life's major mistakes is being the last member of the family to get the flu—after all the compassion has run out. It is often true of us that a lot of our compassion is wasted on ourselves, or we are compassionate as long as it costs us nothing. From our text, we learn of someone who is not like us. We see that

## CHRIST HAS A PASSION FOR COMPASSION

- I. His heart goes out to us.
  - A. Jesus is compassionate because He knows our needs.
    1. Physical needs (vv 31, 35-44).
    2. Spiritual needs (v 34).
  - B. Jesus is compassionate, regardless of our motives.
    1. The disciples were only concerned about their reporting and resting.
    2. The crowds were unaware of their spiritual poverty. They wanted a miracle-worker and a king (Ez 34; Lk 15:4-7).
    3. What about our selfish motives for wanting Jesus and our casual attachments to Him?
  - C. Jesus is compassionate, not wanting any to be lost.
    1. These were His sheep (Ez 34; Lk 15:4-7).
    2. His attachment to us is one of loving ownership (Jn 10:14, 15).
- II. His compassion moves Him to Action.
  - A. He shepherds.
    1. By going out of His way and even interrupting His plans.
    2. By leading with His Word. "He began to teach them many things" (v 34).
  - B. He saves.
    1. Redemption by crucifixion—the supreme act of compassion.

2. Forgiveness—the result of compassion (cf. the Forgiving King in Mt 18:27 and the Waiting Father in Lk 15:20, both of whom had “compassion”).

*Conclusion:* Compassion is a beautiful description of God's attitude toward us. To sheep who are prone to wander and often find themselves lost and hurt, it is good news that we have a shepherd who pours out his heart to us and who poured out His blood for us.

Paul E. Cloeter  
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## TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

John 6:1-15

August 4, 1985

The Feeding of the 5,000 is such an astounding miracle and, apparently of such value for the church, that we find it recorded in all four Gospels. Only John's account, however, has the question of Jesus to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?” (v 5) and the parenthetical remark of v 6 that this question was posed as a test. Rather than make a shallow application of the miracle itself (e.g., “as Jesus fed the 5,000, so He feeds and cares for us”), we choose to apply the purpose of Jesus in doing the miracle. The disciples had been in school with their Master for some time, and now Jesus tests them to see what they have learned. Do they trust Him to provide in the face of an insurmountable problem? Or do they limit themselves to their own resources and admit failure. The Synoptics include Jesus' remark, “You give them something to eat,” a challenge which all the more increases the tension of the testing process.

Like the disciples, we often feel that circumstances of life are more than we can handle. But rather than take them to a Savior who has already proven to us His ability to help, we would rather “send them away.” And when that does not work, we despair, we give up. The goal of this sermon is to apply the testing process to our life so that we can see how we try to carry and solve our burdens alone, and then to be aware of the kind of Lord we have in Christ, who desires and is able to help.

*Introduction:* Testing is a procedure with which we are all familiar. Generally speaking, our ability to pass a test depends on us—our knowledge, study, and work. Jesus in our text administers a test to us which is just the opposite of what we are used to. When we work hard at trying to ace it, we are sure to fail. But when we “cheat” and use the answer sheet Christ provides, we pass. The question is,

### DO YOU PASS THE TEST?

- I. Do we try to take the test alone?
  - A. We often limit ourselves to human possibilities and solutions.
    1. Philip and the disciples thought only of their inability to feed 5,000.
    2. In our independence, we take credit when things go well, and we complain, worry, and despair when things get out of hand.
  - B. Consequently, we fail to “cast our cares on Him.”
    1. Even though we have been schooled by Jesus in the past and have learned of His desire and ability to help, we forget Him or doubt that He will bring help.



*Transition:* Jesus tests us so that we can see how miserably we fail. He wants us to look away from ourselves for assistance during the testing process. And so we ask:

II. Do we get help by using the answer sheet Christ provides?

A. He gives us "signs" to point us to Him.

1. "Signs," according to John, are miracles intended to instill faith in the miracle worker, not fascination in the miracle (Jn 20:30, 31).
2. Jesus wants us to see Him, not as a "Bread King" (v 15), but as the "Bread of Life" (v 48-51).

B. He gives "signs" to deliver us "in the day of trouble."

1. Jesus took care of the immediate need of feeding 5,000.
2. He knows already what He is going to do in our life, and it is always to bring about good.
3. Through His greatest sign, death and resurrection, He gives us His passing grade.

*Conclusion:*

He who hitherto hath fed me  
And to many joys hath led me  
Is and ever shall be mine.

He who did so gently school me,  
He who still doth guide and rule me,  
Will remain my help divine.

Paul E. Cloeter

**ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

**John 6:24-35**

**August 11, 1985**

With the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 still a recent and dramatic memory, Jesus had a fitting illustration on which to build when the crowds came to him the following day. As He observes, they came back to Him mostly because they had received a physical satisfaction from Him (v 26). But He was about to teach them that there was something far more important than food. After the usual verbal jousting that seems to typify the encounters between the Savior and His countrymen, with the predictable Jewish insistence on a definitive "sign" from Jesus to prove that He truly deserved their faith (even after they had a dramatic sign still digesting in their stomachs!), the conversation came to the real point. Jesus reveals Himself as the Bread of life. His "food" satisfies hunger permanently. Like the woman at the well (Jn 4:15), the Savior's hearers desired this kind of provision (v 33). Yet their desire was physical and not spiritual. This attitude remains today a basic human flaw and the challenge of the church.

The central theme of the text is that Jesus is finally all anyone ever needs as He satisfies permanently the spiritual hunger and malnutrition of man by His saving Word and gracious presence. The goal of the sermon is to lead the hearers to under-

stand the emptiness of worldly thinking and the eternal satisfaction which comes from fully knowing the Bread of Life. The problem rests with our inclination to view life in purely physical terms and to take too many short-term perspectives. The means to the goal is Jesus' willingness to give us exactly what we need (not always what we want) to live forever.

*Introduction:* Few in our nation are concerned about where their next meal is coming from. They simply expect to get their fill several times each day. Yet it is troubling to note how easily people expect temporary physical nourishment and how readily they neglect permanent spiritual nourishment. In reality we usually have the food we desire. The tragedy is that, spiritually speaking, we often skip

### THE FOOD WE NEED

- I. It is a food from heaven.
  - A. The manna from on high in the Old Testament was God's gift.
    1. He, not Moses, was the giver of this gift (v 32).
    2. He provided the signs of His care.
  - B. The manna from heaven was a temporary physical provision.
  - C. The food from heaven that endures must also come from God alone.
- II. It is a bread for life.
  - A. The bread that Jesus had given the crowd could sustain only their physical life.
    1. Since most people are short-term and this-world oriented, this physical filling satisfies only for a time.
    2. But people want more because physical hunger cannot be long removed.
  - B. The bread that Jesus offers all people sustains "real" life.
    1. It is always present.
    2. It has substance and meaning.
- III. It is a nourishment for eternity.
  - A. Whatever is physical has a limited existence.
    1. The multitudes knew they would get hungry again, and for this reason they even tried to make Jesus their "Bread King." (v 15)
    2. People perceive the fleeting nature of earthly life in general and earthly possessions in particular.
      - a. Their desires are constant to keep their life "full."
      - b. They want much because "you can never have too much."
  - B. Whatever is spiritual has an eternal existence.
    1. Jesus provides the kind of lasting "food" we cannot get by ourselves.
    2. The Savior deals in eternals because that is exactly what we need.

*Conclusion:* Jesus certainly understood physical hunger and the physical desires of people. He did, after all, feed the multitude of 5,000. Yet He also know exactly what we need to satisfy spiritual malnutrition permanently. He is the Bread of Life and the Food we need.

David E. Seybold  
Fredonia, Wisconsin

## TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

John 6:41-51

August 18, 1985

The Jews who pursued Jesus following the feeding of the 5000 were not about to let the issue of Jesus' identity die. Perhaps they could not stop Him from doing unexplainable feats with food, but they were unwilling to let Him claim to be "the bread which came down from heaven" (v 41). That description of Himself was absurd, they thought, because they knew His parents. But Jesus was undeterred. Whether or not His audience believed it, He continued to expand on the theme of heavenly bread as a self-characterization. He provided the kind of life that even the heavenly bread of the Old Testament days of wilderness wandering could not provide. The people who ate the manna had long since died. But those who "eat" of the Bread of Life have a permanent life, an eternal life (v 50), which begins the moment that God brings them to faith.

