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CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

Volume 62: Number 4 October 1998

Table of Contents

14th Annual Symposium on Exegetical Theology

"The Meaning of Sacred Scripture"

Tuesday, January 19, 1999

10:45 a.m. Welcome and Introduction, Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, President, Concordia Theological Seminary

11:00 a.m. "Paul's Use of Scripture in Galatians." Dr. Moisés Silva, Mary F. Rockefeller Distinguished Professor of New Testament Studies, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Hamilton, Massachusetts

12:15 p.m. Lunch

1:15 p.m. "Sacramental Theology in the Book of Revelation." Dr. Charles A. Gieschen, Assistant Professor of Exegetical Theology (New Testament), Concordia Theological Seminary

2:00 p.m. "Paul's Quotations from Genesis: 'The Intended Sense Is One?'" Dr. Walter A. Maier III, Associate Professor of Exegetical Theology (Old Testament), Concordia Theological Seminary

2:45 p.m. "A Canonical Reading of Ecclesiastes 1-2." Dr. James G. Bollhagen, Professor of Exegetical Theology (Old Testament), Concordia Theological Seminary

3:30 p.m. Coffee Break

4:00 p.m. Vespers

4:15 p.m. Short Exegetical Paper Sectionals
(Dr. David A. Kaufman, Retired Professor of Exercise Science, University of Florida, Gainsville, Florida, will be one of several people presenting a paper during the sectionals. His topic is "The Battle for the Minds at the Secular University: Creation vs. Evolution.")

5:15 p.m. Dinner

Wednesday, January 20, 1999

8:15 a.m. "More than Leader, Administrator, and Therapist: The Scriptural Substance of the Pastoral Office." Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, Professor of Exegetical Theology (Old Testament), Concordia Theological Seminary

9:00 a.m. "The Meaning of Isaiah 9."
Dr. Douglas McC. L. Judisch, Professor of Exegetical Theology (Old Testament), Concordia Theological Seminary
10:00 a.m. Chapel
10:30 a.m. Coffee Break
11:00 a.m. "Reading Luke with the Church Fathers."
Dr. Arthur A. Just Jr., Professor of Exegetical Theology (New Testament), Concordia Theological Seminary
11:45 a.m. Lunch

22nd Annual Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions

and the

12th Annual Symposium on the Lutheran Liturgy

"Worlds in Collision--The Lutheran Confessions and Biblical Interpretation"

Wednesday, January 20, 1999

1:00 p.m. "The Foundation of Faith and Its Structure."
Prof. Kurt Marquart, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary
2:00 p.m. "The Hermeneutical Method of Martin Chemnitz:
Dr. Scott A. Bruzek, Pastor, St. John Lutheran Church, Wheaton, Illinois
3:30 p.m. Coffee Break
4:00 p.m. "Contemporary Bible Translations—Anabaptist Victories in the New World." Dr. Theodore Letis, Director of The Institute for Renaissance and Reformation Biblical Studies, Philadelphia and Edinburgh
5:00 p.m. Choral Vespers: Seminary Schola Cantorum

5:45 p.m. Dinner
7:00 p.m. Reception: Luther Hall

Thursday, January 21, 1999

8:45 a.m. "Patristic Exegesis as Sacramental and Ecclesial." Dr. William C. Weinrich, Academic Dean and Professor of Historical Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary
10:00 a.m Choral Matins: Seminary Kantorei
10:30 a.m. Coffee Break
11:15 a.m. "Faith, Facts, and Reason." Dr. Rod Rosenbladt, Professor of Theology, Concordia University, Irvine, California
12:15 p.m. Lunch
1:15 p.m. Organ Recital: Dr. Craig Cramer, University Organist, Notre Dame University, South Bend, Indiana
2:00 p.m. "Reformed Exegesis—Lutheran Sacraments" Dr. David P. Scaer, Chairman of the Department of Systematic Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary
3:15 p.m Coffee Break
3:45 p.m. "A Reader's Response to Reader Response." The Rev. William M. Cwirla, Pastor, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Hacienda Heights, California
5:30 p.m. Symposium Reception: Fort Wayne War Memorial Coliseum
6:30 p.m. Symposium Banquet: Fort Wayne War Memorial Coliseum. Speaker: The Rev. Paul T. McCain, Assistant to the President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Friday, January 22, 1999

9:00 a.m. "Confessions, Chorales, Cultures, and Catechesis." Dr. Daniel Zager, Professor of Music, Concordia University, River Forest, Illinois

10:00 a.m. Chapel Eucharist
The Rev. Dean O. Wenthe, President, Concordia Theological Seminary, Presiding
12:00 p.m. Lunch

Call for Papers

The Department of Exegetical Theology of Concordia Theological Seminary is inviting the submission of proposals by anyone interested in presenting a short exegetical paper (20-25 minutes in length) during one of the sectionals that will be a part of this year's Symposium on Exegetical Theology. Abstracts (of a page or less in length) of proposed papers are to be submitted to the Sectional Committee of the Department of Exegetical Theology, c/o Dr. Charles A. Gieschen, 6600 N. Clinton St., Ft. Wayne, IN 46825, or email Dr. Gieschen at Gieschen@ctsfw.edu.

Luther, Baptism, and the Church Today

David P. Scaer

Baptism: Does It Matter?

The Lutheran Church has a liturgy, but may not be liturgical. It has sacraments, but may not be a sacramental church. To pass the test sacraments must inform not only our theology but our practice in a consistent and meaningful way. A sacramental church integrates them into every level of theology and does not confine them to one locus. In turn, public practice and private piety express the confidence believers find in the sacraments. Church theology and the common practice inform and reflect each other. One can hardly claim to be sacramental in practice if, although baptized as an infant, he later makes a decision for Christ, or if he defends the real presence, but does not receive the sacrament.

Some years ago a lay person wrote a letter questioning the propriety of a font standing in the middle of the aisle of Kramer Chapel. Assumably it had been there since the chapel was constructed in the 1950s and had probably attracted only the attention of the maintenance staff. Because the chapel was not constituted as a place for congregational worship, the font was out of place, so the letter claimed. It might become a receptacle for holy water.

The font had been waterless. It was just there and stirred up no nostalgia. For the sake of peace it was removed to a storeroom for non-functioning sacramental vessels. Perhaps a small amount of sacramental integrity would have given us the courage to resist this Reformed intrusion and to insist that the font remain exactly where it was, peace or no peace. Luther defined the church by baptism.[1] The font appropriately belonged in the chapel to remind us of our origins in Christ.[2] If

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[1]Jonathan D. Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther*, Studies in Christian Thought 56 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 197.

[2]*Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 volumes, edited by J. Pelikan and H.

Dr. David Scaer is Professor of Systematic Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

the font has no place in a chapel, neither does an altar or a pulpit. The chapel might as well be a Quaker meeting house, where the deadening silence is occasionally broken by devotional readings. A church defined by individual faith requires no sacramental reminders. Such a church, however, is not Luther's church, where believers become God's people through baptism and eucharist.[3] *Et tamen nascuntur per hoc verbum, baptismum, communionem etc. filii regis.*

Just as one eucharistic assembly is the manifestation of the *una sancta*, so one baptism envelops all baptisms, and, accordingly, one font encompasses all fonts. Baptism is more than an entry level sacrament. For Luther it is what being a Christian is. baptism is as much present and future tense as it is past tense, and it continually calls for the baptized to respond in faith.[4] We do not have to look at the font where we were baptized to find this salvation; we could have found it in the one that stood in our chapel. Baptism and the Holy Communion are the *porta dei* through which the Holy Spirit leads us into the church.[5] We acceded to the font's removal for simple peace, but in retrospect it was a capitulation to a Protestantism that pretends to be Lutheran.[6]

Faith or Baptism?

Infant baptism is the most commonly practiced form of baptism and controversy over this form first disrupted the Reformation. Luther discussed the Lord's Supper with Zwingli

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T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia and Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-1986), 22:197: "Similarly, we have two classes of Christians today. All of us who are baptized and are reborn through Baptism are indeed called Christian, but we do not all remain true to Baptism." Subsequent references to volumes in this series will be abbreviated *LW*.

[3]*LW* 3:110.

[4]Trigg, 196.

[5]*LW* 8:264.

[6]During the 1997-1998 academic year the absence of a baptismal font was corrected by placing a new stone one at entrance to the nave in the center aisle. This writer would like to believe that the delivery of this essay provided the Dean of the Chapel with the motivation for undertaking this task, though this cannot be confirmed by the Dean's memory.

(1529), but made no attempt to negotiate with the Anabaptists. On the surface, infant baptism seemed to contradict Luther's doctrine of justification *sola fide*. Justifying faith was *fides explicita* and not the church's or anyone else's, a *fides aliena*. Faith does not belong to Luther's definition of baptism, but relying on baptism without faith creates false confidence.[7] A problem of relating faith to baptism emerges with infants when faith is denied or redefined so that it is not really the New Testament faith. Since the Enlightenment, theologians have attempted to coordinate the practice of infant baptism with the *sola fide* principle.

On the borders of the nineteenth century confessional movement was the Erlangen School, which accommodated a sacramental baptism of infants with Schleiermacher's principle of God consciousness. Schleiermacher created a theological synthesis out of the Pietism of his parental home and the critical Rationalism of his university education. Even if he may not have believed in a personal God, his emphasis on the community and consciousness showed that the Pietism of his youth set the character of his theology. Historical Pietism (circa 1675-1760) did not question infant baptism, but more and more saw faith as self-reflection whose progress could be measured. These Pietists were at odds with Luther, who held that the one who finds himself in despair has a greater faith than the one who thinks he believes.[8] Lutherans, who have often adopted Pietism's aberrant view of faith as a substance or quality, have had to explain the absence of a qualifying faith in baptizing infants. Rationalism substituted reason, of which infants were found to be incapable, in place of Pietism's emotional self-absorption. Accordingly, faith was impossible for them. Infant baptism could be practiced as an apostolic custom but was neither divinely mandated nor necessary. Original sin and baptism's regenerating grace were denied. Infant baptism could be practiced as a voluntary custom symbolizing entrance into

[7] *LW* 22:197.
[8] *LW* 40:241.

the community where Christian virtues were accessible to the child.[9]

Schleiermacher followed suit, defining faith as a highly developed God consciousness. This excluded children, who were not even capable of rudimentary consciousness, but their baptism could serve as an entrance rite into the Christian community where their God consciousness could develop.[10] Both the Rationalists and Schleiermacher attached regeneration not to baptism but to the community where ethical behavior or sanctification was spawned. Sponsors were replaced by parents who pledged to provide ethical upbringing for the child. It became more of a family rite than a churchly one. Our own liturgy contains pledges concerning the child's upbringing which were not part of Luther's rite.[11] The Erlangen theologians looked for a middle ground between the revived confessional Lutheranism, with its deep concern for the sacraments, and Schleiermacher's definition of faith as a matured consciousness. Infants were regenerated by baptism, but without faith.[12] Some scholars have claimed support in Luther for separating faith from baptism.[13] Barth, for all his dislike of Rationalism and Schleiermacher, followed them in finding no biblical reason for infant baptism. He actually went further by calling for its abolition, but did not require it of those baptized as infants.[14] He was an Anabaptist in theology but not practice, and thus more closely resembled Zwingli. Some German Lutheran pastors

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[9]J. A. L. Wegscheider, *Institutiones Theologiae Christianae Dogmaticae*, third edition (Halle: Gebauer, 1817), 364-367.

[10]*Der Christliche Glaube*, third edition, three volumes (Berlin: Reimer,1836), 2:280-284.

[11]*LutheranWorship* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1982), 200.

[12]Franz Frank, *System der Christlichen Wahrheit*, third edition, (Erlangen: Deichert, 1894), 285. One may also see Paul Althaus, Sr., *Die Heilsbedeutung der Taufe im Neuen Testament* (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1897), 296. He could speak of baptismal regeneration without faith.

[13]One may see Karl Brinkel, *Die Lehre Luthers von der fides infantium bei der Kindertaufe* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1958), 11-12.

[14]Karl Barth, *Christian Dogmatics*, four volumes, translated by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1969), 4/4:182.

adopted Barth's arguments, but they rarely put them into practice among the churches practicing infant baptism.[15]

Infant baptism provided an incontestable unity for Reformed, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics, as well as a national and cultural bond in Europe. Barth's opposition to infant baptism was based on his definition of faith as encounter, which is as impossible for children as Schleiermacher's God consciousness. Barth claimed that Luther had sacrificed the *sola fide* principle in his defense of infant baptism.[16] Anabaptists, Zwingli, Calvin, Enlightenment theologians, Schleiermacher, and Barth had profound differences on baptism. Yet all concurred it was an act of faith and agreed, against Luther, that infants did not believe. For Luther, baptism was constituted not by faith, but by God, who was actually present in the water.

Infant baptism takes us to the heart of Luther's theology. The sacraments are God's masks where faith can find Him. At issue is how Luther resolved his *sola fide* principle with his practice of infant baptism, since this correlation has been problematic.[17] Baptism cannot replace justification by faith and Christology as the core of Luther's theology, but it does focus on how he understood them. Salvation is given in baptism, though not because of faith. Finding the certainty of salvation in faith is the devil's work and is as useless as the medieval demand to rely on confession for forgiveness. If baptism were given on the basis of faith, we could baptize no one, including adults.[18] Denying

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[15]One may see Gottfried Hoffmann, "The Baptism and Faith of Infants," in *A Lively Legacy: Essays in Honor of Robert Preus*, 79-85, edited by Kurt E. Marquart, John Stephenson, and Bjarne Teigen (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1985).

[16]In order to maintain infant baptism Barth asks whether it is an integral part of the theological system. He finds that for Luther it is not. One may see *Christian Dogmatics* 4/4, 166-169.

[17]James Atkinson (*Martin Luther and the Birth of Protestantism* [London, 1968], 168) writes: "There is no satisfactory way of reconciling Luther's clear teaching on justification by faith alone with his views on baptismal regeneration. His contemporaries saw this chink in his armour, and so have many radicals who succeeded them." We have provided an historical sketch of the problem from Pietism to Barth.

[18]*LW* 40:240.

baptism especially to infants was, for Luther, a rejection of Christianity. [19]

An often used route out of the quagmire of apparent contradictions in Luther's thought is dividing the younger Reformer from the more mature one. This technique tends to destroy the unity of his thought, but it has merit in providing categories for tracing his historical development. Luther did not see all things in one moment of theological brilliance. No one ever does. Events over which the Reformer did not have direct control shaped his views or caused them to be expressed in different ways. The typical caricature is that the younger *persona* was the vibrant protestant whose battle cry of *sola fide* was his theological engine against Rome. True! The older version suffered from a sacramental clogging of the theological arteries. Luther's immunity against a latent medieval virus broke down, and a degenerative, sclerotic catholicism surged forth. Remove the hyperbole and this is also true. In the Large Catechism, Luther shows no mercy to those who boast of their faith apart from the sacraments.[20] Important as *sola fide* was for Luther, baptism was God's act, whose definition was not dependent on faith. Barth saw this as the triumph of Rome's *ex opere operato* in Luther![21]

Bifurcating Luther into green (Protestant) and ripe (Catholic) periods is attractive for those who want to give faith a secondary role in baptism or eliminate it by delay. Walther's and Pieper's opponents in the Erlangen school did just that: baptize now, believe later.[22] In baptism, *sola gratia* is given place of honor and faith is deferred to adolescence. Erlangen

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[19]Large Catechism IV, 31: "Hence it follows whoever rejects Baptism rejects God's Word, faith, and Christ, who directs and binds us to Baptism."

[20]Large Catechism IV, 28-29.

[21]*Christian Dogmatics* 4/4,172.

[22]Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, four volumes (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1950-1957), 3:267: "Many recent Lutherans . . . teach that Baptism communicates psychic (or 'psychophysical') powers and gifts which the baptized do not receive with the hand of faith. This is the Romanizing element in their teaching." Pieper notes the aberration in this theology, but it may have had its origin in the German philosophy of that day and not Rome.

supported its position with Luther's claim that infant baptism is valid, even without faith.[23] This is but one of several hypothetical arguments Luther offered in his arguments for infant baptism. It may appear that Luther contradicts himself. If one is absolutely certain that the candidate does not believe, he should not baptize him. Again, even if we are uncertain whether children believe, we should still baptize them. Even the Anabaptists have no certain knowledge of this. These hypotheses may or may not be true and cannot be extracted as autonomous truths.

If Luther's tower experience (1512/1519[?]) marks his awareness of justification by faith, a later date marks the movement of the sacraments to the center of his theology.[24] This later date rivals the earlier one in importance and can be placed about 1527/8 with his *Concerning Rebaptism*.[25] In his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), an earlier, Protestant Luther has no use for sacraments added by Rome.[26] Even here, however, Luther does not make baptism's power dependent on the faith of the baptizer or the baptized.[27] This Luther was already Catholic—at least in the eyes of his opponents, from the Anabaptists to Barth! He carried his polemic over into the Large Catechism (1529) against the Anabaptists who claimed an immediate experience of the Spirit and the unprofitable character of external things.

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[23]For an overview of this problem in the nineteenth century with a bibliography, one may see Brinkel, 104-105, n.2. The solution that the grace given in baptism could be received by faith later in life was popular, because it kept the grace of baptism and faith as mature decision intact. Problematic is that logical priority of *sola gratia* over the *sola fide* becomes a temporal separation, which is not Luther's teaching and endangers his *sola fide* principle.

[24]Fran Posset, "'Deification' in the German Spirituality of the Late Middle Ages and in Luther: An Ecumenical Historical Perspective," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 84 (1993):115: "The debate over the data of the Reformer's theological breakthrough appears to be endless."

[25]*LW* 40:229-262.

[26]*LW* 36:81-126.

[27]*LW* 36:64.

Luther addressed his *The Adoration of the Sacrament* (1523) to the Bohemian Brethren, whose refusal to adore the sacrament suggested to some they were with Carlstadt.[28] He was also disturbed that baptism was administered on the basis of future faith.[29] If it is certain that children do not have faith (a point which Luther does not grant), it would be better not to baptize them, a position he took in his treatise *Concerning Baptism* (1527/8).[30] These Anabaptist "know-it-alls" and "leaders of the blind" have taken the *sola* in Luther's *sola fide* to develop a "monofideism," which makes the sacraments unnecessary externals.[31] "Therefore only presumptuous, stupid persons draw the conclusion that where there is no true faith, there also can be no true baptism."[32] This may not be a sacramental *ex opere operato* of Roman Catholicism, but for Luther baptism clearly has an objective reality apart from faith.[33] For Luther the pope is the Antichrist who sits in God's temple where there is faith,

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[28]*LW* 36:271.

[29]Calvin took the position of baptizing on the basis of future faith in later editions of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (translated by Henry Beveridge, two volumes [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company], 4.16.20), and this position found its way into the Enlightenment. In the 1536 edition of the *Institutes* Calvin held that infants had the same faith as adults and that without faith election was impossible (Translated and annotated by Ford Lewis Battles [Grand Rapids: The H. H. Meeter Center for Calvin Studies/Eerdmans, 1975], 4.23). Luther's response was (*LW* 36:300-301): "But I am much concerned because you baptize young children on the basis of future faith, which they are supposed to learn when they come to understanding, and not on the basis of present faith." All references to the *Institutes* will be to the Beveridge edition, unless otherwise noted.

[30]*LW* 40:254.

[31]Large Catechism IV, 28-29.

[32]Large Catechism IV,58.

[33]*LW* 13:303: "You can see the water of baptism as you can see the dew . . . but you cannot see or hear or understand the Spirit, or what He accomplishes thereby: that a human being is cleansed in baptism and becomes a saint in the hands of the priest so that from a child of hell he is changed into a child of God. Nevertheless this is truly and actually accomplished. One has to say, in view of the power which attends it, that the Holy Spirit was present at the event and was making believers by means of water and the word."

Christ, sacraments, and gospels, among others.[34] The Anabaptists, in attacking the pope, desecrate the church by removing its sacraments.[35] The pope still baptizes and is within the church's boundaries.

An earlier Luther said if you are absolutely certain that the candidate for baptism does not believe, then baptism should not be administered to child or adult. A later Luther notes that even if the Bible makes no explicit reference to children or adults being baptized because of their faith, it would be absurd to cease baptizing.[36] "Neither the baptizer nor the baptized can base baptism on a certain faith."[37] Luther saw that in the Anabaptist requirement for rebaptism was a claim for special merit for their own baptism. Water administered by the Anabaptists was superior to that used by other Christians! This was sectarian and hardly different from the *ex opere operato* of Rome.[38]

Luther's Christology is bound up with his doctrine of baptism, which provides the basis for justification and sanctification. Faith finds God in baptism where He has bound Himself. To reject baptism is to repudiate Christ.[39] A Christological understanding of baptism does not mutilate Luther's trinitarian doctrine by denying the Spirit's role in salvation. The Spirit is always connected to the water of baptism and Christ's blood, so that together they form one thing.[40] Baptism is a trinitarian act

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[34]*LW* 40:231: "The Christendom that now is under the papacy is truly the body of Christ and a member of it. If it is his body, then it has the true spirit [*sic*! (Spirit)], gospel, faith, baptism, sacrament, keys, the office of the ministry, prayer, holy Scripture, and everything that pertains to Christendom. So we are all still under the papacy and therefrom have received our Christian treasures."

[35]*LW* 40:232-233.

[36]*LW* 40:254.

[37]*LW* 40:241.

[38]*LW* 28:233. Luther's argument is not that Anabaptist baptism is inherently invalid. Since they hold that the word is not in the water, they are showing contempt for the word. They are ascribing to the water of their baptism a special efficacy. One may see Trigg, 78, n.71.

[39]Large Catechism IV,31.

[40]*LW* 30:316: "In Baptism there is the blood and the Spirit. If you are baptized with water, the blood is sprinkled through the Word."

in which all three persons are actually present, a position that the moderating Calvin could hardly take. Luther's radical opponents detached the Spirit's working from Christ and the sacraments, and so robbed the people both of the Spirit and Christ. This Rome did not do.

Baptism and the Sacramental God of the Old Testament

For Calvin, Old and New Testament rituals differ only in audience and form. Both are void of grace, the Holy Spirit, and Christ.[41] Even the word holds forth—but does not give—Christ and the Spirit, the latter of whom comes as God's inward work in the believer.[42] Circumcision and baptism are divinely commanded, but regeneration is no more dependent on one ceremony than the other: each can be safely omitted, except for the sake of order. For Calvin, Zipporah's circumcising her son is as unacceptable as lay emergency baptism.[43] Sacraments are signs without content.

Ulrich Asendorf has alerted us to the importance of Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*, which began after May 31, 1535 and covered ten years, taking him near his life's end. The Anabaptists and then Zwingli had impacted Luther by then. Luther suffers from none of Calvin's abhorrence for sacraments as substantive means of grace and therefore approaches the Old Testament with a Christological and sacramental vigor. For Luther, Old

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[41] *Institutes* 4.16.15. One may see Ford Lewis Battles, *Analysis of the Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan:Baker, 1980), 366-367: "The core of circumcision and Baptism are the same. Only the externals are different. Calvin holds that the New and Old Testaments are 'in reality and substance . . . altogether one and the same: still the administration is different'" (2.10.2).

[42] *Institutes* 4.14. Calvin, unlike Zwingli, admits to a simultaneous action (4.15.10-13).

[43] *Institutes* 4.14.17: "Wherefore, let it be a fixed point, that the office of the sacraments differs not from the word of God; and this is to hold forth and offer Christ to us, and, in him, the treasures of heavenly grace. They confer nothing, and avail nothing, if not received in faith, just as wine and oil, or any other liquor, however large the quantity which you pour out, will run away and perish unless there be an open vessel to receive it. When the vessel is not open, though it may be sprinkled all over, it will nevertheless remain entirely empty."

Testament signs are the occasion of an actual presence of God. In his *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther finds a God who uses a variety of external objects: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the rainbow, circumcision, the pillars of fire and cloud, the altars and sacrifices. All are means of grace.[44] They are reminders or teaching devices for Calvin, but not sacraments in which God is present giving grace.[45] The hermeneutics of the two reformers are worlds apart.

Luther's exegesis of the Old Testament was not always so sacramentally profligate. As late as his *Lectures on Deuteronomy* (1525) he walks by open sacramental "doors."[46] The Anabaptists and Zwingli had yet to bring the Reformer to his sacramental boiling point. Never would he again be so sacramentally meager. The sacramental ardor of his *Concerning Rebaptism* (1527/8) resurfaces in the Large Catechism (1529) and is sustained into his *Lectures on Genesis* (1535-1545). Here Luther is, as P. D. Pahl notes, the theologian of the means of grace.[47] He completes his life in sacramental indulgence.

Luther's sacramental hermeneutic, which he applies equally to both testaments, counters both the Reformed view, which finds only signs in either testament; and a mediating position, which finds sacraments in the New Testament (Lutheran) but only signs in the Old (Reformed). If sacraments must be New Testament rites, then only baptism and the Lord's Supper qualify. By this definition the Old Testament knows of no

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[44]In his lecture on Genesis 28:7, Luther uses Jacob's ladder to explain how baptism is the gate of God (*LW* 5:247): "This is how faith speaks: 'I am going to the place where the word is taught, where the sacrament is offered and baptism is administered."

[45]*Institutes* 4.14.21: "Circumcision was a sign by which the Jews were reminded that whatever comes of the seed of man—in other words, the whole nature of man—is corrupt, and requires to be cut off; moreover, it was a proof and a memorial to confirm them in the promise made to Abraham, of a see in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed, and from whom they themselves were to look for a blessing."

[46]*LW* 9:110-111. Luther does not take advantage of a reference to circumcision for a discourse on baptism.

[47]P. D. Pahl, "Baptism in Luther's Lectures on Genesis," *Lutheran Theological Journal* (1967): 26-34.

sacraments. This latter view is not without theological problems. God would come in word and sacrament in the New Testament, but only in the word in the Old.[48] Extravagant theophanies and secret whisperings with the prophets are the extent of divine involvement with Israel. Christology is limited to officially-designated predictions and (anti-)types. The first testament, in this view, knows of no sacraments in the sense that God is really present in particular rites, actions, and historical events. Such a truncated Old Testament hermeneutic better fits Marcion than Luther!

For Luther, baptism does not erupt suddenly, *ex nihilo* as it were, in the New Testament. It comes to a people who were prepared by Old Testament sacramental institutions and events. For Luther, Israel's existence was sacramentally permeated. Israel, like the church, was never without outward signs in which God was really present. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was, for Adam, pulpit and altar.[49] The word of God was attached to the tree, even if it was a threat. Luther equates Adam's disobedience with the sectarian refusal to acknowledge the washing of regeneration in baptism.[50] If the fanatics are condemned for finding God without externals, the papists are condemned for setting up their own places where God can be found. Abraham sacrifices to God only where God commands.[51] Jeroboam broke God's word attached to Jerusalem by choosing Bethel as a place of worship. That believers are to

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[48]Calvin does not grant such a mediating position, since neither word nor sacrament in either testament bestow the Spirit and forgiveness.

[49]*LW* 1:95. I have not found that Luther develops his sacramental thought in connection with the tree of life, though the correlation with the New Testament rites would appear obvious. Calvin sees this tree as a guarantee of immortality (*Institutes* 4.14.18): "The term sacrament, in the view we have hitherto taken of it, includes, generally, all the signs which God ever commanded men to use, that he might make them sure and confident of the truth of his promises. These he was pleased sometimes to place in natural objects—sometimes exhibit in miracles. Of the former class we have an example, in his giving the tree of life to Adam and Eve, as an earnest of immortality, that they might feel confident of the promise as often as they ate of the fruit."

[50]*LW* 1:94.

[51]*LW* 4:179.

seek God where He wants to be found is fundamental to Luther's sacramental thought.

While Lutherans traditionally speak about two or three sacraments at the most, Jonathan Trigg notes that "Luther's approach [to the text of Genesis] militates against too closed a group of the means of grace."[52] To avoid confusion, it might be better to speak about the means of grace rather than sacraments, but Luther calls any number of rites sacraments! Whatever form the word takes becomes a means of grace or sacrament. Regardless of terminology God is in the rite or the event and it becomes a Sacrament. While Luther in his *Babylonian Captivity* is adamantly opposed to the sacraments added by Rome, he knows of no sacramental exclusivity in his *Lectures on Genesis*.[53] With this wider interpretation of the means of grace or the sacraments, the space between Luther's and Melanchthon's views on the sacraments narrows. Luther is generally seen as favoring two sacraments, to which Melanchthon adds penance and several more by expanding the definition.[54] In his *Lectures on Genesis,* Luther goes well beyond Melanchthon. Israel was *the* sacramental community for Luther and the sacraments were under ("in, with, under") every biblical bush and under each stone. Genesis was his sacramental paradise. In baptism God speaks and deals with us as He did with Abraham. "Thus in the Old Testament the faces of the Lord were the pillar of fire, the cloud, and the mercy seat; in the New Testament, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the ministry of the word, and the like. By means of these God shows us, as by a visible sign, that He is with us, takes care of us, and is favorably inclined toward us."[55]

Several conclusions follow from Luther's perspective. First, God is present and shows He is favorably inclined to us within both Old and New Testament phenomena. Second, Luther places the ministry (keys) on the same plain as baptism and the Supper. In other places, Luther speaks of marriage as a

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[52]Trigg, 20.

[53]*LW* 36:81-136; *LW* 21:151.

[54]Augsburg Confession and Apology XIII. In the *Babylonian Captivity* (1520) Luther speaks of three sacraments (*LW* 36:18).

[55]*LW* 1:309.

sacrament and sees confession and absolution as marks of the church.[56] Luther's extravagantly rich sacramental and Christological approach to the Old Testament puts him at odds with medieval tradition, which downgraded the Old Testament's promises to the level of the carnal, an approach that appears also in Calvin. It is a secular history with material rewards for those who keep the law.[57] Its spiritual purpose was confined to its being a source book of types and a collection of messianic predictions. In the end, though, it is primarily law.[58] For Luther, God was actually present in these rites and events. They were as much means of grace as the New Testament's sacraments. Circumcision, no less than baptism, is "also a sacrament, that is, a sign of the divine will and therefore a sign of eternal salvation for those who believed."[59] In both the Old and New Testament, saints found Christ in the sacraments and shared the same sufferings.[60] Luther has a lavish array of sacraments or signs in which God is present to show His good will.[61] Luther's limited sacramental range in his *Babylonian Captivity* (1520) is expanded in his *Lectures on Genesis* (1535).

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[56]*LW* 53:115.

[57]*Institutes* 2.11.1-7. The Old Testament puts a higher value on this life, typified Christ under the ceremonies, and was literal. In contrast the New Testament is spiritual. "The Old Testament is literal, because promulgated without the efficacy of the Spirit; the New spiritual, because the Lord has engraven it on the heart. . . . The Old is deadly, because it can do nothing but involve the whole human race in a curse; the New is the instrument of life, because those who are freed form the curse it restores to favour with God. The former is the ministry of condemnation, because it charges the whole sons of Adam with transgression; the latter the ministry of righteousness, because it unfolds the mercy of God, by which we are justified."

[58]Trigg, 54-55; Samuel Freus, *From Shadow to Promise, Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to Luther* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard, 1969), 155-156.

[59]*LW* 3:110.

[60]Trigg, 51.

[61]*LW* 1:252. Calvin, who can do theology without sacraments, not unexpectedly warns against "The Five Other Ceremonies: Falsely Termed Sacraments" (*Institutes* 4.19).

Sacraments

While Luther did not value one means of grace over another in offering forgiveness, he did make distinctions. Baptism was not simply a ceremony, it initiated the Christian life and it established the church's boundaries. It not only gave entrance into the covenant, it was itself the covenant.[62] Being in baptism is equivalent to being in Christ. Recent discussions over Luther's doctrines on the eucharist, church and ministry overlook the greater role which baptism had for him. His oath as a doctor of theology provided him with the legitimacy of his Reformation, but in the face of trials his response was not past faith, holiness or spiritual achievement, but *baptisatus sum.*

> Indeed if I had the matter under my control, I would not want God to speak to me from heaven or appear to me; but this I would want—and my daily prayers are directed to this end—that I might have proper respect and true appreciation for the gift of Baptism, that I have been baptized (*sum baptisatus*).[63]

Thus baptism required faith for justification, but baptism and not faith provided the certainty of salvation. A faith that is *incurvatus se* is both useless and self-destructive. Such a self-reflecting faith was the heart of the monasticism from which he fled and that reappeared among the Anabaptists, who saw baptism as no more than a confession of that faith.[64] Because of man's weakness, preaching, and eucharist were added, but baptism remains the Christian's refuge in Luther's thought.[65]

For Luther, God was masked in the incarnation as the most important sacrament and the source of the others.[66] Sacraments

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[62]*LW* 1:228. The Reformed use of the word covenant as a mutually made agreement has limited use among Lutherans. Here again much is surrendered to the Reformed hermeneutic. Circumcision or the sacraments as covenant are arrangements of grace established by God which calls for faith, but does not depend on faith for its definition.