Clearly in this text Jesus is making the very most of the bread image suggested by the feeding of the 5000. The main point of the text is that Jesus is the Source of all life and provides by grace through faith an everlasting life which begins right now. The goal of the sermon is to emphasize that those who cling to Jesus can have the absolute confidence that their eternal life has already begun. The problem is that there are many who think they can find their own way to life and that even true Christians can forget that their life in Christ never has to end, from this moment on to eternity. The means to the goal is the Savior's gracious gift of His own life (the "bread") which He makes available for the eternal life of everyone.

*Introduction:* Life after life always has been an attractive concept for man. From the ancient Egyptians who outfitted the pyramids with lavish treasures for the use of their rulers in the presumed after-life to the recent fascination with "after-death" experiences of people declared clinically dead, man has wanted to believe that he could live in happiness even after physical death. The message of Jesus is that he can, but only through a relationship of faith with the true "Bread of Life." What is more, this life can begin right now, continuing into eternity even as physical life ceases. It is a thoroughly Christian and completely heartening truth to announce that

## ETERNAL LIFE IS A PRESENT TENSE

- I. Jesus provides more than physical life.
  - A. Bread for the body is necessary.
    1. Jesus did not turn the multitude away when it was time to eat.
    2. Jesus does provide everything we need and more to sustain our physical existence.
  - B. Bread for the body is temporary.
    1. The wandering nation of Israel ate the provided manna but still died (v 49).
    2. The multitude of 5000 ate the bread given but were not permanently satisfied.
    3. The world today also cannot endure by "bread alone."
- II. Jesus offers more than future hope.
  - A. Eternal life is not simply a future hope.
    1. The Savior promises that those who trust in Him have it (not will have it) (v 47).

2. The Savior assures that those who share in His body live forever (v 55).
- B. Eternal life begins right now.
- III. Jesus gives more and permanent life.
  - A. His way to life cannot compare with any other human way to salvation.
  - B. His way to life is the only way and more abundant way (Jn 10:10).
  - C. His way to life does not diminish, deteriorate, or fade away.
  - D. His way to life depends on His all-atoning and once-for-all death (v 51).

*Conclusion:* The "world" may carry a vague hope that life does not end with death. We have the sure conviction that not only do we have in Christ an everlasting life but also we have it right now. Nourished spiritually by the eternal Bread of Jesus, we are filled now in this life and forever in the life to come.

David E. Seybold

### THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

John 6:51-58

August 25, 1985

Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John contains many references to the manna God provided for Israel during wilderness wanderings (vv 4; 30-34; 49; 58). As this bread nourished Israel during those years, Jesus reveals that He is God's Living Bread who nourishes us for eternal life (v 51).

In Jesus, our Heavenly Father gives us what we need for life (vv 51a, 57). However, some people are more interested in consuming health foods that add years to life than in consuming the Bread of Life who grants life beyond years. For anyone to despise the Bread of Life is to invite tragic consequences upon themselves (v 53b). But when men and women feed on Jesus in faith, they are blessed. The result is life that cannot be destroyed by death (v 58). This is not wishful thinking! This is the promise of the Christ who lived and died and rose again. All who partake of Him by faith have His life.

The central thought of this text is that Jesus is the God-appointed Bread that nourishes us for eternal life. The goal of the sermon is that the hearer would not despise the Bread of Life, but would always partake of Him in faith.

*Introduction:* It is the work of God to feed His creation (Ps 145:15, 16). In His mercy He not only provides bread for our tables, but He also provides the Living Bread from heaven.

### LIVING BREAD FROM HEAVEN

- I. Jesus is the Bread sent by God.
  - A. God knows what Bread His people need.
    1. He provided manna in the wilderness.
      - a. It was God's gift (Ex 16:4-16).
      - b. It nourished Israel for forty years (Ex 16:35).
    2. He sent Jesus for us (vv 51, 57, 58).
      - a. Our greatest need is not for food and drink to fill our stomachs (Mt 6:31-33, Lk 12:23a).

- b. Our need is for Bread to nourish our souls (Jn 6:26,27). Jesus alone is this Bread (v 51). We are nourished by the sacrifice of His flesh and the shedding of His blood (vv 51b, 53; He 9:12).
  - B. Some challenge God's choice of Bread.
    - 1. The Israelites did in the wilderness.
      - a. There were those who despised God's manna (Nu 11:4-6).
      - b. They were condemned (Nu 11:33).
    - 2. Certain people reject Jesus.
      - a. They scoff at His claim (v 52).
      - b. They are without life (v 53).
- II. God binds His promise of life to His Bread.
  - A. God's promise is of eternal life.
    - 1. Although God's manna fed the Israelites, they all died (v 58b).
    - 2. In Jesus there is life that death does not destroy (vv 51, 54, 57, 58; Re 1:17b, 18).
  - B. God's promise is for those who partake.
    - 1. This Bread is not to be admired as a centerpiece on a table.
    - 2. This Bread is to be eaten.
      - a. By faith (Jn 6:29, 47, 48).
      - b. In the Sacraments (Mt 26:26-28).
  - C. God's promise is for all.
    - 1. No one is denied this Bread (Jn 6:37b, 51).
    - 2. God's grace is all-inclusive (Is 55:1, 2).

*Conclusion:* May God grant that we partake of His Living Bread from Heaven with the same eagerness that we feed on the bread He provides from the fields.

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## FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

John 6:60-69

September 1, 1985

Some of the 5000 Jesus fed expected to hear how Jesus would keep them in bread (Jn 6:14,15,33,34). It is a common misconception that Jesus speaks words that make us "happy" and that guarantee material success to every "true" believer. But Jesus says no such thing. The disappointed hearers responded: "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" The problem is that people do understand and do not like what they hear (vv 61,66).

His words are unique. They bring eternal life to all who share the confession of Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (vv 68,69). The central thought is that only Jesus has words of eternal life. The goal of the sermon is that the hearer not try to force his own words into the mouth of Jesus, but rather accept and believe the words of Jesus Himself.

*Introduction:* The story of Mary and Martha is familiar to most of us (Lk 10:38-42). While Martha was "distracted with much serving," Mary "sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching." Why? Mary knew that there were no other words like His.

## NO OTHER WORDS LIKE HIS

- I. Some are frustrated by the words of Jesus.
  - A. Jesus had many followers early in His ministry (Jn 6:2).
    1. They had hopes for Him (Jn 6:14,15,33,34).
    2. Their hopes did not agree with His words.
      - a. His words spoke of spiritual concerns (v63b; Lk 5:32; Jn 12:25,26).
      - b. His words included overwhelming claims about Himself (Jn 6:38,40,51).
    3. They objected that His words were hard (vv 60,66).
  - B. Today, some are initially eager to follow Jesus.
    1. They expect to hear words that will make life easy.
    2. The words of Jesus offer no formula for easy living (Mt 5:1-12).
    3. Some are offended and reject His words (Lk 18:18-23).
- II. Others are blessed by the words of Jesus.
  - A. His words are unique.
    1. They are unique because of who He is (v 69).
    2. They are unique because of the life they bring (vv 63,68).
      - a. Life now (Lk 7:47-50).
      - b. Life forever (Jn 11:25, 26).
  - B. His words are for believing.
    1. Jesus does not expect us to understand fully all that He says.
    2. He does expect us to believe (Jn 6:40).
      - a. Faith is a precious gift from God (Jn 6:44).
      - b. Faith is not offended at the words of Jesus (Lk 7:23).

*Conclusion:* What is our response to the words of Jesus? The question Jesus asked of the twelve is for us as well: "Do you also wish to go away?" May we say with Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Lawrence W. Mitchell

## FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 7:1-8

September 8, 1985

A banner that received a great deal of attention at a past convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod contained the inscription: "The Seven Last Words of the Church: We Never Did It That Way Before." This statement is a timely reminder of the dominant role tradition can play in the spiritual life of people and the reluctance of many to give up. In and of themselves traditions are not wrong, providing they are not allowed to take precedence over the clear commands of Scripture. This is the situation that confronts Jesus and His disciples in the text.

The Lord and His followers were being accused by certain Pharisees and scribes of failing to "live according to the tradition of the elders" (v 5), a body of practical rules which they regarded as more important than the inspired Scripture (see Lenski, pp. 283-284).