[63]*LW* 3:165.

[64]*LW* 40:240.

[65]*LW* 3:124.

[66]*LW* 36:18: "Yet, if I were to speak according to the usage of the Scriptures, I should have only one single sacrament, but with three sacramental

were neither isolated or disconnected ordinances, nor empty signs. Following Augustine's interpretation of John 19:34, Luther saw baptism and the eucharist flowing from Christ's side.[67] The principle of the word coming to the element to make the sacrament is applicable to the incarnation.[68] Without the word, Christ's human nature is as useless as the elements in the sacraments.[69] Each sacrament had its own institution, but Christ's death was their common source, the word their common essence and forgiveness their common purpose. As with the commandment honoring parents, God has attached a promise, but baptism actually brings Christ and the Holy Spirit.[70] Circumcision was a mortification of the flesh.[71] Baptism was a death by drowning and a rebirth, patterned after the death and resurrection of Jesus.[72] Still the sign or the outward form did not exhaust the meaning of the sacrament but pointed to God as the greater reality hidden within it. For Calvin, reality and symbol are joined by divine command, but with Luther there is an actual *perichoresis*, so that one is in and with the other in an organic unity. God is really in the water and no place else and without the sign there is no salvation.[73] Those without the symbols, such as Thomas Müntzer, were without the reality.[74]

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signs . . . " Luther depends on 1 Timothy 3:16 for his view (*LW* 36:93). Note that Luther has three sacraments here!

[67]*LW* 8:258: "Among the papists this word has remained: 'The sacraments flowed out of the side of Christ.' For the sacraments have their efficacy from the wounds and blood of Christ. Therefore this is a good and godly saying."

[68]*LW* 29:83: "If we had been able to enter heaven without an outward thing, there would be no necessity for God to send [Christ]. But God did place Him in the flesh and in the manger. Then when He had abolished sin and death, God presented Him through His word in baptism and in the sacrament, so that we might thus be assured of the certainty of His Spirit through His word."

[69]*LW* 29:82: "If the humanity of Christ were without the Word, it would be a vain thing."

[70]LC IV, 38-42.

[71]*LW* 3:135-136.

[72]LC IV, 65.

[73]*LW* 3:143-144.

[74]*LW* 29:82-83.

Since the Reformed work from a general concept of the sacraments, or means of grace, as symbols without internal content, the question arises whether one or the other "sacrament" could be safely omitted in favor of the other or explaining one would suffice.[75] Barth took the Reformed position to its logical conclusion by making a second sacrament redundant. He himself says that his discourse on baptism is applicable to the Supper.[76] Symbols are as disposable as they are exchangeable.

Barth's position would be impossible for Luther, who recognized levels of importance among the sacraments. New Testament sacraments have a permanency and value, but Old Testament rites are no less sacraments and their meaning is not exhausted by their symbolical value. While God's appearances to the patriarchs were only crumbs and droplets compared to what Christians have in the sacraments, this hardly means that God was not really present in the Old Testament theophanies. He was. But the Christian receives more in the sacraments than Abraham did in the theophanies.[77] *Apparet tibi in Baptismo, et ipse te baptisat, te alloquitur ipse.*[78]

God is present everywhere in the act. Jacob's dream of the ladder and his wrestling with God at Jabbok has baptismal meaning for Luther. In these appearances, as in baptism, God meets the believer: *ipse Deus revera adest, baptisat et absolvit.*[79] Just as God was unseen but present as the angel so He is unseen and present in baptism not only in the water but in the one who is

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[75]*Institutes* 4.14.1: "Akin to the preaching of the gospel, we have another help to our faith in the sacraments, . . . First, we must attend to what a sacrament is. It seems to me, then, a simple and appropriate definition to say, that it is an external sign, by which the Lord seals on our consciences his promises of good-will toward us, in order to sustain the weakness of our faith, and we in our turn testify our piety toward him, both before himself, and before angels as well as men. We may also define more briefly by calling it a testimony of the divine favour toward us, confirmed by an external sign, with a corresponding attestation of our faith towards Him."

[76]*Christian Dogmatics*, 4/4:130.

[77]*LW* 3:155.

[78]*WA* 43:443.

[79]*WA* 42:658,31, 23. *LW* 3,220.

baptizing. God is present everywhere in the act. Baptism, the Supper, the minister in giving the absolution, and ordination are all veils or masks behind which God stands and performs His gracious work. Though the minister administers the rite, God Himself baptizes and is present everywhere in the action. Genuflecting is proper both at the baptism and the Supper.[80]

Luther's linking of God to the sacraments as masks behind which He works raises the question of their necessity. Not unexpectedly, Luther says that God can save without baptism, but distancing himself from a Zwinglian position adds, "but in the church we must judge and teach, in accordance with God's ordered power, that without that outward baptism no one is saved."[81] Simply because one finds these masks unsatisfactory or repugnant, one is not free to search for God in other places, such as pilgrim sites, devotions and prayers.[82] Setting up the golden calf in Bethel is an idolatrous example of contempt for God.[83]

Luther sees in John's baptizing Jesus the form of all baptisms in which the Trinity speaks the word: *in Baptismo sonat vox Trinitatis*.[84] God speaks the word, is the word and is present in

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[80]*LW* 8:145: "[God] baptizes me; He absolves me and gives me His body and blood through the tongue and the hand of the minister. For God works salvation in Baptism. And this is the presence or form and epiphany of God in these means." One may also see *LW* 5:249 where Luther says that faith "must see the water, the hand [of the minister], the Word of God and God in the water." He places ordination on the same level of baptism as an activity in which God works. "Thus the imposition of the hands is not a tradition of men, but God makes and ordains ministers. Nor is it the pastor who absolves you, but the mouth and hand of God." In the eastern churches the usual formula is not "I baptize you . . ." but "Let John be baptized in the name of . . ." The eastern formula makes it clearer that God is doing the baptizing.

[81]*LW* 3:274.

[82]*LW* 29:82-83: "Do not seek the Spirit through solitude or through prayer, but read Scripture."

[83]*LW* 5:241.

[84]*LW* 8:145: "In Baptism, . . . our eyes and hearts should always be directed to the manifest appearance in the Jordan, where the voice of the Father is heard from heaven, the flesh of the Son is seen, and the Holy Spirit appears in the form of a dove. . . . In Baptism the voice of the Trinity is heard . . ."

the water. Baptism is not merely past tense, but is a present reality in which salvation is found. He consistently uses Augustine's formula *accedat verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum* not only in regard to baptism but also the visible external signs of the Old Testament, for example, circumcision and the sacrificial cult. Luther's concept of the word is neither simple nor magical. The divine word is masked and hidden in human words and thus the word is one mask along side of the other masks of God. This word in baptism creates a tension by forgiving sins but without completely removing them. Forgiven Christians still struggle with the sin they find in themselves. Like Jacob, they fight for what is theirs by promise.[85] The paradox between what baptism gives and what Christians experience creates the tension in which faith lives. *Adhuc enim expectamus, nondum videmus.*[86] Baptism and circumcision are entry sacraments. Repeating circumcision is impossible; repeating baptism is sinful.[87] Baptism's work, though complete, is not so deficient that it has to be supplemented by other sources of grace. In both the medieval and the contemporary Roman Church, confirmation, penance and extreme unction supplement baptism to form a cohesive sacramental system through which the believer obtains salvation. Luther recognizes the possibility of these sacraments, but not in the sense they have God's command.[88]

Baptism possesses such an objective reality, that it seems to take on an *ex opere operato* character. In his post-baptismal prayer, Luther speaks of the God who "regenerates through the water and the Holy Spirit and forgives all sins."[89] It establishes boundaries in which the true and false churches, which began with Cain and Abel, exist side by side.[90] God's people under the covenants of baptism and circumcision are justified by faith. From this Luther deduces the *fides infantium*, even for those who are uncircumcised or unbaptized. Children in both the Old and

[85] *LW* 5:208.
[86] *LW* 8:186.
[87] *LW* 3:101.
[88] *LW* 36:91.
[89] *LW* 53:109.
[90] *LW* 1:243.

New Testament believe and are justified by their faith. Thus no child can be baptized without faith, but the worth of baptism does not depend on anyone's faith.[91] Baptized and unbaptized adults who deprive infants of faith by not baptizing them are not saved.[92]

Of practical significance is reconciling Luther's insistence that apart from baptism there is no salvation and the problem of unbaptized children. Luther's thought here is complex, but his conclusions are consistent with his principles. Luther does not devalue baptism, as his opponents have, or pretend the problem does not exist. Essential to his position is that where the signs are not present or despised, grace is not present. (Luther has the Anabaptists in mind.) Still Luther holds that in Israel girls and boys dying before the eighth day and unbaptized children born within the church are saved because they have not sinned against the covenants established by circumcision and baptism. They are safe in Abraham's bosom.[93] Believing Gentiles are saved without circumcision, but those Jews who refuse it are damned. For them, and not the Gentiles, circumcision is the means of grace.

Luther identifies the false church by its despising baptism and the places in which God has chosen to reveal Himself. They claim to find God in more glamorous places. If Luther defines the true church by baptism, then the false church is recognized by the lack of faith. The false church, which belongs to the flesh, lives with the true church. The false church presumes upon baptism and claims salvation without true faith. Baptism sets the boundaries for the covenant and the true church, but within the covenant and the church are those who live according to the flesh who cannot be regarded as God's children. Luther places Cain, Ishmael, and Esau in this false church; however, Ishmael repented and returned to the true church. Boundaries between

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[91]LC IV, 54.

[92]*LW* 3:110.

[93]*LW* 3:103: "Nevertheless, since the girls are Abraham's descendants, they are not excluded from Abraham's righteousness; they attain it through faith. But those adults who despised circumcision or who despise Baptism are surely damned."

the true and false church are porous and members of each pass from one to another.

That leaves us only with a few loose ends regarding infant baptism. First, Luther argues for infant baptism from the existence of the church, which has existed for over a thousand years and produced such great saints as Bernard, Gerson and Hus.[94] If it were not a true baptism giving the Holy Spirit, there would be no church. To say the church did not exist would be absurd. His argument is drawn not from Scriptures but from church as tradition. Practice informs theology. Second, Luther also knows of a *fides aliena*, but this should not be confused with the Roman *fides vicaria* where the faith of the sponsors or the church is substituted for the child's faith. Rather the *fides aliena* believes God's promise that children believe and prays God would give the child faith. Prayer and the word do not stand in juxtaposition to one another, so that if we had the word we could not pray. If this were the case, we would have to eliminate the Lord's Prayer and the traditional collects and only pray for what God has not promised.[95] Prayer could be entirely eliminated! Third, the Anabaptists rejected Luther's idea of the *fides infantium* and thus found reason to forbid baptizing them. While Luther connects, he does not limit *fides infantium* to their baptism. For his defense of the *fides infantium*, Luther includes the innocent blood of children slaughtered to idols, the slaughter of the holy innocents, and the leaping of John in his mother's womb. Christ, who is present in baptism, is the same Christ who spoke to John and created faith. To these arguments, Luther adds the words of Jesus that children belong to the kingdom of God. Their faith is more certain than that of adults who can lie. Luther presents the example of Judas.[96] Not only can the Anabaptists not prove that children do not have faith, but these examples prove they can. Finally, Luther sees the entire ritual or act of baptism as a totality, which is not limited to this or that word. He can say that the exorcism provides the word by which the child believes and on that account the

[94]LC IV, 49-50.
[95]One may see Brinkel, 85-88.
[96]*LW* 40:242-44.

sponsors are confessing a faith which is already present, but this "word," by which God works faith, is tied to baptism.[97]

I hope enough reasons from Luther have been presented to search the subterranean caverns of this campus for the lost baptismal font and return it to its place of honor. Its removal was a very un-Luther-like act. In the font we have died and risen with Christ and experience and anticipate the reality of our burial and resurrection.

[97]Brinkel, 82. *WA* 17 II 84, 10-12.

Learning to Preach in Advent and Christmas from Luther

John T. Pless

"For whatever reason, in the ineffable wisdom of God, the speech of Martin Luther rang clear where others merely mumbled."[1] The clarity of Luther's voice is surely apparent in his Advent and Christmas preaching—the Lord's Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem, the preaching of John the Baptist, the annunciation, and the nativity. Showing remarkable theological insight and pastoral warmth, Luther crafts vivid and graphic pictures of the meanness and misery of the biblical stories of the Lord's birth. All the great themes of Luther's theology—incarnation, justification, the "happy exchange," sacraments, the theology of the cross—are present in these sermons. Advent and Christmas evoke the best in Luther's preaching as he proclaims Bethlehem's crib in light of the cross. Ulrich Asendorf rightly notes that "Luther's Advent sermons are a microcosm of his spiritual world."[2]

Luther's preaching in Advent and Christmas is extensive. No less than 110 of Luther's Christmas sermons have been preserved. Roughly half of these sermons are based on Luke 2:1-20, although he clearly delighted in preaching the prologue of the Fourth Gospel. Reading Luther's Advent and Christmas sermons confirms the observation of Johann Gerhard that Luther's preaching was "heroic disorder."[3] This paper does not

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[1]Mark Noll, "The Lutheran Difference," *First Things* (February 1992): 31.

[2]Ulrich Asendorf, "Luther's Sermons on Advent as a Summary of His Theology," in *A Lively Legacy: Essays in Honor of Robert Preus,* edited by Kurt Marquart, John Stephenson, and Bjarne W. Teigen (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1985), 13.

[3]Fred Meuser, *Luther the Preacher* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 57. On Luther's preaching, also see Ulrich Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luther nach Seinen Predigten* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988); Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532,* translated by James Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 284-288; Richard Lischer, "Luther and Contemporary

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aim to systematize Luther's preaching (that would be an impossible task), but to lift up several central themes in his Advent and Christmas preaching that can help shape, inform, and enliven our preaching in this segment of the Church Year. To that end we will look primarily to Luther's church postils of 1521 and his house postils of 1532-1534.[4]

Some of Luther's most potent Advent preaching is based on Matthew 21:1-9, the gospel for the first Sunday in Advent. Luther's preaching of the Palm Sunday account focuses on the character of the "Beggar-King," as Luther calls Jesus, and the nature of our reception of Him. Luther glories in the lowliness of the Beggar-King, noting in a 1533 sermon:

> Christ comes riding along like a beggar on a borrowed donkey without saddle or other trappings, necessitating that the disciples place their cloaks and garments on the donkey in a makeshift arrangement for the poor king. Accordingly in no way could the Jews excuse themselves. The prophecy had been so perfectly clear: when Christ would ride into Jerusalem, he would not do so as some earthly monarch with armor, spear, sword, and weaponry, all of which betoken bloodshed, severity, and force; but as the Evangelist says, meekly, or in the words of the prophet, poor and lowly. It is as though the prophet wanted to forewarn everyone to take good note of the donkey and realize that the one riding it is the Messiah indeed. So be aware and don't be gawking for a golden throne, velvet garments and pieces of gold, or impressive mounted retinue. For Christ will come in lowliness, meekness, and sorrowful of heart, for all to see, riding on a donkey. That

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Preaching: Narrative and Anthropology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* (1983): 487-504.

[4]*Sermons of Martin Luther*, volume 1, edited by John Nicholas Lenker (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983). All citations from this volume will be noted as Lenker; *The House Postils*, volume 1, edited by Eugene Klug (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996). All citations from this volume will be noted as Klug.

> would be the extent of the pomp and splendor he would display with his entry into Jerusalem.[5]

Yet hidden in the weakness of the Beggar-King is God's own power to rescue sinners. Here Luther's theology of the cross leaves its imprint on his preaching as he vividly describes the outcome of the Lord's coming in our flesh: "This King is and shall be called sin's devourer and death's strangler, who extirpates sin and knocks death's teeth out; he disembowels the devil and rescues those who believe on him from sin and death, conducting them to be among the angels where eternal life and blessedness are."[6] In his coming to die for the sins of the world, Jesus "is life personified," says Luther, "and he comes to give you life."[7] The fact that Christ comes not on a proud steed with pomp and power, but on a donkey demonstrates that He is coming not to make war against sinners but to save them. "He indicates by this that he comes not to frighten man, nor to drive him or crush him, but to help him and carry his burden for him."[8] Christ comes as gift and blessing.