The superior attitude of the scribes and Pharisees compelled Jesus to denounce

their traditionalism and label their behavior as hypocrisy in the religious sense. "The worst form of hypocrisy is that which carries its self-deception to the point where it thinks that it really is what it actually only pretends to be . . . The two great marks of fully developed hypocrites are presented in Jehovah's characterization: honor that is mere pretense (with the lips, not with heart); teachings that are likewise empty pretense (presented as divine when they are put forward only by men). The two always go together, for the moment the heart keeps far from God it leaves also his Word. The very first requirement of his Word which is fundamental for all true worship of God is genuine sincerity toward him and his Word" (Lenski, p. 287).

*Introduction:* "Did you wash your hands?" is a question most parents ask their children before they sit down to eat. The Pharisees and scribes in our text were also concerned about clean hands. Their concern, however, was not primarily hygienic but religious. They were upset because the Lord's disciples were not living according to "the tradition of the elders." In no uncertain terms Jesus stood up to their criticisms with the admonition,

### **LET GO OF MEN'S TRADITIONS! HOLD ON TO GOD'S COMMANDS!**

- I. False religion holds on to the traditions of men and lets go of the commands of God.
  - A. Traditionalism substitutes man-made rules for genuine love and concern.
    1. It is more interested in the impurities of the body than in purity of heart.
    2. It is more interested in following rules than helping someone in need.
  - B. Traditionalism results in hypocrisy.
    1. It fosters an attitude of self-glory.
    2. It leads to vain worship.
- II. True Christianity lets go of the traditions of men and holds on to the commands of God.
  - A. True Christianity is anchored in the sure Word of God.
    1. It recognizes Scripture alone as the only source and norm of Christian doctrine.
    2. It denounces those who would elevate the opinions of men above the clear teachings of the Bible.
  - B. True Christianity expresses itself in worship that is controlled by that Word.
    1. It is worship of the heart and not mere worship of the lips.
    2. It is worship that is guided by God's will and Word and leads to true Christian service.

*Conclusion:* Traditions play an important role in our lives. It is never easy to give up things with which we have grown comfortable. Yet Christ would remind us that we must be willing to let go of the external and formal for what God requires—the faith, love, and loyalty of the heart.

Ronald W. Irsch  
Rochester, Michigan

## THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 7:31-37

September 15, 1985

Some general observations on Mark 7:31-37 follow: (A.) While the man brought to Jesus was completely deaf, *mogilalon* (as opposed to *alalos*) would imply an impediment in his speech rather than absolute dumbness or inability to speak. (B.) Taking the man aside was done, no doubt, to fix the attention of the afflicted man upon himself, and upon the fact that the Lord was about to act upon his ears and his tongue (*Pulpit Commentary*, "The Gospel of Mark," Volume 1, p. 296). (C.) After taking the afflicted man aside, Jesus carried out three actions to help him understand what was about to happen: (1.) The first action was to convey the idea that Jesus was about to do something about the man's deafness. (2.) The second actions (spitting and touching the man's tongue) indicate that Jesus now wants the afflicted man to center his attention on his mouth and tongue; Jesus intends to do something about his speech impediment. (3.) "Jesus looks up to heaven. The man watches Jesus do this. He grasps the idea that the help that Jesus brings him is from heaven, is divine, almighty help that is far different than anything merely human. With this upward look Jesus sighs. The man is to see the sigh; it is part of the sign language which Jesus is using" (Lenski, pp. 310-311). (D.) Why did Jesus charge those who had witnessed this miracle to tell no one? "He has only a few months left, and he does not want the excitement to spread far and wide about his being the Messiah. The people generally connected earthly, political ideas with that title, the very ideas which Jesus combated." (Lenski, p. 312).

*Introduction:* Being a deaf-mute would be a difficult handicap to live with. What is worse, however, are ears and tongues that are spiritually inoperable. Thanks to God's love there is a sure remedy for the latter. Through the power of His Word we can know the blessing of

## OPENED EARS AND UNLOOSED TONGUES

- I. By the power of God, ears that are deaf can be opened.
  - A. Through Jesus' command the ears of a deaf-mute were opened.
    1. In love Jesus drew him aside in order to minister to his needs (v 33a).
    2. As a sign of what He was about to do, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears (v 33b).
  - B. Through God's abiding Word the ears of the spiritually deaf are opened.
    1. The world is filled with people who are spiritually deaf (Ez 12:2; Mt. 13:15).
    2. Apart from God, their ears will never be opened.
    3. The Word of God is a power that opens ears that are spiritually deaf (Is 35:4-5, Re 10:14-17).
- II. By the power of God, tongues that are silent can be unloosed.
  - A. Through Jesus' command the tongue of a deaf-mute was loosened (v 35).
    1. Jesus also provided a sign for this miracle when he spit and touched the man's tongue (v33c).
    2. The same word that opened the man's ears, "Ephphatha," also unloosed his tongue (vv 34-35).
  - B. Despite Jesus' command the tongues of those who witnessed the miracle were loosened (v 36).



1. They "were overwhelmed with amazement" (v 37a).
2. They proclaimed the Lord's greatness (v 37b).
- C. Because of Jesus' command our tongues are loosened.
  1. We have been commissioned to use our tongues to speak God's message of reconciliation (Mt 28:19-20; Ac 1:8; 2 Cor 5:18-20).
  2. It is through this message that the Spirit works to unloose the tongues of the spiritually mute (1 Cor 12:3; Luther's explanation to the Third Article).

*Conclusion:* May we who have ears to hear and tongues to speak spread forth the Good News of God's saving love so that Isaiah's prophecy will continue to be fulfilled: "The ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; and the tongue of the dumb sing" (Is 35:5).

Ronald W. Irsch

## SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 8:27-35

September 22, 1985

The rendezvous with Calvary's cross would soon be kept, but still there was much important instruction to be given by our Lord. In a brief hiatus from Galilee, the Master took His "seminary class" to the northern reaches of the land of the Jews. This area was known as Caesarea Philippi and was in the tetrarchy of Philip. This is to distinguish it from the more prominent Roman capital of Caesarea on the coast of the Mediterranean. It is here that our Lord conducts a theological class and gives His students a test. This test comes under an umbrella which reveals that there are many and varied answers given concerning the person of Christ. Even the disciples of the Lord can be confused about the role of the Messiah. Giving the right answer verbally to the test as to Jesus' person can present a real challenge.

*Introduction:* We face many forms of tests and testings in our world and society. What student has not "burned the midnight oil" over midterm and final examinations? What man or woman seeking a promotion or advancement has not been concerned about passing some technical quiz concerning his or her field of endeavor? What teenager, eager to get his driver's license, has not worried about the state driving examinations? We face many situations in life in which we are called to answer questions on a test. No test, however, is more important than the one which the Lord gave to His disciples in our text when He posed the questions: "Who do people say that I am?" and "Who do you say that I am?" The test is before us; we are called to answer.

### CAN YOU PASS THE TEST?

- I. People give various answers to the test.
  - A. Some answers fail.
    1. "He is John the Baptist" who has come back from the dead to haunt Herod who had beheaded him. "He is Elijah" whom the Jews believed would be a prelude to God's Messiah. "He is one of the prophets" or just a great man of God.

2. The world today has a mixed bag of answers when it comes to recognizing Christ: teacher, guide, exemplar of morals, inspiration, etc.
- B. One answer suffices.
  1. He is "the Christ." This is Peter's response-that Christ is the promised Messiah and Savior.
- II. The test can be confusing.
  - A. It is confusing when Christ announces that the Messiah must suffer and die. When Peter rebukes Christ for speaking of death by crucifixion, he no longer speaks from God but from Satan. He and the others do not yet understand. "No cross, no crown." They were still wrapped up in an earthly kingdom for the Messiah.
  - B. This confusion is part of the devil's smokescreen to confuse the church and the world concerning God's Messiah and His plan of redemption.
  - C. Our world and many in the church continue to be confused as to why Christ had to suffer and die.
- III. Passing the test can be a challenge.
  - A. It means denying the self for Jesus' sake.
  - B. It means taking up the cross of discipleship for Jesus' sake.
  - C. It means following Christ, no matter where He may choose to lead. The disciples would find all these things to be true soon enough. So shall we if we pass the test.

*Conclusion:* When one of my sons was ready to take his driver's license test, he seemed very confident. I cautioned him to study, to be prepared, and not be overconfident. I asked him, "Can you pass the test?" Our Lord confronts us with a much more important test. The answer to His test will not tell us whether or not we can drive a car, but whether we can be sure and confident about our position as a child of God. Can you pass the test when it comes to truly knowing Christ? There may be many answers that are false; however, there is only one true answer. This, in itself, can be confusing, but this is part of the devil's scheme to confuse the world concerning the Christ. Having given our answer, let us be willing to live that answer in true and devoted discipleship.

Edmond E. Aho  
Yuma, Arizona

## EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 9:30-37

September 29, 1985

Last week we left our Lord and His disciples in the tetrarchy of Philip, Caesarea Philippi. Now we find Him and His group on their final trip through Galilee, which was the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas. It is probably the spring of 29 A.D. and the Master knows there is an appointment to be kept very soon in Jerusalem.

The Lord does not want to be bothered with eager people pressing upon Him for some miracle or cryptic statement about the mysteries of the kingdom. He only wants to impress upon His disciples that in order to fulfill God's plan, He must go the way of the cross. Typically, they do not understand and, consequently, lose themselves in vain arguments as to who of them would be considered greatest when Christ

assumed power in His earthly kingdom. Just when it appears that the Lord's men have a grasp of His kingdom's plan, they prove again that they are earthen vessels with feet of clay. Ever so patiently the Lord impresses upon the disciples that real respect and greatness come through service and sacrifice such as He would give and they also would be called upon to give. The Lord uses a simple object lesson. He bids His men to be great and gain respect by being humble as children and by serving rather than being served.

*Introduction:* The comedian Rodney Dangerfield always laments, "I get no respect." Often we, too, may feel that we get no respect—no respect from our peers, from our parents, from our teammates, from our boss, and from others around us. People often resort to bizarre means to get respect from others, but so often they end up as fools, still crying for respect. We are so concerned about getting respect from other people. What about respect from God? God respects all people in the sense that we all are important to Him. After all, He created us and still preserves us. But are we respectable enough to be in heaven one day with God? How do we get from God the respect that makes us worthy of eternal life? So the question before us is,

### HOW TO GET RESPECT—IN GOD'S SIGHT

- I. God's respect is not earned.
  - A. Our humility and service do not measure up to God's perfect standard.
    1. Like the disciples, we would rather be served than serve.
    2. Even when we serve, our motive is often one of self-serving.
    3. We make comparisons: "I have served more than you have." Pride creeps in to stain our service.
  - B. We labor under a false pretense if we think we can earn God's respect by our humble serving.
    1. Jesus refused to seek people's respect under a false pretense (v 30).
    2. The way to God's respect is opened by honest admittance that in ourselves we are not respectable people.
- II. God's respect is a gift.
  - A. Christ earned it for us.
    1. His humbling Himself all the way to death on a cross (v 31a) atoned for our pride.
    2. His rising from the dead (v 31b) guaranteed our respectability before God.
  - B. When we believe that Christ died and rose for us we can be sure God respects us as heaven-worthy people.
    1. Christ has given us His humility in exchange for our pride.
    2. Christ has bestowed on us His greatness in exchange for our smallness.
- III. God's respect is demonstrated by us.
  - A. When we serve people who do not deserve our respect.
    1. Willing to place ourselves last (v 35).
    2. Willing to serve without recognition or praise and thereby foregoing greatness as the world sees it (v 34b).
  - B. When we serve people who are not in a position to reward us for our service.
    1. Little children are not in a position to reciprocate our service to them (v 36), any more than we are able to pay God back for having served us in His Son.
    2. Yet when we serve even the least of God's children, God respects our service for Jesus' sake and graciously rewards us (v 17).

*Conclusion:* Herman Gockel in his book *Give Your Life a Lift* tells the story of a very wealthy woman who had given great sums of money to benevolences and missions in her church. One day she decided to take a trip to visit some of the mission projects her money had so generously endowed. She visited a hospital where wonderful help was afforded to needy natives. She stopped at an orphanage where little children of the street were cared for. She went to a leper colony where a loving nurse was treating those who were suffering from the putrifying disease. She commented, more to herself than to the host, "My, I wouldn't do that for a million dollars." The nurse who was treating a patient answered, "Neither would I." In the service of Christ to us, exemplified in the nurse's service, we find the secret of greatness and the way to get respect in God's sight.

Edmond E. Aho

## NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 9:38-50

October 6, 1985

This text is part of Jesus' final teaching as He was leaving Galilee, heading for Jerusalem and for suffering and death. Ever since Jesus had left the regions of Tyre and Sidon, He had been in retirement with His disciples. Despite His withdrawal Jesus found it difficult to escape notice; the crowds repeatedly found Him and throngs assembled about the Master. It was not that Jesus feared His enemies, but He desired opportunity for meditation and prayer.

At Capernaum the disciples disputed among themselves as to who among them was to be greatest in the kingdom Christ was going to establish. Jesus taught them the nature of true greatness by placing a child in their midst and by stating: "Who-soever shall receive such a little child in my name, receiveth me, and whosoever receives me, receiveth not me, but Him that sent Me." This instruction concerning true greatness was then followed by instruction about the character of true religion.

*Introduction:* The history of mankind has been characterized by intolerance in religion. In pre-Christian times conquering nations would often insist on the conquered accepting the gods and religion of the victors. Until A.D. 313, Christians periodically were persecuted for their refusal to participate in the emperor worship of Rome. After Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, pagans were discriminated against. During the days of the Holy Roman Empire heretics and Jews were persecuted because of their non-conformity to Christianity. When the Mohammedans conquered many Christian countries, the latter were persecuted and discriminated against if they did not accept the religion of Mohammed. The Roman inquisition established a terrible record of persecution and intolerance against Jews and heretics. Protestants in the Reformation and post-Reformation period were also often guilty of intolerance toward those who believed otherwise. It has happened that because of the emphasis on purity of doctrine Christians in the past, as well as at present, have acted intolerantly toward other Christians. Religious prejudice and intolerance are sins against which all Christians need to be on their guard. In the text Jesus discusses religious intolerance from two different perspectives. Hear what Jesus' answer is to the question,

## WHEN IS RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE WRONG AND WHEN IS IT NECESSARY?

- I. Religious intolerance is sometimes wrong.
  - A. John, the son of Zebedee was wrong when he would have opposed a man, not of their company, who cast out demons in Christ's name (v 38).
  - B. Intolerance is wrong when it is motivated by a great deal of presumption and prejudice (v 39).
  - C. Religious intolerance is wrong when a spirit of legalism underlies opposition to other Christians (v 39).
  - D. Religious intolerance is wrong when others are expected to serve the Lord in the same way with the same gifts, since gifts are diverse.
- II. Religious intolerance is sometimes necessary.
  - A. A Christian must be intolerant of all who would cause a believer to fall away (v 42).
  - B. The Christian must be intolerant of his sinful self (v 43).
  - C. The Christian must be intolerant of false teachers and false doctrine (Mt 7:15, Tt 1:13-14, I Tm 2:12; Ro 16:17).
  - D. Christian intolerance does not advocate or use physical force in opposing false teachers.
  - E. Failure to be intolerant of one's sinful self and the forces of evil will have serious consequences.
    1. The thoughts, words, and deeds of men will be subject to burning and judgment (vv 47,48).
    2. Intolerance of all evil will ultimately prevent the believer from losing his faith and spending an eternity in hell (v 48).

*Conclusion:* Christ has commanded His followers to be a light and a salt (Mt 5:13-14). By avoiding the wrong kind of intolerance and by exhibiting the right kind of intolerance Christians will have "salt in themselves and peace with one another."

Raymond F. Surburg

## TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 10:2-16

October 13, 1985

In chapter 10 Mark gives an account of what is known as the Perean-Judean ministry of Christ. The other Synoptic Gospels give many incidents which occurred during it, but Mark selects but a few happenings of the Perean ministry. Chapter 10 is the dividing line of the whole life of Christ as presented by the second evangelist. The nine chapters which precede outline the years of Christ's public ministry; the last seven chapters (10-16) record the events of the passion week and of the resurrection day. Mark usually emphasizes the mighty deeds of the Messiah, but it stands out as a characteristic of Mark's account of the last journey to Jerusalem that only one miracle is mentioned. Otherwise, Mark confines his narrative to the teachings of Jesus; those selected by Mark under the Holy Spirit's guidance are of the greatest significance. The first teaching deals with the subject of marriage and divorce.