Luther's Advent preaching is, therefore, a call to faith. Luther warns his hearers not to be like the Jews who rejected their Messiah, failing to discern that He would not be like a secular lord. Instead Luther points to the humility of the Lord Christ as a very sign that He is the Savior promised by the prophets, saying to the congregation: "Don't gawk with your eyes but let your ears give insight to your eyes."[9]

In his preaching on the first Sunday in Advent, Luther does not weary of emphasizing that we do not come to the King, but that the King comes to us. In a 1521 sermon Luther drives home this point saying:

> This is what is meant by "Thy king cometh." You do not seek him, but he seeks you. You do not find him, he finds you. For preachers come from him, not from you; their

[5]Klug, 26.
[6]Klug, 27.
[7]Klug, 18.
[8]Lenker, 19.
[9]Klug, 27.

> sermons come from him, not from you; your faith comes from him, not from you; and where he does not come, you remain outside; and where there is no Gospel there is no God, but only sin and damnation, free will may do, suffer, work, and live as it may and can. Therefore you should not ask, where to begin to be godly; there is no beginning, except where the king enters and is proclaimed.[10]

It should come as no surprise, then, that Luther directs his hearers to the preached word and the sacraments as the concrete places where the King makes His entry.[11] Even as Christ humbled Himself in His incarnation, so He stoops to us in the lowliness of the preaching, baptism, and the Sacrament of the Altar. According to Luther, the lowliness of the means that the Lord uses to distribute the gifts of salvation parallels the humility of His coming in the flesh. In both cases, faith clings to what is heard, not to what is seen.

> If we don't want to understand this with our ears, but accept only that which our eyes see and our hands touch, we will miss our King and be lost. There's a big difference between this King and other kings. With the latter everything is outward pomp, great and gallant appearance, magnificent air. But not so with Christ. His mission and work is to help against sin and death, to justify and bring to life. He has placed his help in baptism and the sacrament, and incorporated it in the Word and preaching. To our eyes baptism appears to be nothing more than ordinary water, and the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood simple bread and wine, like other bread and wine, and the sermon, hot air from a man's mouth. But we must not trust what our eyes see, but listen to what this King is

[10]Lenker, 27.

[11]Luther accents the preached word. Note his comment in his 1521 sermon on the First Sunday in Advent: "This agrees with the word 'Bethphage,' which means, as some say, mouth-house, for St. Paul says in Romans 1, 2, that the Gospel was promised afore in the Holy Scriptures, but it was not preached orally and publicly until Christ came and sent out his apostles. Therefore the church is a mouth-house, not a pen-house, for since Christ's advent that Gospel is preached orally which before was hidden in written books" (Lenker, 44).

> teaching us in his Word and Sacrament, namely, I poured out my blood to save you from your sins, to rescue you from death and bring you to heaven; to that end I have given you baptism as a gift for the forgiveness of sins, and preach to you unceasingly by word of mouth concerning this treasure, sealing it to you with the Sacrament of my body and blood, so that you need never doubt. True, it seems little and insignificant, that by the washing of water, the Word, and the Sacrament this should all be effected. But don't let your eyes deceive you. At that time, it seemed like a small and insignificant thing for him to come riding on a borrowed donkey and later be crucified, in order to take away sin, death, and hell. No one could tell this by his appearance, but the prophet foretold it, and his work later fulfilled it. Therefore we must simply grasp it with our ears and believe it with our hearts, for our eyes are blind.[12]

Luther located the rejection of Jesus by the Jews in "their carnally minded thinking," which did not recognize the eternal God clothed in human flesh. As Luther preaches the offense of Advent, he identifies the same "carnally minded thinking" as the cause for continued contempt of Christ as He comes in word and sacrament.

> But the rejection of Christ does not happen only with the Jews, but also among us, for the high and mighty scorn us because of our gospel and sacraments. What folly, they say, that I should let myself be baptized with water poured on my head, supposedly to be saved thereby; or that some poor parish preacher, barely able to put a coat on his back, should pronounce forgiveness and absolve me from my sins; or that receiving bread and wine in the Sacrament I should be saved. On that basis they despise a Christ-preacher. For it goes with the territory to be despised by reason of Christ's poverty. As a result, when a man becomes a preacher he is more despised than some lowly knave of no reputation. There is no station in life quite as scorned and humble as that of a preacher. That happens

[12]Klug, 28.

> not because of us or the preacher, but because Christ is despised on all sides in the world. No wonder that the aristocrats and plutocrats say, Why should we believe some tramp-like, beggarly cleric? Why doesn't our Lord God send us a fine pulpit-prince to preach to us? Him we would believe. However, just as Christ's preachers are despised, so people despise his baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar. Virtually no peasant retains respect for them, let alone burghers and nobles. Under the papacy people mocked at indulgences and pilgrimages, and yet they were highly regarded. Now, however, the prevailing word is, Huh, if all you can do is preach about Christ and faith, I'm fed up with that already, I've heard it all many times before.[13]

In the traditional lectionary, the Second Sunday in Advent sounds an eschatological note based on Luke 21:25-36. Luther contrasted the previous Sunday's focus on the coming of Christ to suffer with the apocalyptic message of the Gospel for the Second Sunday in Advent:

> Last Sunday you heard about his riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, minus all pretentious show. He had no place to call his own, not even a foot of space; and besides, he later was crucified. He is facing a poor, miserable future, not as a master but as a servant, whose desire was to serve in such a way as to die for us. . . . To sum up, during his first advent he rendered the greatest service which no angel, no creature was able to render, and prepared a kingdom for his believers and elect, but when the number of elect is complete, he will return not as a servant but as a master, in order to free us from earth, maggoty mire, death, and decay.[14]

Compared with much of the eschatological preaching of the late Middle Ages, Luther's preaching seems mild.[15] While

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[13]Klug, 35.

[14]Klug, 38.

[15]John Dolan describes such preaching at the threshold of the Reformation: "Preachers were preoccupied with the theme of sin and the grim face of

Luther's preaching for the Second Sunday in Advent is replete with warnings regarding the quickness of the Lord's return to judgement and the need for constant watchfulness lest that Day overtake people unprepared, he strives to have his hearers "discern Judgement Day correctly, to know what he (Christ) means for us and why we hope and await his return."[16] After describing how the pope preaches a Christ who is a stern judge with whom we must be reconciled by our works, Luther goes on to preach the comfort which is to be found in Christ's final advent:

> . . . in this Gospel he teaches us differently, namely, that he will come not to judge and damn us but to redeem and save us, and to fulfill all for which we have petitioned him, and to bring us his kingdom. To the ungodly and the unbelievers he will come as judge and punish them as his enemies and the Christians' foes, who have afflicted Christians with all kinds of misery. But to the believers and Christians he will come as a redeemer.[17]

In a similar fashion, Luther chides the fanatics for robbing Christians of the comfort of the Lord's return.

> The godless fanatical preachers are to be censured who in their sermons deprive people of these words of Christ and faith in them, who desire to make people devout by terrifying them and who teach them to prepare for the last day by relying on their good works as satisfaction for their sins. Here despair, fear, and terror must remain and grow

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death waiting for the moment of merited punishment. There was an emphasis on the horrors of hell and the suffering of the damned. Their sermons were filled with descriptions of burning trees on which hung the souls of those who did not attend church services, vultures gnawing at men's vitals, venomous serpents stinging the unholy, boiling lakes, frozen fens, heated ovens and vile dungeons. . . . Everywhere the emphasis was on the negative side of man's salvation, his sins and punishment" (*History of the Reformation* [New York: The New American Library, 1965], 186, cited in Stanley Schneider, "Luther, Preaching, and the Reformation," *Interpreting Luther's Legacy*, edited by Fred Meuser and Stanley Schneider [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969], 124).

[16]Klug, 51.

[17]Klug, 51.

> and with it hatred, aversion, and abhorrence for the coming of the Lord, and enmity against God be established in the heart; for they picture Christ as nothing but a stern judge whose wrath must be appeased by works, and they never present him as the Redeemer, as he calls and offers himself, of whom we are to expect that out of pure grace he will redeem us from sin and evil.[18]

While Luther expresses his personal opinion that the end times are near, he does not engage in detailed speculation regarding the parousia.[19] Instead, Luther's preaching on this theme is "an eschatology of faith," to use the words of T. F. Torrance, as Luther urges his hearers to find joy in the glad announcement that "your redemption draweth nigh."[20]

The traditional Gospel pericopes for the Third and Fourth Sundays in Advent tell of John the Baptist. Luther develops two major themes in his preaching on Matthew 11:2-10 and John 1:19-28—the offense of Christ and the function of John the Baptist as God's finger. In his sermons for the Third Sunday in Advent, Luther underscores our Lord's words to the disciples of John, "And blessed is he who is not offended because of me" (Matthew 11:6). Here Luther notes that the Jews are offended by the Christ who establishes His kingdom among the poor, the lame, and the blind. John the Baptist points to a Savior who offends the spiritual instincts of the self-righteous. "The world is offended that Christ is so miserable and poor."[21]

Originally, God sent John the Baptist to the Jews. Thus Luther says in a sermon on Matthew 11:2-10, that Jesus did not preach

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[18]Lenker, 78.

[19]For example, in a 1521 Advent sermon Luther states: " I do not wish to force any one to believe as I do; neither will I permit anyone to deny me the right to believe that the last day is near at hand. These words and signs of Christ compel me to believe that such is the case" (Lenker, 62). For a treatment of Luther's apocalyptic views, see Mark Edwards, *Luther's Last Battles* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 97-114.

[20]T. F. Torrance, "The Eschatology of Faith: Martin Luther," in *Luther: Theologian for Catholics and Protestants*, 145-213, edited by George Yule (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986).

[21]Klug, 66.

this sermon for the sake of John the Baptist. "Rather he preached this sermon for the sake of the Jews that they might recognize John the Baptist and understand his mission."[22] Now John the Baptist preaches to us for "to the Jews he (Christ) came in the flesh; to us he comes in the Word."[23] It is the mission of John the Baptist that Luther takes up in his sermons for the Fourth Sunday in Advent. Here Luther holds up John the Baptist as finger of God. "Let us look to the mouth and finger of John with which he bears witness and points, so that we do not close our eyes and lose our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; for to the present day John still very diligently, faithfully, and richly points and directs us here, in order that we may be saved."[24] According to Luther, John is the great preacher of the law, but he is an even greater preacher of the gospel. Luther calls John "an image, and a type, and also a pioneer, the first of all preachers of the Gospel," because he points to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.[25]

John's proclamation of the Lamb of God prepares the way for the preaching of Christmas. Thomas Wabel has characterized Luther's Christmas sermons as reflecting "the simplicity of Scripture."[26] At the beginning of a 1522 Christmas sermon on Luke 2:1-14, Luther suggests that "this Gospel is so clear that it requires very little explanation, but it should be well considered and taken deeply to the heart."[27] For the most part, Luther follows his own rule; he simply narrates the events of the nativity. Luther's Christmas preaching is marked by a simplicity that assists the hearer in pondering the profound things that are taking place as God's Son is born.

Luther sees the incarnation of Jesus in light of His atonement, His birth in light of His death. We have already noted how Luther's theology of the cross left its imprint on the Advent

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[22]Klug, 69.
[23]Klug, 95.
[24]Klug, 91.
[25]Lenker, 130.
[26]Thomas Wabel, "The Simplicity of Scripture in Luther's Christmas Sermons," *Lutheran Quarterly* (Autumn 1995): 241.
[27]Lenker, 137.

sermons; this is true to an even greater degree with the Christmas sermons, as Herman Sasse appropriately notes:

> Obviously the "theology of the cross" does not mean that for a theologian the church year shrinks together into nothing but Good Friday. Rather it means that Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost cannot be understood without Good Friday. Next to Irenaeus and Athanasius, Luther was the greatest theologian of the incarnation. He was this because in the background of the manger he saw the cross. His understanding of the Easter victory was equal to that of any theologian of the Eastern Church. He understood it because he understood the victory of the Crucified One.[28]

Luther saw Bethlehem through the lens of Calvary. Luther's theology of the cross, formulated in the Heidelberg Theses of 1518, is given expression in his commentary on the Magnificat three years later. There Luther speaks of God's work in Mary as a work that "is done in the depths," a work that cannot be perceived by carnal eyes. He writes: "Even now and to the end of the world, all His works are such that out of that which is nothing, worthless, despised, wretched, and dead, he makes that which is something, precious, honorable, blessed, and living."[29] Mary, no more than "a simple maiden, tending the cattle and doing the housework," hardly esteemed in the eyes of the world is chosen and exalted by the Most High God to be the mother of the Savior. "Thus God's work and His eyes are in the depths, but man's only in the height."[30] The "foolishness of God" (1 Corinthians 1:27) is not confined to Calvary, but embraces the incarnation as well.

Luther sees God operating "in the depths" at Bethlehem. Drawing attention to the ordinariness of the circumstances

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[28]Hermann Sasse, *We Confess Jesus Christ*, translated by Norman Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 39. For the influence of the theology of the cross on Luther's preaching, see John T. Pless, "Martin Luther: Preacher of the Cross," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (April-July 1987): 83-101.

[29]*Luther's Works* (American Edition) 21:299. The text of the Heidleberg Theses may be found in *LW* 31:35-70.

[30]*LW* 21:301, 302.

surrounding the Lord's birth-the poverty of Mary and Joseph, the arduous journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and the birth in the stable, Luther concludes:

> Nobody notices or understands what God performs in the stable. . . . Thus God indicates that he pays no attention at all to what the world is or has or can do, and on the other hand the world proves that it knows nothing at all of, and pays no attention to what God is or has or does. Behold, this is the first symbol wherewith Christ puts to shame the world and indicates that all of its doing, knowledge, and being are contemptible to us, that the greatest wisdom is in reality foolishness, that its best performance is wrongdoing, and that the greatest good is evil."[31]

In obscure Bethlehem, God demonstrates His goodness "by stepping down so deep into flesh and blood."[32]

Luther's Christmas preaching hangs on to the flesh and blood of God in the manger. Sentimental reflections on the "little baby Jesus" are not present in his preaching. Rather Luther leads his hearers to the crib that now holds the enfleshed God. In a 1534 sermon, Luther exults in the fact that God did not become an angel but a man:

> The angels are much more glorious creatures by nature than we human beings. But God did not consider that; he is not an angel, nor did he become an angel. The angels, moreover, are blameless and holy. But he sets the course, chooses the lowly, poor human nature, lost in sin and subject under the devil's rule and power of death, plagued and troubled through and through by the devil and his ceaseless pressure. That meant sinking to the lowest depths.[33]

In "sinking to the lowest depths" God raises our humanity above and beyond the angels; He exalts our flesh to the right

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[31]*LW* 52:9-10.
[32]*LW* 52:12.
[33]Klug, 113.

hand of God. "That is why we can boast that God has become our brother."[34]

As Luther preaches the Lukan birth narrative, he approaches Christmas from the perspective of Mary, the angels, and the shepherds. Luther emphasizes the naturalness of our Lord's birth in a sermon for Christmas Eve in 1522:

> . . . there are some who express opinions concerning how this birth took place, claiming Mary was delivered of her child while she was praying, in great joy, before she was aware of it, without any pains. I do not condemn these devotional considerations—perhaps they were devised for the benefit of simple-minded folk—but we must stay with the Gospel text which says "born of the Virgin Mary." There is no deception here, but, as the words indicate, it was a real birth. . . . The birth happened to her exactly as to other women, consciously with her mind functioning normally and with the other parts of her body helping along, as is proper at the time of birth, in order that she should be his natural mother and he her natural normal son. For this reason her body did not abandon its natural functions which belong to childbirth, except that she gave birth without sin, without shame, without pain, and without injury, just as she had conceived without sin. The curse of Eve, which reads: "In pain you shall bear your children" (Genesis 3:16) did not apply to her. In other respects things happened to her exactly as they happen to any woman giving birth.[35]

From the body of the Virgin, the Son of God takes on our flesh and blood and so is born to be our Redeemer. Luther's Christology controls his view of Mary, leading him to acknowledge her as the Mother of God.

Luther esteems Mary as the mother of the incarnate Savior and he honors her as the model of faith for all believers. It is from Mary that we learn to meditate rightly on the Lord's birth.

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[34]Klug, 133.
[35]*LW* 52:11-12.