The theme of Christ's discourse was prompted by the Pharisees who wished to impale Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. At our Lord's time, the Jews held two different

views about divorce. It was the hope of the enemies that no matter which answer Jesus gave, He would be discredited in the eyes of his countrymen. Instead, siding with one of the two current schools, he settled the matter by taking his questioners to the beginning of the institution of marriage and restating the instruction Jehovah had given Adam and Eve relative to the permanence of marriage and its non-dissolution.

*Introduction:* God has established three pillars of society, namely, the home, the church, and the state. They were established for the stability and welfare of mankind. All three have been attacked by humanism and Marxism. The home is the foundational institution of society. In the twentieth century in Western civilization the home's stability has been greatly shaken by the loose morality that advocates free sex and encourages people to live together although not married. Divorce has become commonplace, with nearly as many marriages ending in divorce as those enduring. Unfortunately, many of those calling themselves Christians have succumbed to this new morality and have contributed to the moral breakdown of our times.

Christians especially, as the salt of the earth, are to take the teachings of the Bible seriously as God's instructions, if they wish to inherit eternal life. It is also a part of God's plan that under normal circumstances Christian married people should have children. Today let us follow

### CHRIST'S TEACHING ABOUT MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND THE BLESSEDNESS OF CHILDREN

- A. Christ's instruction about marriage.
  - 1. Marriage is not merely a human arrangement as held by Jewish schools in Christ's time.
  - 2. Jesus restated the divine regulation given mankind in the garden of Eden (v 7).
- B. Christ's teaching about divorce.
  - 1. Hardness of heart was the major reason God had allowed divorce, a violation of the Edenic marriage guideline (Gn 2:24).
  - 2. Christ's definitive regulation was that marriage is indissoluble; divorce in principle is not permitted (v 12).
  - 3. According to Matthew 19:9, Jesus allowed divorce on account of adultery.
  - 4. Through His apostle Paul Jesus also permitted divorce on account of desertion (1 Cor 7:15).
  - 5. A person of securing an unlawful divorce was not to marry again.
  - 6. A Christian was not free to marry an unlawfully divorced person (v 12; Mt 19:9).
- C. Christ's teaching about the blessedness of children.
  - 1. Christ desires to bless children; He wants them brought to Him (v 14).
  - 2. Children can be a part of the kingdom of God (v 15).

*Conclusion:* In this atomic age, where divinely instituted morality is flouted, Christians have a great opportunity to reverse the corruption of modern civilization and prevent the punishment which will surely come if men and women do not abide by the Creator's rules for living.

Raymond F. Surburg

## TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 10:17-27

October 20, 1985

There is no need to doubt the sincerity of the young ruler's question to Jesus. While he seemed to have everything something was missing. Notice how Mark mentions that Jesus "loved him." How contemporary is Jesus' warning about the dangers of riches! Whether the "eye of the needle" refers to a sewing needle or a narrow gap in a rock, the point is the virtual impossibility of the camel going through. The goal of the sermon is that the hearer will rely wholly on Jesus for eternal life. The problem is our reluctance to accept God's life as a free gift. We are naturally inclined and conditioned by our society to earn our "benefits." The means to the goal is our wonderful God, who can do anything.

*Introduction:* While "all roads may lead to Rome," all roads do not lead to heaven. It is heaven where we as Christians desire to go. Yet sometimes doubts arise as we see so many apparent options offered, so many "paths to life." Our text gives us God's answer to the question,

## WHICH HIGHWAY TO HEAVEN?

- I. Is it the toll road?
  - A. The toll road principle is well known.
    1. You pay the price—a fee of some sort to use the highway.
    2. You get benefits—even special ones: gas stops, restaurants, maintenance.
  - B. The rich young ruler took the toll road.
    1. He paid the price.
      - a. His question assumes he had to do something to get to heaven (v 17).
      - b. He presented his credentials—an impeccable young man (v 20).
    2. He wanted special benefits.
      - a. He looked for eternal life (v 17).
      - b. Yet he was unsure that he was on the right highway; therefore he asked Jesus.
  - C. There was a roadblock in the way.
    1. The roadblock seemed to be money (vv 21-22).
    2. The real roadblock was an unwillingness to surrender heart and life to Christ, while outwardly obeying God's will.
    3. It is not always the "gross" sins that destroy people, but more often the things to which they become attached.
  - D. A toll road to heaven is impossible.
    1. Money has the power to corrupt the heart (v 23) (cf. the "almighty dollar").
    2. Men cannot save men (vv 26-27; Eph 2:8-9). Defeat and disappointment are the experience of all who try to save themselves.

The toll road takes its toll. It is the highway to hell. Thank God there is another highway.

- II. It is the freeway.
  - A. The freeway principle is well known.

1. You travel without cost. Our government a few years ago erected a nationwide system of freeways.
- B. The freeway is very expensive—for God.
  1. Planned by the Father from eternity (Eph 1:3-4).
  2. Built and paved with the blood of Jesus (Jn 14:6; 1 Pe 1:18-19).
  3. Maintained by the Holy Spirit (Ro 8:16-17).
- C. The freeway ends with eternal life with God (Jn 17:3,24; 3:36; Php 1:6).

This is the amazing grace of our God, who does the "impossible" in love for us!

*Conclusion:* Isn't God's love fantastic? He tackles a job no man could handle. He does the impossible. He plans a freeway to heaven. His Son both builds it and pays the cost. His Spirit invites us to travel without cost or price, to believe in Jesus as our Savior and to live in His love until the freeway ends—safe in the arms of Jesus in heaven.

Lloyd Strelow  
Covina, California

## TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 10:35-45

October 27, 1985

James and John are excellent examples of how narrow and self-centered people become. Here Jesus had just explained His coming suffering, but they were so wrapped up in themselves they could only think of their coming "glory." Matthew tells us Salome, their mother, was right there with them. In a royal court, both the left and right sides would be positions of honor. The goal of the sermon is to get beyond the "proper actions" to God-pleasing motivation for effective Christian service. The obstacles are that we naturally want to master and be glory-hounds because we so easily misunderstand the nature of the kingdom of God. The means to the goal is our Lord Jesus Christ and the loving service He rendered for us.

*Introduction:* Actions speak louder than words. But actions are determined by attitudes. How we feel, think, or perceive others or ourselves is crucial in determining how we act toward them. Our text calls us to engage in self-examination. Is our own

### MOTIVATION FOR MASTERY OF MINISTRY?

- I. In relation to God.
  - A. Beware of an over-inflated ego.
    1. Salome and sons (vv 35-37; cf. Mt 20:20)
    2. Our feelings of pride, spirituality, goodness.
  - B. Beware of under-estimating the suffering in His kingdom.
    1. Example: we see Hollywood stars, highly paid athletes, successful leaders, but have little idea of their struggles to get and stay where they are.
    2. James and John were oblivious to Jesus' cup of suffering (vv 38,32-34; Mk 14:36).
    3. Christians must be prepared to suffer for Christ's sake.
      - a. Not glibly (v 39).
      - b. But in daily life and witness (v 39; 1 Pe 4:13; 2 Cor 4:10; Jn 15:20).



- C. Beware of misunderstanding God's ways.
  1. He "awards" by grace rather than "rewards" by merit.
  2. Awards are the Father's decisions (v 40; Mt 20:23).
- II. In relation to others.
  - A. When self is at the center.
    1. We become glory and power oriented.
      - a. That is how worldly rulers operate (v 42).
      - b. That was the mistaken idea James and John had of God's kingdom.
  - B. When service is at the center.
    1. The natural order is reversed: ministry replaces mastery (vv 43-44).
    2. The opportunities in this congregation and community for such ministry abound. (Enumerate them specifically.)
    3. Jesus Christ shows the way.
      - a. Although He is Lord of heaven and earth, He came to live among men and serve them.
      - b. The proof is His life, miracles, and message.
      - c. His death (v 45) and resurrection provide forgiveness for our efforts at mastery and make it possible for us to minister to others.

*Conclusion:* Christian people have a great deal of energy. They do many things in God's kingdom. The question is, Why? What is your motivation? It cannot be mastery, power, or glory. See how Jesus worked—always in loving ministry. May His love ever motivate your service.