In an illustration which he attributes to St. Bernard, Luther declares:

> there are three miracles here (in the incarnation): that God and man should be joined in this Child; that a mother should remain a virgin; that Mary should have such faith as to believe that this mystery would be accomplished in her. The last is not the least of the three. The Virgin birth is a mere trifle for God; that God should become a man is a greater miracle; but the most amazing of all is that this maiden should credit the announcement that she, rather than some other virgin, had been chosen to be the mother of God. . . . Had she not believed, she could not have conceived. She held fast to the word of the angel because she had become a new creature. Even so must we be transformed and renewed in heart from day to day. This is the word of the prophet: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Isa. 9:6). This is the hardest point, not so much to believe that he is the son of the Virgin and God Himself, as to believe that this Son of God is ours.[36]

As Mary heard the heavenly words of the angel, believed those words, and so conceived and carried the Son of God in her womb, so we hear the words of God and by those words faith is conceived. In fact, Luther says "He is more mine than Mary's."[37]

The first Christmas sermon was preached by angels to a congregation of shepherds. In a 1532 sermon on the Lukan pericope, Luther points out that "This Gospel has two parts. The first has to do with the account itself and its meaning for us today. The second part is the message of the angels telling of its fruit and power, and how we are to profit from it."[38] It is not enough that Christ is born. Without the proclamation of His birth, we would left without its blessing; the new born Savior

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[36]Roland Bainton, *The Martin Luther Christmas Book* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 22-23.

[37]*LW* 51:215.

[38]Klug, 100.

would still be the "hidden God."[39] God not preached remains hidden and inaccessible, that is, we are left under the terror of His silence. In the same sermon, Luther asserts that "Christ might have been born a hundred times over, but it would all have been in vain if it had not been preached and revealed to us." Through the gift of preaching, the angel brings joy to the shepherds by proclaiming "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). This angelic message, says Luther, is a short sermon but one which "compresses the entire Holy Scripture in one bundle."[40]

In a 1533 sermon Luther dwells on the doxological character of the angelic anthem. "It could justly be called the true SANCTUS, in letters of gold, even as the message might rightly be called the angel's sermon, because it was an angel, not a human being, that delivered it. So this song is properly the angels' hymn, because a heavenly host sang it, not human beings."[41] In their hymn, angels tutor human beings in the true worship of God, a worship that is grounded in the flesh of Jesus. Luther understands the true worship of God in light of the First Commandment.[42] As Luther knows of no God apart from the one who sleeps in Mary's lap and hangs dead on the cross, his understanding of worship is normed by the First Commandment and given incarnational content with the flesh of Jesus. Thus Luther preaches on the *Gloria*:

> Accordingly this angel anthem proclaims that whatever is outside of or apart from Christ stands condemned before God as blasphemy, idolatry, and abomination. God can

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[39]One may see Chapter 4, "The Preached God," in Gerhard Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 87-133 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

[40]Klug, 109, 119.

[41]Note the implications here for liturgical preaching. The Divine Service is founded on the twin pillars of word and sacrament. As Christ comes to us in His word, the congregation welcomes Him with the angelic hymn that announces the incarnation. As the same Lord comes to us in His body and blood, the congregation anticipates this gift with the angelic hymn (the Sanctus) that proclaims His presence. Note the way in which the Gloria and the Sanctus are parallel in the liturgical structure of the Divine Service.

[42]One may see Vilmos Vatja, *Luther on Worship*, translated by Ulrich Leupold (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 3-63.

> only be honored in and through this child who is Christ the Lord. Apart from him no person can find and worship God, but grossly offends and dishonors him. That means that everything across the world that is called worship and service of God must end. Truly holy and God-pleasing offerings, genuine service of God, will bear Christ's name or is in Christ; otherwise it is no divine service. God has channeled his worship in this child, and where he is not worshiped in this way, true worship is not present.[43]

The angels deliver their sermon to the shepherds, held captive by sin, death, and the devil. Because "this hymn did not originate on earth but was brought down from heaven to the earth by the angels" it gives joy and courage to the shepherds.[44] As good preachers, the angels direct the shepherds to the place where Christ is—to the manger in Bethlehem. "If these shepherds had not believed the angel, they would not have gone to Bethlehem nor would they have done any of the things which are related of them in the Gospel."[45] From the shepherds we learn "that the preaching and singing of the angels were not in vain."[46]

For Luther, the revelation of the glory of God in the birth of His Son to the shepherds is consistent with the way in which God uses what the world holds to be weak and foolish to make His mercy manifest. Like Mary, the shepherds are models of faith, which lives from the word. Luther also sees in the shepherds a model for Christian vocation.

> Here is another excellent and helpful lesson, namely, that after the shepherds have been enlightened and have come to a true knowledge of Christ, they do not run out into the desert—which is what the crazy monks and nuns in the cloisters did! No the shepherds continue in their vocation, and in the process they also serve their fellow men. For true faith does not create people who abandon their secular

[43]Klug, 122-123.
[44]Klug, 143.
[45]*LW* 52:32.
[46]Klug, 144.

> vocation and begin a totally different kind of living, a way of life which the totally irrational monks considered essential to being saved, even though it was only an externally different way of existence.[47]

Although most of Luther's preaching was based on the Lukan account of the nativity, he demonstrates a fondness for John's Gospel and his preaching of the Christmas story often echoes John 1:1-14.[48] Luther asserts that this pericope "is the most important of all the Gospels of the church year, and yet it is not, as some think, obscure or difficult. For upon it is clearly founded the important article of faith concerning the divinity of Christ."[49] In a sermon on John's prologue, Luther says "John

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[47]Klug, 148. In Luther's homiletical treatment of the shepherds, we are given an excellent window into his doctrine of vocation—a doctrine that contemporary Lutheranism desperately needs to recover in light of the "neo-monasticism" of contemporary American Evangelicalism. One may see Harold Senkbeil, *Sanctification: Christ in Action* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989), 12-15. In his treatise of 1520, "On the Freedom of a Christian," Luther writes (*LW* 31:371): "We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in Himself, but in Christ and in the neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor." This is expressed liturgically in the Post-Communion Collect: "We give thanks to you, almighty God, that you have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore you that of your mercy you would strengthen us through the same in faith toward you and in fervent love toward one another. . ." Homiletically, Luther gives expression to this in his Christmas sermons. For example in a 1521 Christmas sermon Luther says (Lenker, 146): "These are the two things in which a Christian is to exercise himself, the one that he draws Christ into himself, and that by faith he makes him his own, appropriates to himself the treasures of Christ and confidently builds upon them; the other that he condescends to his neighbor and lets him share in that which he has received, even as he shares in the treasures of Christ." Contra Richard Caemmerer's distinction of "faith-goal sermons" from "life-goal sermons" (*Preaching for the Church* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959], 179-190), Luther preaches faith which is active in love.

[48]On Luther and the Fourth Gospel see Victor Pfitzner, "Luther as Interpreter of John's Gospel," *Lutheran Theological Journal* (August 1984): 65-73; Carl Stange, "The Johannine Character of Luther's Doctrine," *Lutheran World Review* (October 1949): 65-77.

[49]Lenker, 173.

begins his Gospel in such an exalted tone and continues in the same vein so that in almost every single letter he preaches the deity of Christ, which is done by no other evangelist."[50] Luther loves John's Gospel because the evangelist makes it clear that "Whoever has touched Christ's skin has actually touched God."[51] The Christian's comfort is only to be found in the Word made flesh. A Christmas sermon from 1527 makes this point in a most striking way:

> He has power to cast us into hell and yet he took soul and body like ours. . . . If he were against us he would not have clothed himself in our flesh. . . . Here God is not to be feared but loved, and that love brings the joy of which the angel speaks. . . . Satan, on the other hand, brings home to me the Majesty and my sin, and terrifies me so that I despair. . . . But the angel does not declare that he is in heaven. . . . "You shall find . . ." He points out that he has come to us in our flesh and blood. . . . Our joy is not that we ascend and put on his nature as is the case when the Mass is made a boastful decking of ourselves in divinity. Do not be driven to distraction, but remain down here and listen, "Unto you a Saviour." He does not come with horses but in a stable. . . . Reason and will would ascend and seek above, but if you will have joy, bend yourself down to this place. There you will find that boy given for you who is your Creator lying in a manger. I will stay with that boy as he sucks, is washed, and dies. . . . There is no joy but in this boy. Take him away and you face the Majesty which terrifies. . . . I know of no God but this one in the manger. . . . Do not let yourself be turned away from this

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[50]*LW* 52:53

[51]Ian Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 232. In addition to Siggins' outstanding treatment of Luther's incarnational Christology, one may see Marc Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), 153-194; Norman Nagel, "*Martinus:* 'Heresy, Doctor Luther, Heresy!' The Person and Work of Christ," in *Seven-Headed Luther,* edited by Peter Newman Brooks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 25-49; and Franz Posset, *Luther's Catholic Christology* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1988).

> humanity. . . . What wonderful words (Col. 2:9)! . . . If you separate them, the joy is gone. O Thou boy, lying in the manger, thou art truly God who hast created me, and thou wilt not be wrathful with me because thou comest to me in this loving way—more loving cannot be imagined.[52]

In Luther's preaching Christology and soteriology are never separated. Or as Ulrich Asendorf notes: "Christ shares all He is and has with those who belong to Him. In this way christological facts are directly transformed soteriologically."[53]

Luther's Advent and Christmas preaching, like all good preaching, is finally doxological. In many respects his ballad-like "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come" is a summation of Luther's Christmas preaching.[54]

In his book *Against the Protestant Gnostics,* Philip Lee suggests that if contemporary Protestantism is to be delivered from its enslavement to gnostic captivity, preaching that is faithful to the biblical narrative, Christological in content, and liturgical in shape will need to be restored to the church's pulpits.[55] The gnostic forces of our age threaten the church nowhere as much as they do in December as the clear preaching of repentance in Advent is often muted by the sentimentalism encouraged by the hungry consumerism of our culture and Christmas is transformed into a festival of moralisms. Preaching cannot but benefit greatly from that preacher of Wittenberg who always proclaimed that we have God in the flesh for our forgiveness, life, and salvation.[56]

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[52]Quoted in Nagel, 48.

[53]Asendorf, 2.

[54]*TLH* 85; *LW* 37/38.

[55]Philip J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 218-225. One may also see Maxwell Johnson, "Let's Keep Advent Right Where It Is," *Lutheran Forum* (November 1994): 45-47.

[56]Recommended for the pastor's own devotional reading and spiritual formation in preparation for Advent-Christmas preaching (and liturgical preaching in general) are *Day By Day We Magnify Thee: Daily Readings for the Church Year From the Writings of Martin Luther,* edited and translated by M. Steiner and P. Scott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1982); *Luther's Family Devotions,* edited by Georg Link and translated by Joel Baseley (Dearborn: Mark V Publications, 1996).

Twentieth-Century Melanchthon Scholarship and the Missouri Synod: With Particular Reference to Richard Caemmerer's "The Melanchthonian Blight"

Ken Schurb

Many causes lay behind the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod controversy that came to a head in the 1970s: the practice of historical criticism within the Synod, a stubborn impulse toward ecumenism, and a deeply-felt urge to "get out of the ghetto" and overcome the "German church" image. There was even a generational dimension to the conflict. But amid all the other factors—theological, sociological, and psychological, among others—one that is almost never talked about or even noticed is the role of historiography, especially Melanchthon historiography.

In a church body like the Missouri Synod, where there is a confessional orientation as well as an historical interest, pastors and others constantly bump into Philip Melanchthon. He wrote three of the Lutheran Confessions, he was at Luther's side from 1518 on, and he stood at the center of the storm as several important disputes swirled after Luther died. Confessionally committed pastors and others tend to have very strong views about Melanchthon and his influence.

The present essay deals with historiography primarily and only secondarily with Melanchthon himself. It contends that during the 1940s and 1950s Richard Caemmerer, Jaroslav Pelikan, and others started applying to a particular church body, the Missouri Synod, one of the considered conclusions from the Luther Renaissance and other late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century theological and historical scholarship. This conclusion was about Melanchthon, the "*praeceptor* of Germany," his differences from Luther, and his alleged deleterious effect on the subsequent classic Lutheran theology

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that the Missouri Synod represented. That is the subject of part one below.

More recently in the wider world of scholarship, however, the historiography on Melanchthon has been shifting. It has moved away from some of the thinking that informed the work of Caemmerer, Pelikan, and others. Part two will explore some facets of this change.

Melanchthon Historiography in the First Half of the Century

This first part of the essay grows increasingly specific as its three sections unfold. After a few comments on the perspective that gripped much early- to mid-twentieth-century writing on the Reformation, that of the Luther Renaissance, it will focus on some of the assessments of Melanchthon made within the context of such scholarship. Then it will see how Melanchthon was treated in the Missouri Synod at mid-century.

General Picture: A Decline from a "Golden Age"

There is a stream of Reformation scholarship that holds that the sixteenth-century reform movement did not bring about many of the results that Luther initially desired. Steven Ozment captures this view in his aphorism that the "freedom fighters" of the 1520's became the "new papists" of the succeeding decades.[1] The argument is that as the years elapsed, a growing decline set in from a comparatively good set of circumstances in the early Reformation. The fresh effervescence of the movement went flat. Even the breathtaking verve with which Luther expressed theology gave way to textbook definitions, a development that is supposed to have taken its toll even on the cardinal teaching of justification by faith.

This argument may strike interpreters as plausible, at least at a glance. There is some truth to it. Unquestionably, Lutheran Germany became a theological battlefield as well as a political football after Luther's death. And as time went by there was a

[1]Steven E. Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 159-166.

growing concern in the Lutheran Reformation, as in any movement, about passing along its gains to the next generation.

We should recognize, however, that whatever seeds of truth lay beneath the surface of this affirmation, they are prone to be watered by tears of romanticism mourning the passing of an imagined golden age. As James Kittelson puts it, Luther Renaissance scholars like Karl Holl and Wilhelm Pauck "labored mightily to absolve Luther of most responsibility for the Lutheran churches" especially in matters like organization, deliberate training of pastors, formal confessions, and so forth.[2] That is, they downplayed Luther's own involvement in the grubby details connected with the institutionalization of the reform movement. At the same time they critically scrutinized a number of people who got their hands dirty in various attempts to continue what Luther started. The Luther Renaissance both raised and offered its own answer to the question: were the co-workers and heirs of Luther culpable for at least a share of the decline to which so many have pointed? And was Melanchthon the chief culprit?[3]

The Role Usually Attributed to Melanchthon

Many Reformation scholars have identified Melanchthon as a catalyst in a multi-faceted decline that allegedly started already during Luther's lifetime. Albert Herrlinger theorized that Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was but poorly echoed by Melanchthon. Therefore under the *praeceptor's* influence the congregation became an "an object of education

[2]James M. Kittelson, "Luther the Church Bureaucrat," *Concordia Journal* 14 (October 1987): 295-296.

[3]Some scholars might observe that it is just like theologians to get themselves a-buzzing over the question, "what went wrong?" But in and of itself, there is nothing wrong with this question. Think of Gettysburg. An amazing amount of ink has been spilled over the years by American historians, military historians, southern historians, and others who have tried to analyze the most decisive moments and actions in this crucial Civil War battle. Why? Deep down, it seems that they do realize, all diatribes against "presentism" notwithstanding, that unless history can help us to understand how we got to where we are today, its value comes into serious question. Neither historians nor theologians ought to shrink from inquiring about "what went wrong?"

through doctrine and discipline," not the warm *Gemeinde* of Luther's thought.[4] Decades later, speaking along identical lines, Wilhelm Pauck argued that ". . . Melanchthon tended to regard the church as a kind of school . . ." Accordingly, Pauck went on, "he was wont to put special stress on the teaching aspects of the ministerial office and the sermon, thus minimizing Luther's concept of the church as the *communio sanctorum*, especially insofar as it was connected with the idea of the universal priesthood of believers."[5]

Georg Wehrung was one of many who suspected this ecclesiastical development of forming only the tip of a theological iceberg. He thought that beneath a formalization of church life there lurked the idea that faith consisted primarily if not exclusively in knowing doctrine. This amounted to another Melanchthonian departure from Luther, Wehrung contended.[6] In the same vein, Pauck asserted that "the older he [Melanchthon] became, the more he tended to think that the substance of the gospel was represented by 'doctrines.'"[7] Pauck drew a contrast between this approach and that of Luther, who "understood . . . a divine action which men must apprehend or 'feel' by experience, a giving on the part of God to which, in the Holy Spirit, a receiving on the part of man corresponds, a divine speaking and promising which becomes actualized in human hearing and trusting."[8] While he was willing to allow that Melanchthon comprehended the real import and meaning of the Reformation quite well, Pauck still maintained that, encumbered by his "defining theology" and "basic concepts," Philip "did not mirror that immediate, dynamic actuality of the gospel of Christ which Luther was able to express so directly and forcefully. This," Pauck added, "was noticeable particularly in his treatment of justification."[9] We can discern in that last sentence

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[4]Albert Herrlinger, *Die Theologie Melanchthons* (Gotha: Perthes, 1879), 271.

[5]Wilhelm Pauck, "Luther and Melanchthon," in *From Luther to Tillich*, edited by Marion Pauck (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), 50.