Lloyd Strelow

## TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 10:46-52

November 3, 1985

Jesus comes into the lives of people from a distance. As He confronts a person individually, there is a charged atmosphere of expectation, a feeling that life can be different following the meeting. The miracle happens? It is everything we expected and more. But the troop of followers moves on to bring the message of new life and changed living to others along the road. So at any one moment in time, there are countless thousands who see Jesus from different perspectives: some see Him coming, some passing, some revealing strength and hope for new life. It is a privilege to walk with Christ and see Him come into the lives of people, change their lives in a miraculous way, and give them new direction and purpose in living.

*Introduction:* Followers of Christ (and also unbelievers) are convinced of the value of cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR). It saves lives and creates a special bond between the saved and the saver. On the road to Jericho, there was a CPR event with a different, but very significant result.

### CPR ON THE ROADSIDE

- I. "C" - Jesus comes (v 46).
  - A. His reputation preceeds Him.

- B. Advance workers want a peaceful approach (v 48).
- II. "P" - Jesus passes, and the air is electrified (v 50).
  - A. Jesus extends an invitation to the individual (v 49).
  - B. Jesus accepts honest words of praise.
  - C. Jesus performs a miracle of few words, but with long-lasting effects (v 52).
- III. "R" - Jesus reveals grace to others, as the entourage continues.
  - A. Bartimaeus lends his support to Jesus' message.
  - B. Jesus receives him as a part of His following (v 52).
  - C. Bartimaeus both receives Christ's continuing revelation of grace and testifies to the special grace once revealed to him.

*Conclusion:* As Jesus comes, passes, and continues to reveal Himself to people, a bond develops which strengthens and matures for future usefulness among followers and potential followers.

Philip C. Tesch  
Houston, Texas

### THIRD LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR

Mark 13:1-13

November 10, 1985

There are scores of preachers who feed their hearers a steady diet of calculations. They read current events, terrestrial movements, and even stop-and-go lights as keys to unlock the timing of the parousia. This type of calculation falls upon itching ears which are anxious for any knowledge of the future. But it is the proclamation of the Gospel which must dominate the activity of the church, or it will suffer the same fate as the second temple. No one can accuse Christ of sugar-coating the fate of those who fail to take His proclamation seriously. But the free gift of heaven awaits those who embrace Christ Jesus by faith.

*Introduction:* Specialized calculators are available to count calories, convert English to metric, chart biorhythms and mathematical functions. Many are turning the Scriptures into a specialized calculator to fix the second coming of Christ. But the function of the church is

### NOT CALCULATION BUT PROCLAMATION

- I. There is urgency in Gospel proclamation.
  - A. Signs are wrongly interpreted by deceiving calculators (v 5).
  - B. The Holy Spirit provides the spontaneous witness to the truth (v 11).
- II. There is risk in Gospel proclamation.
  - A. Jesus promises resistance from authorities (v 9).
  - B. Jesus polarizes family members against each other (v 12).
- III. There is reward for Gospel proclamation.
  - A. The "reward" of persecution is directed at Jesus, though received by us (vv 9,13).
  - B. Salvation comes only through Jesus (v 13).

*Conclusion:* If we are convinced that Christ will come soon, we ought to be making a concerted effort to proclaim, not what might be interesting to the curious, but what is essential for salvation.

Philip C. Tesch

## SECOND LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR

Mark 13:24-31

November 17, 1985

Lenski, Alford, Lang, and others understand Mk 13 to speak of both the destruction of Jerusalem and the Parousia, alternating between the two in the course of the chapter, with vv 24-31 applying to the Parousia. R. T. France, on the other hand, in his *Jesus and the Old Testament* sees Mk 13:1-31 as dealing exclusively with the destruction of Jerusalem. In this writer's opinion, France's view is the correct one for the following reasons. The figurative language of Is 13 and 34 (used by Jesus in vv 24-25) referred to the fall of Babylon and God's judgment against the nations, thus signifying, on Jesus' lips, God's judgment against the Jewish nation. In v 26 the Son of Man comes. But in Daniel the Son of Man comes not to earth but to the Ancient of Days and receives "authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him" (Dn 7:13-14). (Note the striking parallel with the great commission.) Jesus also says that this generation will not pass away until all these things take place (v 30). These words easily apply to the destruction of Jerusalem. The sending of the angels to gather the elect is reminiscent of the great commission. Not until v 32 does Jesus mention "that day" in the singular. Until that verse he uses the plural, "days" (vv 17,20).

The NASB begins a new paragraph at v 33 and has "He" in v 29, though there is no pronoun in the text. The NIV, KJV, and RSV all end the paragraph at v 31, and the NIV and KJV both have "it" in v 29, referring to the nearness of the time rather than to Christ himself—the former being in keeping with the suggested understanding of these verses. The central thought in this text is that Jesus will receive honor and glory and Jerusalem will be destroyed, and all this will certainly happen soon for the purpose of gathering God's elect together into the New Testament Church. The goal of the sermon is that the hearer will respond with repentant joy to God's call and His desire to gather His people. The malady is that we too often respond to God only because we fear the consequences of not responding.

*Introduction:* Some preachers try to scare people into the Kingdom of God by recounting the terror of the tribulation or the second coming of Christ. The words of our text may seem to be words that do the same, unless we put ourselves into the context of Jesus and His disciples. The disciples heard these words and recognized the very strong Old Testament figurative language. When we hear these words in the light of the Old Testament we will not recall accounts of the horror and dread of the end of the world, but rather we will hear a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem that happened in 70 A.D. But more important, we will note that

### GOD WANTS TO GATHER HIS PEOPLE

- I. To gather His people, God established His Son as the final authority on earth and in heaven.
  - A. Jesus has received all power and authority.
    1. The powers of heaven have been shaken. Jerusalem was utterly destroyed.
    2. The Son of Man has come to the Ancient of Days and received authority, glory, and sovereign power (Dn 7:13-14; Mt 28:18).
  - B. His word will stand forever.
    1. Herod's magnificent temple no longer stands. Even the finest things of earth rot and decay—one day heaven and earth itself will pass away.
    2. But Jesus' words of forgiveness and life will never change. His salvation will remain.

*Transition:* To gather His people, God established Jesus our Savior and His word forever. This message of the church must be spread.

- II. To gather His people God has sent His messengers to the far reaches of the earth.
  - A. God "sends his angels."
    1. God's angels are His messengers, those who tell the Good News.
    2. God continually sends messengers with the Good News: The Twelve, Paul, Timothy, missionaries, pastors, and people like you who are willing to share the message of God's love in Christ.
  - B. God's messengers range far and wide seeking His people.
    1. "From the ends of the earth to the ends of heavens," says the text.
    2. This is a great comfort for us. God has sought us out—wherever He has had to go to find us.
    3. This is also a great responsibility for God's messengers. They must be willing to go wherever necessary to share the Good News.

*Conclusion:* God does not want to frighten people into His Kingdom. He wants to gather people with the Good News of His love and mercy in Christ. For those He has gathered, this Good News is also a great motivator to range far and wide with the message of salvation.

David L. Bahn  
Pine Bluff, Arkansas

### LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR

John 18:33-37

November 24, 1985

The immediate challenge of this text is to connect the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate. Is this a verbal jousting match with these two men trying to thrust and dodge? Or is there meaningful dialogue taking place here? The answer lies in finding a common thread of thought running through their conversation. That thread of thought centers in more than the kingship of Jesus. It is rather the kind of kingship Jesus claims and exercises. According to v 37, Jesus is the King of Truth. The central thought of this text is that Jesus' kingship transcends and even uses the ways of the world for the purposes of truth. The goal of this sermon is that the hearer will listen to Jesus, the King of Truth. The malady is that we fail to recognize Jesus' voice because we look for it in the wrong realm.