[6]Georg Wehrung, *Kirchen nach evangelischen Verständnis* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1947), 81-82.

[7]Pauck, 50.

[8]Pauck, 50-51.

[9]Pauck, 51.

from Pauck the influence of his teacher Karl Holl, who never approved of Melanchthon's emphasis on forensic justification.[10]

The twentieth-century high-water mark for this stream of Melanchthon interpretation may well have come in international circles at the 1960 Luther Congress. There it received its most forceful, though by no means its only, expression in Pauck's lead address entitled "Luther and Melanchthon," which is the origin of the previous Pauck quotes. One must recall that Pauck was not only the student of Karl Holl but also the teacher of Jaroslav Pelikan. And so we see one of the ways in which these historiographical meanderings reach the Missouri Synod.

Melanchthon as Interpreted in the Missouri Synod

By the middle of the 20th century, voices within the Missouri Synod echoed the claim that Melanchthon had made faith a matter of knowledge and accordingly depicted the Office of the Ministry merely as a purveyor of information. In *From Luther to Kierkegaard,* a book he published as a young St. Louis seminary professor, Jaroslav Pelikan advocated these notions. He wrote that "Melanchthon was very fearful of an uneducated ministry. This fear is to be understood in terms of his understanding of the ministry. Inasmuch as the primary element in faith was assent, the primary task of the ministry was that of providing the information to which the people were to assent."[11] Pelikan

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[10]See Lowell C. Green, *How Melanchthon Helped Luther Discover the Gospel* (Fallbrook, California: Verdict Publications, 1980), chapter 1.

[11]Jaroslav Pelikan, *From Luther to Kierkegaard* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 34-35. Interestingly, while Pelikan and Pauck (as seen above) were in the mainstream, some voices had already been raised in dissent by this time. For example: Charles Leander Hill ("Critical Estimate of the Character and Influence of Melanchthon and of His Contributions to the History of Thought," in *The Loci Communes of Philip Melanchthon* [Boston: Meador Publishing, 1944], 38-39), although he was very positive toward what he described as Melanchthon's rationalizing and philosophizing tendencies, nonetheless held that when Melanchthon compared the church to a school "it is . . . clear in what sense he does this." Hill continued, "If Melanchthon calls the church a 'schola' it is only to say that the evangelical church should be and is constituted out of an inner working power of religious proof and instruction as opposed to the outer legal principle of authority so characteristic of Roman Catholicism. The church is the elected

held that Melanchthon's unhappy bequest to the period of Lutheran orthodoxy consisted precisely in an intellectualization of the Christian faith. And since the Missouri Synod had been shaped to such a large degree by the study of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Lutheran Orthodoxy, the conclusion lay close at hand that intellectualization of the faith constituted the essential problem with the Missouri Synod itself.

The kind of allegations that Pelikan and others were raising differed significantly from the standard sort of Melanchthon criticism found on the pages of F. Bente's *Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord.*[12] Missourians had long drawn attention to Melanchthon's defections in particular areas such as the doctrines of conversion and the Lord's Supper. Pundits like Pelikan were talking about something much more pervasive: a whole approach to theology. Nonetheless, Bente's analyses laid the groundwork for these kinds of criticisms to receive a favorable hearing in the Missouri Synod. Could it be that there was an unwillingness to assess Melanchthon on his own terms in the Missouri Synod of the 1940s and 1950s? Too much readiness to believe that anyone who went awry on topics like conversion and the Lord's Supper was capable of whatever other aberration anyone might attribute to him?

In the synodical centennial year of 1947, three years before Pelikan's book appeared, Richard R. Caemmerer, Sr., professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, had published one of the most significant articles ever to appear in the Missouri Synod: "The Melanchthonian Blight."[13] This article was not only about

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organ for the declaration of the gospel. Its whole function is to show the 'efficaciam verbi divini.' But in this proclaiming the efficacy of the divine word, its ministry must teach as well as preach." One may also see Hill's, "An Exposition and Critical Estimate of the Philosophy of Philip Melanchthon," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1938.

[12]Bente's volume, first published in the *Concordia Triglotta*, continues to find use as a stand alone volume. It has likely done more than any other piece to color the theological image of Melanchthon in the Missouri Synod.

[13]Richard Caemmerer, "The Melanchthonian Blight," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 18 (May 1947): 321-338. There is irony in the fact that the 500th anniversary year of Melanchthon's birth, 1997, also marks the 50th

Melanchthon, I submit, but also implicitly about what the Synod should become in its second hundred years. Caemmerer taught homiletics, but he had studied modern European history for his Ph.D. at Washington University and was quite familiar with the Reformation historiography of his day.[14]

Caemmerer began with the premise that the spiritual vitality of the Lutheran Reformation (significantly, he called it "Luther's Reformation") seemed to wane around 1525. The reason for this decline, he went on to suggest, was none other than the "Melanchthonian blight": a phenomenon admittedly larger than Melanchthon himself, yet nonetheless exemplified by him. Caemmerer summarized it by saying that Melanchthon's "humanistic heritage and his educational preoccupation combined to produce the un-Lutheran but potent oversimplification of Christian knowledge as information, apprehended by a mind which is to all intents and purposes identical with the natural mind."[15] In other words, Caemmerer depicted Melanchthon's version of the gospel basically as sacred information, which does not change those who hear it. Accordingly, faith would amount to mere agreement with a set of propositions. Elsewhere, Caemmerer put it still more simply. He said Melanchthon knew not of God speaking but only of statements about God.[16]

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anniversary for Caemmerer's essay.

[14]Caemmerer wrote, decades later, that "Frederick Mayer helped me on one of my first serious theological papers, 'The Melanchthonian Blight.'" Richard Caemmerer, "No Continuing City," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 5 (October 1978): 282. The role of F. E. Mayer as an advisor to Caemmerer and the extent to which he might have knowingly or unknowingly aided and abetted Caemmerer's plans would be a valuable topic for further research.

[15]Caemmerer, "Blight," 328. One of the essays released to explain and defend the "Statement of the 44" (*Speaking the Truth in Love: Essays Related to A Statement, Chicago Nineteen Forty-five* [Chicago: The Willow Press, n.d.], 52) stated: "There is the ever present danger to look upon the accepted *corpus doctrinae* as a set of intellectual propositions which are to be grasped merely by the mind of man."

[16]One may see Peter Fraenkel, "Revelation and Tradition: Notes on Some Aspects of Doctrinal Continuity in the Theology of Philip Melanchthon," *Studia Theologica* 13 (1959): 97-133, especially 100, note 2.

Moreover, in "The Melanchthonian Blight," Caemmerer said that "Melanchthon put the Humanist emphasis into the training of the clergy."[17] "Hence," he continued, "ministers trained in the Melanchthonian mode became a proud and learned caste, and their theology became a proving ground for dialectic competence."[18] Further, added Caemmerer, Melanchthon "wrote obedience to the clergy into the Christian's creed."[19]

In an article published a year before "The Melanchthonian Blight" appeared, Caemmerer had written of Melanchthon as the "First Lutheran Scholar." But his purpose in this earlier article had hardly been to commend the *praeceptor*. On the contrary, there he set down a sketch of his "Melanchthonian blight" thesis. He wrote:

> Melanchthon's Aristotelian psychology, identifying man's will and hence motives with his information and mental knowledge, was a radical abridgment of Luther's concept of man under the grace of God. For Luther the Gospel was a power because it was God's means of rebirth through faith in Christ; for Melanchthon it was one of a series of facts, along with the deposit of classical learning, to be stored in the mind and thus to influence man on the natural level. . . . For Melanchthon, learning was the badge of the scholar, the instrument of his pride and distinction.[20]

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[17]Caemmerer, "Blight," 327.

[18]Caemmerer, "Blight," p. 336. The afore-mentioned essay on thesis VII of the "Statement of the 44" (*Speaking the Truth in Love*, 52-53) cautioned against "the danger of silencing the heart and operating with the head, of sniping, and of engaging in dialectic skirmishes which are not motivated by the love of Christ and of the brethren."

[19]Caemmerer, "Blight," 336. Somewhat later, Caemmerer complained that in the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy "the ministry and consistory were in effect agents of civil government for the preservation of civic morality." Caemmerer, "The Basic Motives of Christian Ethics in Action," *The Lutheran Scholar* 6 (April 1949): 26.

[20]Richard Caemmerer, "The First Lutheran Scholar," *The Lutheran Scholar* 3 (April 1946): 23. In keeping with the theme of this article, Caemmerer concluded: "To Melanchthon, German scholarship owes . . . the pride of caste, the satisfaction with scholarship as an end instead of a means to service, and the reliance upon mental acumen and inability to differentiate between prejudice and knowledge, which have defaced much of German

In 1947 Caemmerer offered two suggestions or antidotes, as it were, to counteract the malady he had diagnosed as "the Melanchthonian blight." For one thing, he said, the church should constantly keep in view that "religious knowledge is more than information, that it is the gift of the grace of God in Christ Jesus by which the Christian becomes aware of God in a fashion different from, and beyond, the scope of natural thinking (1 Cor. 1 and 2; Col. 1) . . . ." Also, he said, "realize the evangelical character of the ministry."[21]

In short, there was a "one-two punch" in Missouri Synod publications of the late 1940s. First Caemmerer stated his "Melanchthonian blight" thesis in articles, then Pelikan drew out some of its larger implications in a book released by Concordia Publishing House. The book argued, especially in the wake of Kant's philosophical work, that existentialism *a la* Kierkegaard offered a much more promising philosophical road than the blighted trail first marked off for Lutherans by Melanchthon.

While Pelikan went on to make a name for himself in wider academic circles, Caemmerer's influence was more significant within the Missouri Synod itself. One of his students pointed out that "The leaven of Caemmerer's insights [in the 1947 "Blight" essay] was sure to have implications for the missionary thinking of the church body as generations of students carried his evangelical confessional emphasis into the Synod at large

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scholarship into our own time." That last assertion, made in the immediate post-World War II setting and not clearly following from the premises that Caemmerer had laid down earlier in the article, was a particularly unkind cut at Melanchthon.

[21]Caemmerer, "Blight," 337-338. Caemmerer advocated the "ministry of the laity" with "the pastor serving as coach and trainer" (see his theological autobiography, "Stance and Distance" in *The Lively Function of the Gospel: Essays in Honor of Richard R. Caemmerer on Completion of 25 years as Professor of Practical Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*, edited by Robert W. Bertram [St. Louis: Concordia, 1965], 5). Perhaps another cause for his dislike of Melanchthon had its roots in the latter's distinction between the Ministry and the laity. See Caemmerer, "The Ministry of the Word," *Theology in the Life of the Church*, edited Robert W. Bertram (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), especially 219 and 223.

through preaching."[22] For some time, Caemmerer also promoted his ideas with small groups of students who gathered for evening discussions in his seminary campus office.[23]

Toward an Assessment of the Historiography

The second part of this essay points out a few places where Reformation historiography in general has moved away from the ground on which Caemmerer and Pelikan stood. It then spotlights an element in Melanchthon's theology that calls into question some of the conclusions that these men and their followers reached. Finally, it reports on a few relatively recent scholars who have painted a different picture of Melanchthon than one finds in the "blight"-oriented literature.

Shifts in Reformation Historiography

Three brief observations are in order here. First, scholarship is becoming less and less quick to describe sixteenth-century humanists, particularly those in Northern Europe, as a phalanx pitted against the reformers. That Caemmerer aligned himself with the historiography of his day, which was influenced by the Luther Renaissance and Ernst Troeltsch, is demonstrated by his statement that "the reason for Melanchthon's point of view is that he was initially an exponent of the movement of German Humanism, [and] that he only temporarily and slightly modified his Humanistic outlook."[24] However, especially on the basis of work by Paul Oskar Kristeller, today's consensus recognizes that humanists "did *not* share philosophical or theological positions on human nature, revelation, justification, sacraments, free will, or the other questions that generated the

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[22]F. Dean Lueking, *Mission in the Making: The Missionary Enterprise Among Missouri Synod Lutherans 1846-1963* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), 289. On the influence of Caemmerer's approach to preaching, see also Robert C. Schultz, "From Walther to Caemmerer: A Study in the Development of Homiletics Within the Missouri Synod," *American Lutheran* 44 (July 1961): 7-10, 25-26.

[23]One may see Martin E. Marty, "The Church in the World," in *The Lively Function of the Gospel: Essays in Honor of Richard R. Caemmerer on Completion of 25 years as Professor of Practical Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*, edited by Robert W. Bertram [St. Louis: Concordia, 1965], 133.

[24]Caemmerer, "Blight," 323.

Reformation controversy. On these points, their theologies could and did differ widely."[25] What did they share? "Methods of discourse," which included philological expertise, a passion for rhetoric, and an opposition to scholastic method.[26] It is no longer so persuasive to assert (as Caemmerer did) that Melanchthon's "humanistic heritage and his educational preoccupation combined to produce the un-Lutheran but potent oversimplification of Christian knowledge as information. . . ."[27]

A related point is that today's Reformation scholarship tends to view Luther as more than grudgingly or tangentially interested in humanist education curricula. Pauck was fairly typical of thinking under the sway of the Luther Renaissance when he argued that Luther "did not interfere with his friend's [that is, Melanchthon's] efforts to establish a humanistic educational program on the soil of the Lutheran Reformation."[28] Lewis Spitz Jr., however, has tellingly drawn attention to a letter Luther wrote some five months before Melanchthon arrived at Wittenberg, at a time when we might expect him to have had the indulgence controversy and its growing impact uppermost in mind. Luther said: "Our university is making progress. We may shortly expect to have lectures in two, yes, in three languages, and beyond that to receive lectures on Pliny, mathematics, Quintilian, and other outstanding lectures. But we

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[25]James Michael Weiss, "Humanism," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, Hans J. Hillerbrand editor in chief (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 2:265. See James D. Tracy, "Humanism and the Reformation," *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research*, edited by Steven Ozment (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1982), 41, and Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 32-34.

[26]Weiss, 265. The last item is the place where scholars in varying ways might still hold out for some substantive theological import to the humanists' shared agenda. For instance, see Charles Nauert, "The Clash of Humanists and Scholastics: An Approach to Pre-Reformation Controversies," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 4 (April 1973): 1-18, especially 11.

[27]Caemmerer, "Blight," 328.

[28]Pauck, 48. Caemmerer similarly wrote that Luther "was interested in the languages, but only for the sake of their service in unfolding the meaning of the Word" ("Blight," 324-325).

shall throw overboard those on Petrus Hispanus, Tartaretus, and Aristotle."[29] These are hardly the words of someone who lacked passion or sympathy for the humanist educational program.[30]

Finally, today's scholars, especially as they reflect on the later years of Luther's career, are taking greater notice of Luther's personal involvement with the "nitty-gritty" side of the Reformation. Once again, Caemmerer had been in step with much of the scholarship of his time when he claimed that, in contrast to Luther, "the formal detail of administration of the church . . . was developed by his [Luther's] coworkers, particularly Philip Melanchthon."[31] But the academic world is now appreciating more and more that in a variety of ways, the last fifteen to twenty years of Luther's life manifest his great determination to build the church and to pass the gospel on to a new generation. He wanted to ensure, under the Lord's blessing, that there would be Lutheranism after Luther. While he was very much aware of the impressive gifts and abilities that suited Melanchthon to such a task, Luther did not avoid becoming personally involved in it in his own ways.[32]

These are but three places in which Reformation historians have refined and even changed their perspective. As in the case of the Israelite army, they have withdrawn from positions once rather firmly held to take up new stances that better reflect the sixteenth-century data. In so doing they have left Caemmerer and Pelikan and some of their assertions like Uriah the Hittite—out there pretty much alone. This gives us a first reason

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[29]Quoted in Lewis W. Spitz Jr., "The Course of Christian Humanism," *The Springfielder* 27 (Summer 1963): 28. Still earlier, a Concordia Publishing House product had called attention to such statements by Luther: E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 297.

[30]One may also see LewisW. Spitz Jr., "Luther, Humanism, and the Word," *Lutheran Theological Seminary Bulletin* 65 (Winter, 1985): 3-26, especially 8-12.

[31]Richard Caemmerer, "The Education of Representative German Princes in the Sixteenth Century," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Washington University, 1944, 56.

[32]One may see James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), especially 15-16, 300.

for pause as we evaluate the "Melanchthonian blight" thesis that they advanced.

In Light of Melanchthon's Position on Church and Ministry

During the years after 1530, Melanchthon, Luther, and others did indeed set about building an evangelical church establishment to replace the traditional Roman hierarchy from which they had separated. If a cool aloofness between clergy and laity were to set in, this was a likely occasion. Still more, if church life was to become rigorously intellectualized as a function of a nascent but already operative Protestant "scholasticism," here was an organizational opportunity.

But an under-noticed fact in Melanchthon's theology suggests that he has been miscast in the role of "blighter." If we read his writings from this very period when the time was ripe—1530 and thereafter—we find that they are quite consistent with a confessional point: that the keys were given "principally and immediately to the church," to put it in Melanchthon's own words from paragraph 24 of the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope.[33]

No matter how much the *praeceptor* insisted on education within organized church life, he never placed doctrine into the hands of a cluster of "new papists" as a tool by which to exercise control. Melanchthon's position on church and ministry points to such a conclusion. He noted that the keys belonged not only to the preachers but also, in the first place, to the church as a gift from Christ. Therefore individual Christian laypeople could use them in private and in emergencies.

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[33]Even as he lamented Melanchthon's "concessions to power" in the form of "state interests" leading to the *landesherrliche Kirchenregiment*, Franz Hildebrandt observed that for the *praeceptor* it was "the common priesthood of all believers" that formed the "basis for the historic alliance between throne and altar." *Melanchthon: Alien or Ally?* (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1946), 62. One may also see Ken Schurb, "Melanchthon on Church and Ministry," *Concordia Journal* 15 (October 1989): 447-466; and Ken Schurb, "The Meeting of Church and Ministry in the Lutheran Confessions and Some of their Interpreters," in *The Pieper Lectures: Volume 1: The Office of the Ministry*, edited by Chris Christophersen Boshoven (St. Louis: Concordia Historical Institute and the Luther Academy, 1997), 60-112.

Because all Christians have the command to confess doctrine, Melanchthon's emphasis on education and doctrine also for the unlearned shows that he had not set out to pit the preachers against the laity: the informed, as it were, against the uninformed. Instead, he wanted to raise everyone's level of doctrinal knowledge and aptitude for confession. German Melanchthon scholar Klaus Haendler affirmed that the *praeceptor's* goal was to ensure proper biblical exposition, not to develop a learned caste as such.[34]

Intellectual attainment was neither Melanchthon's chief goal nor the burden of Christianity as he saw it. Again, his position on church and ministry is revealing. Melanchthon taught that Christians had a command from God to confess doctrine, but there was more to it than that. In doing so, they were at the same time speaking to one another the word that has the power of God to forgive sins, and so using the very keys that open heaven itself.

In short, doctrine stood out as important for Melanchthon, but as a means to an end. Being a Christian typically involved knowing certain things, of course. Beyond that, however, it meant being a member of the church—a people who have all things in Christ and who have the honor of bearing the keys in this world.

These observations on church and ministry form an under used vantage point from which to evaluate whether Caemmerer, Pelikan, and others had properly analyzed Melanchthon. It is ironic that within the Missouri Synod, of all places, there arose a movement devoted to decrying as "the Melanchthonian blight" the approach to theology characteristic of Lutheran Orthodoxy and at length of the Synod itself. Of all people, Missourians might have been expected to have known better. The Synod's position on church and ministry, informed in part by confessional material from Melanchthon's hand,

[34]Klaus Haendler, *Wort und Glaube bei Melanchthon*, Band 37 of Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte (Gütersloh: Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1968), 343, note 281.

provided good reason to consider the arguments of Caemmerer and Pelikan carefully.[35]

In Light of More Recent Melanchthon Historiography

In Peter Fraenkel's 1959 article entitled "Revelation and Tradition: Notes on Some Aspects of Doctrinal Continuity in the Theology of Philip Melanchthon," Fraenkel specifically mentioned Pelikan and Caemmerer and registered his disagreement with them. He noted that for Melanchthon "The Law is *both* given to reason *and* revealed by God in human speech; the mysteries of the gospel are divinely revealed by the medium of human speech *alone*."[36] Therefore, Fraenkel concluded, "the 'propositional' character of the Gospel would thus appear to be, in the mind of Melanchthon, a feature of the more than rational character of divine revelation and Christian faith." Fraenkel went on to note that for Melanchthon God reveals not only mysteries but Himself. "He . . . is the speaking subject."[37] When God speaks the gospel, He confers gifts. The word not only teaches Christians but nourishes them too. "Doctrine" is "effective" in saving people.[38] In fact, for Melanchthon "*doctrina*" is a verbal noun. Even when the word refers to subject matter, he depicts it as subject matter "at work."[39]

Fraenkel's observations run directly counter to the claims of Caemmerer and Pelikan concerning Melanchthon's treatment of the word. Similarly, turning to Melanchthon on the church,

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[35]Further, the Augsburg Confession notes that "faith is not merely a knowledge of historical events but a confidence in God and in the fulfillment of his promises" (Augsburg Confession XX, 25). These words, of course, were put to pen by none other than the alleged intellectualizer, Melanchthon. So were the following: ". . . we have said several times that we are talking about faith in Christ and in the forgiveness of sins, a faith that truly and wholeheartedly accepts the promise of grace. This does not come without a great battle in the human heart. Sensible people can easily see that a faith which believes that God cares for us, forgives us, and hears us is a supernatural thing" (Apology of the Augsburg Confession IV 303).

[36]Fraenkel, 104, emphasis original.

[37]Fraenkel, 105.

[38]Fraenkel, 106.

[39]Fraenkel, 117.

Fraenkel wrote: ". . .all the life of the Church is connected with teaching and learning and the use of human speech, intelligence, and knowledge; yet again this is not only an intellectual occupation or thinking *about* God but at the same time a *gratus cultus* of God, for the subject matter that we teach and learn is the Gospel itself."[40]

In an essay delivered at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis for the observance of Melanchthon's death in 1960, Robert Preus also quoted the *praeceptor* on the power of the gospel word. The word of justification brings forgiveness of sins and reconciliation, Melanchthon said. Receiving forgiveness involves consolation and vivification. For the *praeceptor*, the Son of God works through the external word, shows the Father's mercy, and gives the Holy Spirit.[41] Preus added that Melanchthon's theological writings:

> are remarkably free of philosophical jargon as well as doctrines. Melanchthon's downfall therefore lies not in his prolegomena, not in his avowed method and purpose in theologizing, surely not in his insinuating any alien synthesis upon theology, for . . . he reveals an ardent desire to adhere only to Scripture, and he takes a dim view toward philosophy. His debacle may be traced rather to this, that certain philosophical points of view are uncritically and unwittingly imposed on certain theological discussions.[42]

In a 1983 lecture, Heinz Scheible, director of Heidelberg's *Melanchthonforschungstelle*, agreed with Bernhard Lohse that "Melanchthon both intellectualized faith and formalized what for the Reformation was the basic difference between Law and Gospel," and that this can be found already in the very first

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[40]Fraenkel, 112, emphasis original.

[41]Robert Preus, "Melanchthon the Theologian," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 30 (August 1960): 474, note 32. These were remarkable things to be saying on a campus where Caemmerer enjoyed great popularity in 1960!

[42]Preus, 471, note 18. Preus echoed these thoughts ten years later in the first volume of *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970), 80-82. In an appendix to that volume, Preus provided a translation of the Preface to Melanchthon's 1559 *Loci* (415-419).

edition of the *Loci Communes*.[43] But, Scheible asked, "should not Luther himself have been able to see these differences, when he lavished such praise on Melanchthon's book?" Maybe Luther took a more positive view toward this intellectualizing and formalizing than some scholars do today. Scheible contends that Luther did take this positive view, as shown in these expressions: "I cannot combine brevity and clarity the way Philip does" and "I prefer Master Philip's books to my own."[44]

Drawing on and advancing further the thesis of a few scholars that Melanchthon's theological work must be understood and appreciated in the context of his rhetoric, John Schneider published a provocative book with wide-ranging import in 1990.[45] He is not surprised that the Luther renaissance was unimpressed with Melanchthon as a theologian. Its historians and theologians were "the children of Kant" who took religious truth to be found "not in cognitive propositions about divine reality, but in 'practical assertions,' in 'spirit,' in 'a consciousness of God.'"[46] While they admired Luther's spiritual genius and Melanchthon's practical side, they regarded Melanchthon as a terrible intellectualizer. Schneider is aware of their "broad critique": that the *praeceptor* "viewed Christian revelation in the terms of 'mind to mind' communication. Everything began with proper cognition, and it ended with that." But Schneider offers a better way to look upon Melanchthon's treatment of doctrinal topics: "They are not essentially propositions, but structures of *truth, loci communes*, which contain the seeds of wisdom and moral power that inhere in the created universe, or in divine

[43]Heinz Scheible, "Luther and Melanchthon," *Lutheran Quarterly* 4 (Autumn 1990): 317-339.

[44]*WA* Tr 2, 1649, quoted in Scheible, 323. *WA* 30/2, 68, quoted in Scheible, pp. 323 and 335. One may compare a recent article by Markus Wreidt, "Between Angst and Confidence: Melanchthon as a Man of the Sixteenth Century," translated by Robert Rosin, *Concordia Journal* 23 (October 1997): 277-294, especially 282-284.

[45]John Schneider, *Philip Melanchthon's Rhetorical Construal of Biblical Authority:* Oratio Sacra (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990).

[46]Schneider, 235.

reality. Moreover, these precious, sacred *loci* have been revealed by God and put to use by the Spirit of God."[47]

Schneider depicts Melanchthon as having used "a fusion of dialectical and rhetorical structures to select *loci communes*, which were by nature intellectually and affectively powerful when placed in their logically and existentially correct order."[48] In short, "for him 'doctrine' was a grand elocutionary event between God and honest people. It was *oratio sacra*, not a theologian's lexicon or dictionary." Schneider also wonders whether "the widespread influence" exercised by Melanchthon's *Loci* does not show that this book "communicated with a simple charm and power that may elude the modern reader."[49]

Unquestionably, the proclamatory theology of Luther differed from the more analytical approach that characterized both Melanchthon and his students.[50] This fact is apparent to any

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[47]Schneider, 235, emphasis original.

[48]Schneider, 234-235.

[49]Schneider, 237. Similarly, Timothy J. Wengert ("Philip Melanchthon's 1522 Annotations on Romans and the Lutheran Origins of Rhetorical Criticism," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday*, edited by Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 118.) has recently pointed out in the case of an exegetical work, Melanchthon's first published interpretation of Romans, that the *praeceptor* had produced "a commentary that to contemporary readers, who were also steeped in humanism's rhetorical techniques, would have sounded like the Apostle Paul's own voice commenting from the first century on the sixteenth century's most critical theological debates. For these readers Melanchthon's method rendered the exegete and the exegetical tradition nearly invisible. . ." The power that would have been packed by such an exposition should not be underestimated.

[50]One may see, for example, Robert Kolb, "The Significance of Luther's Galatians Commentary of 1535 on Later Sixteenth-Century Lutheran Commentaries on Galatians," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 84 (1993): 156-183 and also Robert Kolb, "'Not Without the Satisfaction of God's Righteousness': The Generation Gap between Luther and His Students," *Archive for Reformation History Special Volume: The Reformation in Germany and Europe: Interpretations and Issues*, edited by Hans R. Guggisberg and Gottfried G. Krodel in collaboration with Hans Fueglister (Guetersloh: Guetersloher Verlagshaus, 1993), 136-156. For a critical, although not unsympathetic

reader. Franz Hildebrandt has hardly been the last to note the fact that Philip can be "so intolerably dull in his endless rhetorical repetitions that quotations from his works must be severely rationed if the modern reader is to keep awake."[51]

Still, the historiography has been shifting since mid-century.[52] It has moved away from some of the thinking that informed both Caemmerer's and Pelikan's work, not only as regards general approaches to the Reformation and Luther, but also in specific interpretations at the very points where these men criticized Melanchthon the most.

Epilogue

This essay has done its painting with an admittedly broad brush. But it offers a suggestion that has some potential for illuminating key aspects of recent Lutheran history in America. For without a Missouri Synod controversy there would have been no AELC; without the AELC, the ELCA as we know it today might not even be in existence. And the foregoing historiographical discussion has definite import for understanding the Missouri Synod controversy.

The 1945 "Statement of the 44" said, under thesis VII: "We . . . deplore any tendency which reduces the warmth and power of the Gospel to a set of intellectual propositions which are to be

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assessment of Melanchthon and other "humanists-turned-reformers" in this regard, see James M. Kittelson, "Humanism in the Theological Faculties of Lutheran Universities during the Late Reformation," in *The Harvest of Humanism in Central Europe: Essays in Honor of Lewis W. Spitz*, edited by Manfred P. Fleischer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), 1992, 139-157, especially 154-157.

[51]Franz Hildebrandt, xiii. For years now, Professor Leif Grane of Copenhagen has asserted in public lectures that Melanchthon is the most boring theologian he has encountered.

[52]A well balanced summary assessment of Melanchthon is offered by Bengt Hagglund, "Melanchthon versus Luther: The Contemporary Struggle," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 44 (July 1980): 123-133. One may also see Wilbert H. Rosin, "In Response to Bengt Hagglund: The Importance of Epistemology for Luther's and Melanchthon's Theology," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 44 (July 1980): 134-140.

grasped solely by the mind of man."[53] This sentence formed a precursor to the statement of the "Melanchthonian blight" case made somewhat later by Caemmerer, who had been a drafter as well as one of the signers of the "Statement."[54]

When taken together with Caemmerer's work, the above quote provides good reason for the conclusion that a peculiarly negative view toward Melanchthon and what he was taken to represent, based largely on then-regnant Reformation historiography, became one of the elements that guided the liberal (sometimes referred to as "moderate") movement in the Missouri Synod. It would be interesting to trace where and how the "Melanchthonian blight" idea (whether called that or not) exerted its influence into the 1950s and 1960s, building up to the explosion of the 1970s.[55] Here, oral history might prove more helpful than flipping through the pages of published works.[56]

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[53]*Speaking the Truth in Love*, 51.

[54]Richard Caemmerer, "Recollections of 'A Statement'," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 43 (November 1970): 157. See the letter in the same *CHIQ* issue from another guiding force in the development of the "Statement," O.P. Kretzmann: "Perhaps the strangest thing about it is that the most 'dangerous' theses are not considered at all by the brethren who are hollering their heads off" (189).

[55]Caemmerer himself provided one hint, on the subject of the third use of the law, in his article "The Educational Use of Scripture in the Light of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 28 (March 1957): 217.

[56]Occasionally one can find suggestive statements in print, such as this one by Robert C. Schultz ("Pastoral Theology," in *The Lively Function of the Gospel: Essays in Honor of Richard R. Caemmerer on Completion of 25 years as Professor of Practical Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*, edited by Robert W. Bertram [St. Louis: Concordia, 1965], 21): "Caemmerer . . . understood the Melanchthonian blight and its threat to Missouri Synod theology. Being freed of this intellectualization and moralization of the Gospel, he was free of the compulsion to affirm or reject a particular formulation as though eternal salvation depended on it. We [seminary students in the late '40s and early '50s] knew that he frequently disagreed with what passed for the 'official position' in those days, but no man was more loyal to the Synod. He could do this without dishonesty because his life was not centered in his relationship to the institution." On pages 17-18 Schultz mentions the "Melanchthonian blight" idea and its relationship to subsequent studies of the concept of the "word of God."

The reduction of Christianity to a mere matter of the intellect is a blight. No doubt, this phenomenon has at times crept into the Missouri Synod. But is it the Melanchthonian blight? Is it an endemic theological malady handed down to our Synod in a more or less straight line from the *praeceptor*? Moreover, does the influence of this man—arising from his intentions and his work as a systematizer, regularizer, and teacher of the faith—constitute a blight both so terrible and so deeply-rooted that it had to be excised by unusual, even radical means? Or should our picture of Melanchthon and his true heritage take on somewhat different contours?

Were the proponents of the "Melanchthonian blight" idea in the Missouri Synod right about the cause they posited for the conflict toward which they were building? Given the present state of historiography, this appears to be a very good question, though admittedly posed with all the benefits of hindsight.[57]

[57]This paper was first presented as a lecture to the students of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, November, 1997. The essayist extends thanks to Dr. Karl Barth, the Rev. Gordon Bynum, and Dr. Walter Rosin for commenting on earlier drafts of this paper. Any errors of fact or judgment, however, remain the essayist's sole responsibility.

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Book Reviews

***TE DEUM*: THE CHURCH AND MUSIC. By Paul Westermeyer. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998. xiii +412 Pages. $25.00.**

Paul Westermeyer has taught the history and practice of the church's song at Elmhurst College, Yale Institute of Sacred Music, Trinity Seminary in Columbus, Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, Luther Seminary in St. Paul, and at St. Olaf College. *Te Deum: The Church and Music* brings the classroom of one of this country's most distinguished scholars and professors of church music to the reader. His goal in this book is "to provide a succinct introductory overview to church music from a historical and theological point of view." He does that and he does it very well.