*Introduction:* How often do you hear people tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? From the "fine print" of contracts we sign to "truth in lending" laws we may be frustrated or sometimes satisfied in our desire for the truth. At times we would rather ignore the truth, but that is not a wise action. The truth always catches up with us. Jesus put a high value on truth. He was, in fact, the truth (cf. Jn 14:6). Our text makes clear that

## JESUS IS THE KING OF THE KINGDOM OF TRUTH

- I. He implores us to come to grips with the truth in our lives.
  - A. Jesus confronted Pilate with the truth of his motives.
    1. Pilate wanted to find any excuse to charge and condemn Jesus. He was not so much concerned about the truth as he was concerned about disposing of Jesus' case now before him.
    2. Jesus wanted Pilate to face the truth. He asked why Pilate questioned Him about his kingship. Behind this question lay Jesus' concern for the truth, and His desire for Pilate to face that truth as well.
  - B. We are confronted by the King of the kingdom of truth.
    1. Too often we would hide behind the half-truth of our outward piety. Too easily we ignore Jesus' call to repentance and faith in Him as the true King of God's kingdom.
    2. Jesus wants us to repent of hiding behind half-truths in dealing with God or our neighbor. He wants us to bring forth the fruit of true repentance.
- II. He desires that we be part of God's kingdom of truth.
  - A. False kingdoms seek our attention and devotion.
    1. Pilate saw in Jesus a man with no apparent power and a king with no obvious subjects. Jesus was not a king in any sense of the word Pilate knew.
    2. Kingdoms that seek our devotion are obviously powerful, visible, and with great throngs of followers. False Christ-denying cults attract many followers. Powerful special interest groups seek our support. Highly visible empires want our investments of time and money to aid their building.
    3. But whether in the name of religion, special interest, or financial security, all such kingdoms are doomed to ultimate failure. These are not of the essence of Jesus' true kingdom.
  - B. Jesus' kingdom of truth is founded on the foundation of God's truth in heaven.
    1. Jesus says, "If mine were an earthly kingdom the visible trappings would be present." Servants would fight, power would be obvious to all.
    2. But, Jesus has a greater power-truth. He has greater loyalty—the lovers of truth are His subjects.
  - C. Jesus wants us to be part of His kingdom of truth.
    1. This means more than allowing Jesus to be true. It means recognizing the truth of His mission: to testify of the truth of God's love for all. The greatest testimony of that truth is found in the cross of Calvary.
    2. This also calls for us to lay aside worldly definitions of glory and power. True power, lasting and beneficial power, is founded in Jesus' kingdom of truth alone.

*Conclusion:* Jesus confronts us with truth's claim on us—the truth concerning our need of repentance, and the truth of Christ's cross-earned forgiveness. May we rejoice as subjects of the King of the kingdom of truth, ever listening to the King Himself.



# Book Reviews

**EASTER GOSPELS: The Resurrection of Jesus according to the Four Evangelists.**  
Robert H. Smith. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983. 245 pages.

While the author takes a verse by verse approach, the entire enterprise is rendered invalid by certain apriori assumptions accepted without testing. For example, Matthew and Luke wrote with Mark in front of them; Matthew was a Gentile and not a Jewish Christian; and John wrote independently of the synoptic tradition. Not only do the earliest church fathers contradict these views, but unless we expect the Fourth Evangelist to copy from the others word for word (what use would that be?), the internal evidence from the Gospels themselves contradict this. John shows a definite awareness of the Synoptic Gospels.

Some separate sections are in themselves disappointing. For example, totally missed is the apologetic significance of the Jewish story, recorded in Matthew, that the body of Jesus had been stolen. What is to be believed about the corporeal resurrection in Luke is less than fully clear. On one hand, Luke is seen to stress the physical reality of the resurrection (p. 123) and then the next page says that the Evangelist was not commenting "on the nature of Jesus' resurrection body," but affirming "that death could not hold the crucified Jesus." In the introduction the Evangelists are said not to have the modern thrust that the resurrection of Jesus is foundational for a general resurrection. Such an opinion fails to take into consideration that John's account must be understood within the context of his entire Gospel, where the connection is made (11:25). Even the suffering with Christ theme of Matthew and Mark is necessarily complemented by a glorification with him. Such glorification means resurrection. Isolating the Easter Gospels in this way lays open the fundamental weakness of this approach. Each evangelist intended that his account of the resurrection was to be understood in the light of his *own* Gospel and against the background of what was written and known. A side by side, verse by verse approach is almost a throwback to the proof text method and does not even begin to plummet what each evangelist was doing. Some time ago Jack Kingsbury in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* integrated, in my opinion quite successfully, Matthew's resurrection within the totality of the entire Gospel. This approach is preferable in determining the original meaning of the evangelists and in offering something a bit more useful for the church.

David P. Scaer

**ON BEING REFORMED: Distinctive Characteristics and Common Misunderstandings.** I. John Hesselink. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Books, 1983. 159 pages. Paper.

Any doubts that the Lutheran fathers may have dealt overly harshly with the Reformed are removed by Hesselink, a dyed-in-the-wool conservative Calvinist. The seminary professor directs the first twelve chapters against misconceptions and the final one points out distinctive characteristics of this faith. Chapters proving that

not all Reformed are of Dutch background and are not committed to a particular polity are so harmless that they could have been excluded without a great loss. Hesselink bends over backwards to diminish the importance of creeds in his tradition and mentions that all Lutherans, except for the Missouri Synod, have taken the same route. (At the turn of the century Pieper said just about the same thing about the Reformed.)

The chapter on the liturgical character of the Reformed self-destructs when it is mentioned that the Lord's Supper is celebrated four times a year. While Lutheranism is Christocentric, Calvinism's stress is on the sovereignty of God. We are warned by the author of "an unbiblical Christocentrism." The Reformed faith is still the religion of the Holy Spirit who works in a parallel action alongside of the Word. For Lutherans the Holy Spirit works only in the Gospel, i.e., the message about Christ. Hesselink is honest and to the point. He has performed a great service. No other conclusion is possible than that Lutheranism and the Reformed faith are two different religions, beginning with their differing concepts of God, Christ, and revelation. That is only the start. The problem on the Lord's Supper is only a symptomatic blemish of the real fundamental problems. A book like this is always of great value as it shows where some characteristically Reformed thoughts have been panned off as Lutheran.

David P. Scaer

#### THE POWER OF THE POWERLESS: The Word of Liberation for Today.

By Juergen Moltmann. San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1983. 166 pages. Cloth, n.p.

About twenty years ago Moltmann's *theology of hope* placed him in a position of prominence in the theological world from which he has not fallen. His other books, never matching the first in depth and scholarship, are variations on the theme adopted from the philosopher Ernst Bloch that disappointment provides the future with the foundation of hope. In *Power of the Powerless* the eighteen chapters are sermons centering on this theme with special attention to man's participation in the social order to bring about a better world existence.

With the American background of the Social Gospel, Moltmann's message has found even a more fertile soil on this side of the Atlantic than in its German homeland. Each chapter is supplied with a Biblical text and many provide a concluding prayer. This is usable material. Attractive in Moltmann's approach is a deliberate attempt to be Biblical both in themes and language, very much like Karl Barth. Of course, this can be its greatest danger. A sermon on Noah becomes a plea for conserving natural resources. One on the peacemakers pushes pacificism. A final sermon urges Christian responsibility for Third World countries. Moltmann is Reformed, but with his concept of God's involvement in the suffering world he is more like Luther in content and language than Calvin with his idea of God's transcendence. Thus the sermon



for Good Friday bristles with phrases (of course, abstracted from the totality of Moltmann's theology) that emphasize a suffering Christ, too often forgotten. If the suffering theme of Moltmann is a corrective for a Christology which sees humiliation as an embarrassing interlude in the divine plan, it would have no meaning without the "who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven." Since this is missing, Moltmann's Christ is hardly more than the man who in disappointment continues to hope.

David P. Scaer

**MELANCHTHON'S BRIEFWECHSEL. Band 4. Regesten 3421-4528 (1544-1546).**

Bearbeitet von Heinz Scheible unter Mitwirkung von Walther Thuringer. Frommann-Holzboog, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1983. Cloth. 477 pages.

Collected here are one thousand one hundred and seven letters from the year 1544 to 1546 of the German reformer, Phillip Melancthon. The letters are not transcribed word for word, but the editors have organized the original material into straightforward sentences. In the more extensive letters, the sentences are numbered for more efficient reference. Some of the letters are authored by Melancthon along with Luther and Bugenhagen and others are those received by him.

As these letters come from the period just around Luther's death, some of them can be mentioned briefly. On February 17, 1546, Brenz wrote to Melancthon complaining about participating in the Regensburg colloquy with the Catholics as they had not changed their position on justification. On the next day, Melancthon wrote Luther wishing him a safe journey home, thanking him for informing him about the death of Pope Paul III, and saying that his wife had sent him the requested medicine. On February 21, the elector sent Melancthon a letter telling him to make funeral preparations for Luther. Other letters speak about the emperor's mobilizing of the troops to move against the Lutherans. Reformation research will benefit greatly from the publishing of these edited letters.

David P. Scaer

**WORD BIBLICAL COMMENTARY. Volume 19.** By Peter C. Craigie. Word Book Publishers, Waco, Texas, 1983. Hardbound, 378 pages.

*Word Biblical Commentary* has been hailed as a new repository of Biblical learning. Word Book Publishers claim to have engaged a team of international scholars to provide a showcase of the best in evangelical critical scholarship for a new generation. The completed commentary will comprise 52 volumes, of which 32 will deal with the Old Testament. The general Editors are David A. Hubbard and Glenn Barker, with John D. Watts as the Old Testament editor.

Volume 19 treats Psalms 1-50, following the division adopted by the Anchor Bible. The author of this volume is Peter Craigie, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities in the University of Calgary. In his commentary Craigie gives a careful analysis of the language and form. He was concerned to communicate both the emotional and theological impact of the Psalms as he believes these poems were originally experienced by the Israelites in their worship services and also in their private devotions. Each of the Psalms receives a new translation which is based on the latest textual and linguistic research. Craigie has specialized in Ugaritic and, like Dahood, uses Ugaritic to explain and correct the Biblical Massoretic text. Page 276 lists all the Ugaritic passages and words used and consulted in dealing with the form, structure, and contents of the Psalms discussed in volume 19. In addition to notes on each psalm there are a number of introductory essays that include "The Origin of Psalmody in Israel," "The Compilation of the Psalter," "The Psalms and the Problem of Authorship," "The Theological Perspective in the Book of Psalms," and "The Psalms and Recent Research," covering pages 25-26.

The historical-critical method is the controlling hermeneutic of Craigie's in his interpretation of Psalms 1-50. Craigie claims that the poems in the Psalter are man's response to Israel's experience with God. Thus the Old Testament contains some books that are a revelation from God to man, and other books contain man's response to his religious experience. This means that only certain books are actually the Word of God. That surely is not the stance of the New Testament. In numerous passages New Testament authors quote passages from the Psalms as the authoritative Word of God and do not consider the Psalms merely man's thoughts and words. Christ is not found at all in the Old Testament by Craigie. Psalms like 2, 8, 16, 45, 69, 89, 110, cited in the New Testament as predicting events about Christ, are interpreted in a completely different manner. In fact, Craigie claims that the Psalms have different levels of meaning. Psalm 2 is a coronation poem, which had a different meaning originally then when it was later written down; then it was again reinterpreted. One may ask: What is the difference between this theory that a text has different theological levels depending on the century of man's existence in which it is employed, and the three different senses Origen attributed to a text or the fourfold sense so popular throughout the Middle Ages till the time of the Reformation?

Word Publishers claim that their new commentaries "offer a thorough scrutiny of the evidence produced during the current generation" of major discoveries found in the historical, textual, and archaeological fields, presented with a firm commitment to the authority of Scripture as divine revelation. But the historical-critical method undermines the authority of Scripture; the Psalms are said to contain objectionable sayings (the so-called maledictory Psalms) and erroneous views but does not do justice to the Psalms because of its rejection of the basic hermeneutical principle that a text has only one intended sense and not multiple meanings. Serious,

of course, is its failure to find Christ's life and saving work foretold and taught in a number of Psalms. This commentary is a good example of the manner in which neo-evangelicalism has been influenced by the historical-critical approach to the Bible, which undermines the reliability and veracity of God's Word and departs completely from the hermeneutical principles given by God Himself in His Word.

Raymond F. Surburg

**INTRODUCTION TO THE SEMITIC LANGUAGES.** By Gotthelf Bergstraesser  
Translated by Peter T. Daniels. Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Indiana, 1983. Paper,  
276 pages. \$20.00

This is a translation of Bergstraesser's *Einfuehrung in die semitischen Sprachen*, originally published in 1928 (third edition issued by Max Huebner Verlag, Ismaning, Muenchen, 1977). This German scholarly work was translated by Peter T. Daniels, who has also provided notes, a bibliography, and an appendix on the Semitic Scripts. Bergstraesser's *Introduction to the Semitic Languages* has chapters on the following languages: (1.) Proto-Semitic, a purely reconstructed language; (2.) Akkadian; (3.) Hebrew; (4.) Aramaic, both Old Aramaic and Modern Aramaic; (5.) South Arabic and Ethiopic; and (6.) North Arabic. The book concludes with three appendices: common Semitic words, paradigms, and Semitic scripts. The new American translation gives a listing of periodicals and collections, an extensive bibliography, and an index of authors mentioned throughout the book, all new features.

Although the book appeared fifty years ago, it is still not outdated. Daniels asserts about the work he translated: "Gotthelf Bergstraesser (1886-1933) was one of the great Semitic linguists and philologists. This small volume encapsulates his learning, and every page yields concise statements of remarkable insight. He intended the book for elementary classes in Semitic linguistics, but only one familiar can begin to appreciate the achievements in these brief chapters" (p. xv). Since the appearance of Bergstraesser's *Introduction*, Ugaritic and Eblaite (or Eblite) have been discovered, but they are not included in this edition by Daniels. Here is the reason given for not incorporating information on these languages: "It was happily decided in advance, since the vowels are only partially transmitted and Bergstraesser treats only fully vocalized dialects. Ugaritic, as well as other unvocalized dialects (Phoenician, Epigraphic South Arabic) and the problematic Amorite and Eblite, however, are included in the notes in the bibliography" (p. xvi).

In the notes and comments Daniel had the assistance of a number of his teachers, outstanding scholars of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Scattered throughout this comparative grammar are twelve very useful tables. Students interested in the relationship of Hebrew and Aramaic to other Semitic languages will be grateful that Eisenbrauns undertook the publication of this well-printed book.

Raymond F. Surburg

**MARTIN LUTHER'S DEUTSCHE BIBEL.** By Hans Volz. Herausgegeben von Henning Wendland. Friedrich Wittig Verlag, Hamberg, Germany, 1977. 253 pages. 98 marks.

Although this excellent work was published in 1977, it might be looked upon as preparation for the 450th anniversary (1984) of the translation and publication of Luther's Old and New Testaments as the German Bible in 1534. The publication of Luther's German Bible has been labelled as the greatest book event of the sixteenth century. Dr. Hans Volz (1904-1978), an authority on the Luther Bible and also a contributor on Luther's German Bible to the Weimar edition of Luther's works, intended this volume as a publication on the origin and publication of the German Bible, especially for the general public. Unfortunately, he was not able to see the project through, a task carried out by Henning Wendland.

The volume has ten chapters, plus a time table, a bibliography and a listing of all persons and events referred to in the book. The introductory chapter was written by Wilhelm Kantzenbach and treats Luther's language in the German Bible. The next chapter presents an account of the German pre-Lutheran Bibles, published in the late Middle Ages. The third chapter gives a history of the stages that preceded Luther's translation activities. The fourth chapter discusses the lives of the men who helped Luther with his translation and revisional activity, such as Philip Melancthon, Johannes Bugenhagen, Caspar Cruciger, Justus Jonas, Georg Spalatin, Matthaeus Aurogallus, and Georg Roerer. The fifth chapter, in 17 pages, lists and discusses the publishers and printers involved in the publication of Luther's New Testament and later of the complete Bible. In the next chapter Volz lists the German Bible in single editions, followed by a chapter giving the history of the complete editions of the Bible. In the next chapter Volz reports on the spread and effect which Luther's German Bible had on Germany and other European lands. Wittenberg had a number of printers and binderies busy publishing Luther's Bible and other writings. However, as Volz shows, in chapter nine, the Bible of Luther was also published in Basel, Zuerich, Augsburg, Nuernberg, Mainz, Worms and Strassburg. By means of his Bible translation Luther had created the new High German language for Germans, but Low German also was spoken in various parts of what later was to be called Germany and Volz in still another chapter shows how translations were made in Low German. In his last chapter the influence of Luther's translation was seen in the fact that King Christian II, who had to flee his land because of his attempt to introduce the Reformation, lived in Wittenberg in the house of Lucas Cranach, where he witnessed the publication of Luther's September and December New Testaments in 1522. The king determined to make the Bible available to the Danes; and in 1524 appeared a translation of the New Testament in Danish, published in Leipzig, but actually done in Wittenberg by Christian Vinter, Hans Nikelsen, and Henrik Smith (p. 124).

An outstanding feature of this book is the many reproductions of pages from various books connected with the history of Luther's complete German Bible. The volume contains a gold mine of information about Luther, his co-workers, and artists and printers of the German Bible.

Raymond F. Surburg

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