For years I have been looking for such a textbook for the CTS course "Theology and Church Music." Books on church music usually cover specific historic periods, composers, musical forms, works, or issues, but do not attempt to look theologically at the whole checkered history of the church's music-making. *Te Deum* is different. It is the complete story written by a theologian/musician, a fact manifest on every page. A theological base pervades and helps the reader understand the "why" and the "what does this mean?" for a whole feast of topics. One is led to the theological roots and implications for the church in everything from Cluny to Olney, from Moody to Solesmes, from psalm tones to praise bands and beyond. Westermeyer speaks as scholar first and pastor second to these and literally hundreds of other music related topics.

Te Deum is a real buy at twenty-five dollars. The early church section, the time line, or the bibliography alone would be worth that. His writing on J. S. Bach does not rehearse what has been said many times before by others, but instead shows how Bach is the musical result of Luther. His extensive and insightful comparison of Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli on matters musical is priceless. His observations and cautions concerning today's worship tensions are especially astute. And all that he says is well documented with often half of a page of footnotes.

The whole church shares the gift of music, and Westermeyer writes here for that diverse readership. It is obvious that he wishes to be objective and treat all who have contributed to the picture with equal attention. That is why, for instance, chorales and Wesley hymns are given about the same number of pages. That is also why

perhaps no denomination will come away from his book completely satisfied.

Nevertheless, I encourage pastors to own a copy of this highly readable book. If you have ever wished that you had learned more while at the seminary about the church's singing and how this history and practice fit into our prayer life today, order the book. The church's *Te Deum* is past, present, and future, and it is a song that pastors need to understand.

Richard C. Resch

THE COMPLETE TIMOTHEUS VERINUS. By Valentin Ernst Loescher. Translated by James L. Langebartels and Robert J. Koester. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1998.

Northwestern Publishing is to be strongly commended for its publication of James Langebartels and Robert Koester's translation of Valentin Ernst Loescher's *Complete Timotheus Verinus*. In bringing this volume before the public, the long-silenced utterance of one aptly described as the "voice of Lutheran Orthodoxy against Pietism" (v) is finally allowed to ring out loudly in the English language.

Loescher's remarkably insightful analysis of Pietism captures the key elements of the movement, and demonstrates some of the basic ways in which Pietism challenges confessional Lutheranism. A listing of some of his topics reveals his insight. Pietism, writes Loescher, has "protected and defended people who publicly taught that the external water baptism is not the correct baptism" (83); "denies now and again that the Lord's Supper confers the forgiveness of sins" (84); "reproach[es] the evangelical Lutheran worship service as completely corrupt" (216); and has "maintained . . . that the 'private use today of confession and absolution is unscriptural'" (203). Last but not least, Loescher notes that Pietists "introduce the *quatenus* subscription to the symbolical books" and "ridicule and despise the theological systems up to this time" (215, 216). Beyond a mere description, though, Loescher reaches into the depths of Pietist thought and shows the essential manner in which it compromises biblical Christianity, that is, orthodox Lutheranism.

Loescher centers his critique of Pietism in its "indifferentism." The key to Pietism's perversion of the true Christian faith is its indifference to the content of that faith. In contrast to orthodox

Christianity, Pietism emphasizes the *fides quae* at the expense of the *fides qua*. From this erroneous starting point proceed all of the other confusions that characterize Pietism. Several examples will suffice. "The contempt for the means of grace really belongs to the pietistic indifferentism. They have such a low regard for the truths learned from God's word and for the means of grace established by God that, unless true piety is present at the same time, no matter how pure and clear such truths have been learned and grasped, they despise them and proclaim them to be a mere natural and dead letter work. They take away from these truths the power to convert and make holy, and in place of them substitute something mystical" (63). Regarding millennialism, he notes: "Wherever the zeal for piety has been misused and pushed without Christian discretion, millennialism has always broken out. By millennialism is meant not only the imagination of experience, but also the imagination of a very great essential change; they think that the kingdom of the cross (in which believers are tested) and the church militant in this life and on earth will cease. Further, millennialism teaches that another glorious kingdom of Jesus Christ must come, to which all the prophets and apostles, especially John (Rev. 20) point. They say that without millennialism, the Scriptures cannot be defended against unbelievers and mockers" (144).

The translation reads quite well. What emerges from it is the portrait of a faithful, confessional Lutheran. We might go so far as to say that Loescher wears his heart on his sleeve. His willingness to share his emotions provides a different picture of orthodox Lutheranism than the caricature offered by the Pietists. Rather than simply being a hair-splitting exercise in academic theology, *Timotheus Verinus* is a pastoral plea for a return to a right understanding of and a proper balance between justification and sanctification in a context where Pietism had placed sanctification at the center of theology and thereby displaced Christ. From this displacement flowed the denial of sacramental grace, a minimizing of the Office of the Ministry, and an emphasis on faith as activity. What drives the enterprise for Loescher, then, is not simply "pure doctrine." Rather, Loescher makes it clear that no false dichotomy is to be made between doctrine and practice. Doctrine has a resultant practice and vice versa—evangelical substance results in evangelical worship, and vice versa.

For this , then, we can be thankful for the voice that Northwestern has helped to sound again, both for its positive program, as well as

for the warnings that it raises. As long as there are those who bifucate substance and style, we will need to hear the faithful voice of Valentin Ernst Loescher, reminding us"from the beginning, the Church of Christ has seen the fanatical confusion mixed together with the unjustly-pushed seeking of piety, or hidden behind piety. Therefore it is necessary to faithfully admonish those who earnestly strive after piety in others to guard themselves against such easily traveled wrong ways. They ought to consider well that a good appearance is not everything; rather, everything, even the best appearing ways, is to be tested before the Lord and according to his word, lest one by and by fall into the enthusiastic maze. This is otherwise called Crypto-Enthusiasm, a slow but very dangerous evil, which spreads like gangrene. . ." (221).

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

PRISON MEDITATIONS ON PSALMS 51 AND 31. By Girolamo Savonarola. Introduced, translated, and edited by John Patrick Donnelly. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994.

With this volume, Marquette University Press introduces a new series entitled *Reformation Texts with Translation (1350-1650)*. The texts will be divided into Biblical Studies, Women of the Reformation, and Late Reformation. The editors hope to encourage the study of the original languages and provide a "help to acquire facility in reading Latin" (9). Although this reader has done some Latin translation, he found it a very valuable tool to improve his own ability to read postclassical Latin.

Though these works of Savonarola have not been printed in English in this century, they were popular with Luther who published them twice. It was in Milwaukee that one of the last English translations of Psalm 51 was printed. A trip to one of the large WELS congregations in downtown Milwaukee confronts the Sunday worshipper with a stained glass portrayal of Savonarola. Why was he important to these early German immigrants? Perhaps, the connection is in the devotional character of these writings.

Imprisoned and facing certain death, Savonarola, in his cell, sought to confess his sinfulness and his confidence in Christ. In the midst of Lent, he took up Psalm 51 to pray and confess his faith. He is "a soul calling God from the depths of personal tribulation" (18). There is no defense of himself or tirade against his opponents. Here the heart of

faith, burdened with the weight of sin, calls out for mercy. His own introduction to the prayer makes this clear: "I dare not raise my eyes to heaven, for I have sinned seriously against it. I find no refuge on earth, because I have been a scandal to it. What then shall I do? Shall I despair. Far be it. God is merciful, my Saviour is kind. God alone then is my refuge . . ." His prayer leads him back and forth in the Scriptures. Girolamo calls upon Christ the Good Samaritan, rejoices that he will hear the very same words offered to the thief at the cross, and pleads that he be looked upon with the mercy granted to Zacchaeus. He takes comfort in the Canaanite woman for he cries out day and night as she. As he comes to the end of the psalm, his prayer turns to the needs of the church, which he describes as small. "I beg you, Lord, what advantage is there in the damnation of so many thousands of people? Hell is filled, the church is daily emptied. "Arise! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Arise, and do not cast us off forever" [Ps 44:23]" (91).

This book is valuable reading for the parish pastor or the seminary student learning about preaching the word of God. The translation is well done and easy to read which makes it a good addition to a church or academic library.

Karl F. Fabrizius
Greendale, Wisconsin

THE THEOLOGY OF PAUL THE APOSTLE. By James D. G. Dunn. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998.

James Dunn undertook an admittedly herculean task when he penned this single volume theology of St. Paul. The study is, in many ways, the crowning achievement of Dunn's numerous years of scholarly writing and teaching on the letters of Paul.

Viewing Romans as the mature Paul's theological magnum opus, Dunn utilizes the progression and outline therein as a paradigm for his exposition of the Apostle's theology. The chapters address the following broad subjects: God and Humankind, Humankind under Indictment, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Beginning of Salvation, the Process of Salvation, the Church, and How Should Believers Live? Areas of theology not explicitly referenced in Romans (e.g., the Lord's Supper) are not given short shrift but included and expounded under the appropriate chapter heading. The happy result

is a book which at least attempts to address every major and most minor aspects of Paul's apostolic preaching.

A strength of the book is Dunn's sustained balance between an exegetical dissection of holy writ and a systematic exposition of the text. Exegesis is not reduced to footnotes, nor does the book read like a typical biblical commentary. Another positive feature is Dunn's aggressive interaction with other studies on matters related to Paul. The reader is given a virtual compendium of current Pauline scholarship since Dunn not only expresses his own convictions but also skillfully weaves the views of others into his own argumentation.

A foundational flaw and weakness of the book, however, is Dunn's rejection of Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles as belonging to the genuine writings of the Apostle Paul. The effect of such canonical rejection is most evident in Dunn's views on the meaning of the phrase "works of the law" and the place of formal, ministerial offices in the congregations Paul established. The epistles Dunn regards as non-Pauline often contradict or undermine his exegetical arguments.

Dunn's study is indeed monumental. Especially as it serves as a revealing barometer of the current state of scholarship on Pauline literature, *The Theology oftaul the Apostle* invites and deserves serious perusal by students of the New Testament.

Chad L. Bird
Saint Paul Lutheran Church
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THE FOOLISHNESS OF PEACHING: PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL AGAINST THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD. By Robert Farrar Capon. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.

Robert Farrar Capon, an Episcopal priest, has been a prolific author for many decades. His numerous books have explored theology, cooking, and preaching. The contents of his most current book were delivered as lectures on preaching at Seabury-Western Seminary.

Capon writes clearly, and well. One doesn't have his published bibliography without writing skill. His humor is enjoyable, although I think some expletives could have been deleted from this book.

The second part of the work outlines Capon's suggestions concerning sermon preparation. Suggestions for use of the computer in the sermon writing task are helpful. I also appreciated Capon's insistence on serious thinking about the meaning of the sermon text, plus his advocacy of the importance of prayer in the preparation of sermons. Capon recommends preaching from the lectionary. Like Martin Luther, he also enjoins the preacher to say what needs saying, and then to sit down.

Lutherans of our Synod will not be much impressed with the first part of the book. Here Capon outlines the theology to be presented in the preaching task. Initially, I was impressed with Capon's focus on the central importance of the death of Christ. Indeed, he even gets around to saying that Jesus' resurrection is important, too! Although what he means by "resurrection" is not entirely clear to me.

He seems to operate with a Neo-Orthodox view of Scripture, with a "soul-sleep" view of death from which one awakens at the Judgment. Apparently, there is no immediate entry of the soul into Heaven in his view.

While he does not employ the term, Capon teaches an objective justification of mankind, achieved in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The theological problem for Lutherans is that he appears to teach that Jesus has saved everyone, whether they believe it or not. Faith in Christ is, therefore, unimportant and unnecessary. This is at best an overemphasis on general justification, and at worst Universalism. I was not impressed.

The sermon writing suggestions may make the book worth reading. The theology will not impress Lutheran readers. In a universalistic theology preaching is foolishness. For if all are saved, anyway, why bother?

Gary C. Genzen
Leesburg, Florida

WHAT ABOUT CREMATION? - A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE. By John J. Davis. Winona Lake, Indiana: Pinegrove Publishing, 1998

John J. Davis, Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Indiana, has provided parish pastors with an excellent study on the topic of cremation. The book

is based on a thorough study of the history of cremation in the Biblical, ancient, and modern world. Davis also provides a thorough review of what Scripture has to say. In this way his book does, indeed, provide a Christian perspective about cremation.

In twenty-eight years as a parish pastor, I have been asked to officiate at relatively few cremations. However, I have noticed that the frequency of cremations, even among Christians, has been increasing. After a recent move to a parish in Florida, a state where cremation is more common, I am being more regularly faced with the question: Is cremation permissible for a deceased believer? Davis points out that the number of cremations in America is increasing rapidly, primarily for economic reasons. On that basis, I suspect this book will prove useflil to most pastors as they face the questions that families have about cremation.

In his review of the Bible, Davis points out that there are only two cremations mentioned in the Old Testament that are more favorably reported. There are no cremations reported in the New Testament. Therefore, on the basis of history, the Biblical text, and a review of modern cremation practices and abuses, Davis concludes that burial, interment or inhumation is preferable for deceased Christians. Although Davis is quick to admit that the Bible nowhere commands burial, nor prohibits cremation. The volume concludes with a chapter dealing with some needed reforms and advice concerning funeral practices.

The book is well-written, and is easily read at a sitting. It could well serve as a guide for a church study concerning burial or cremation. It would make an excellent adjunct text in pastoral theology classes. Frankly, it is an important book about a topic that will increasingly challenge pastors. I highly recommend it.

Gary C. Genzen
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THE SEMITIC BACKGROUND OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. Combined Edition of *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament* and *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays.* By Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S. J. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997.

In the latter half of this century the Church and those who fill her pulpits have benefitted greatly from numerous archaeological

discoveries in Israel and surrounding lands that have illuminated the New Testament Scriptures. The Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran, the best known of these, comprises but a portion of these texts, which have supplied insights into the first-century world of the eastern Mediterranean. Written in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic—especially the latter three—these texts are highly diverse in literary genre. Religious writings, personal and official letters, legal contracts, and funeral inscriptions are numbered among them. The literature bears witness to a social and religious culture marked by everything but uniformity, in which a cacophony of disparate ideological voices filled the air. It was among these that the voice of Truth Incarnate began to speak.

Joseph A Fitzmyer, in the combined edition of two of his former works, provides a helpful discussion of how some of these various texts confirm traditional interpretations of New Testament passages, and, most importantly, how they improve our understanding of controverted or obscure passages of Holy Writ. The Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16), Son of David and Melchizedek traditions, and the meaning of the κύριος title as applied to Jesus are examples of the subjects addressed.

By those who are called weekly to enter the world of first century Palestine and then to let the inspired texts of that period and place speak to congregants of this time and place, these collected essays of Fitzmyer are well worth study and perusal.

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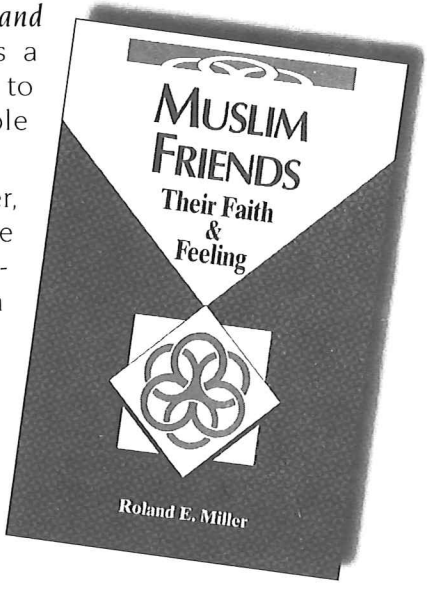
Indices to Volume 62 (1998)

ARTICLES

Book Reviews

Reach Out to Your Muslim Neighbors

Muslim Friends: Their Faith and Feeling by Roland E. Miller offers a perceptive and unique introduction to the Islamic faith and the people who follow it.



Written for the general reader, Miller looks beyond the false stereotypes of Islam and caricatures of its believers to offer an objective description of the Qurʾān and Islamic beliefs. He describes the fundamental beliefs and practices of Islam and how they permeate all aspects of Muslim culture through the family, friendships, social understanding, festivals, and rites of passage.

As a result, *Muslim Friends* accurately explores the richness of the Muslim culture and offers a rarely-seen portrait of individuals who have normal ideals, goals, and a rich heritage and culture.

Miller draws on decades of personal experience with Muslim friends in India to present this authentic portrayal of the Muslim and his beliefs.

Begin your discovery of the rich heritage and history of Islam today with *Muslim Friends*.

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