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# Eschatology and Fanaticism in the Reformation Era: Luther and the Anabaptists

Carter Lindberg

Eschatology[1] may, in reality, be the last word, but that has not precluded a seemingly everlasting discussion of it. Furthermore, it seems that recently everyone has something to say about it. Indeed, the millennium has been a growth industry not just for computer firms fixing their own self-made problems, but for the media and, of course, for academe. One entrepreneurial professor even got funding to set up a Center for Millennial Studies. Ironically, its future will now have to concentrate on the past! That, of course is the difference between futurology and the Advent gospel. "Briefly, the 'future' is a mere projection of the past. Advent, on the other hand, identifies what *is coming* in terms of the power of *potential* over *reality*, the future over the past. . . ."[2] We look to He who is to come. Here is Luther's map through this swamp: salvation is received, not achieved; God reaches us, we do not reach God. Thus Luther explains the petition, "Thy kingdom come." "What does this mean? Answer: To be sure, the kingdom of God comes of itself, without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may also come to us. How is this done? Answer: When the heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit so that by his grace we may believe his holy Word and live a godly life, both here in time and hereafter forever."[3] In his explanation of the Lord's Prayer, Luther maintained the eschatological orientation of the petition, casting aside everything that could smack of achievement or merit.

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[1]Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman, editors, *Last Things: Death and Apocalyptic in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 257 note 1: "*Eschatology* is a modern coinage apparently used by Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider in 1804; medieval thinkers spoke of *novissima* or *res novissimae*."

[2]Steven Paulson, "The Place of Eschatology in Modern Theology," *Lutheran Quarterly* 12 (Autumn 1998): 333 with reference to Jürgen Moltmann's *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*.

[3]*Small Catechism* in Theodore Tappert, editor, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 346. One may also see the explanation in the *Large Catechism*, 426-428, and Albrecht Peters, *Kommentar zu Luthers Katechismen. Band 3: Das Vaterunser*, edited by Gottfried Seebass (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck &Ruprecht, 1992), 70-87.

***Dr. Carter Lindberg is professor of church history at Boston University.***

What distinguishes Luther and the fanatics in their understandings of eschatology is their respective fundamental theological orientations toward justification. We will return to this point, but first we will briefly review the medieval context for the eschatological convictions of the Reformers.

## The Medieval Heritage[4]

The Reformers of the sixteenth century were heirs to vivid eschatological currents that crested in apocalyptic and chiliastic waves of lyrics, dramatic poetry, Antichrist plays, visionary literature, woodcuts, and revolutionary social-political prophecies. Architectural art over church portals and main altars portrayed Christ as an enthroned judge with a sword and a lily on opposite sides of His mouth. While the lily represented resurrection to heaven, the sword of judgment to eternal torment was more vivid in the minds of most people.[5] A sandstone relief of this common depiction of Christ in the Wittenberg parish churchyard so terrified Luther that he refused to look at it.

The best known of medieval eschatologists is probably the Calabrian Abbot, Joachim of Fiore (died 1202), who prophesied a future perfected age colored by revolutionary expectations. After the Age of the Father (the history of the Old Testament), followed by the Age of the Son (the history of the New Testament and the clerical church), there would be the Age of the Spirit and the *ecclesia spiritualis*. He calculated the second age would end around 1260 with a major persecution of the church, to be followed by the third age of spiritual bliss ideally expressed in the form of monasticism. Implicit here is the displacement of the clerical hierarchy. "The very expectation of a time when the ruling hierarchy would no longer exist was a basic challenge to the papacy. . . . The New Age of the

[4]What follows is informed by the articles on eschatology and apocalyptic in the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (TRE). TRE 3: "Apokalyptik: VI. Mittelalter (by Robert Konrad). VII. Reformation und Neuzeit (by Gottfried Seebass);" TRE 10: "Eschatologie: VI. Mittelalter (by Robert E. Lerner); VII. Reformation und Neuzeit (by Ulrich Asendorf)." One may also see Walter Klaassen, *Living at the End of the Ages: Apocalyptic Expectation in the Radical Reformation* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1992), 1-17.

[5]Isaiah 49:2, "He made my mouth like a sharp sword." Revelation 1:16, "from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword."

Spirit will build upon new foundations and put an end to the rule of the successor to Peter!"[6]

The Spiritual Franciscans utilized Joachim's ideas in their controversies over the ideal of poverty. They conceived of themselves as the "vanguard of the third kingdom, the kingdom of the Spirit."[7] Social-revolutionary ideas came to the fore with the pseudo-Joachimite tract, *Super Hieremiam Prophetam* (end of thirteenth century), which criticized the papacy for resisting the coming thousand-year kingdom of peace. Two of the basic ideas of the *Super Hieremiam* are "a vehement anticlericalism and the steadfast conviction that the existing order in the Church and society will be overthrown by a radical revolution and that this order will be replaced by a kingdom of peace and justice. It is precisely these ideas which we find in Thomas Müntzer." Indeed, Müntzer "lauds the Calabrian abbot for his commentary on Jeremiah which he claims to know and to have read."[8]

The fourteenth century also expected the end of the world. The lay theologian Arnold of Villanova (*De adventu Antichristi*, circa 1288) expected the Antichrist to appear around 1378, a date that handily coincided with the Western Schism (1378-1415). The Franciscan Minorite, Jean de Roquetaillade, placed the start of the great persecution in the year 1365 and saw the father of the future Antichrist in Friedrich III of Sicily. Joachimite echoes are heard in the fantasies of renewal of the empire. The Spanish Dominican penitential preacher, Vincent Ferrar, wrote in 1402 to Pope Benedict XIII that the Antichrist would be born in 1403. Chiliasm became widespread in Europe through the Hussite movement that also propagated Wycliffite and Waldensian concepts of the Antichrist in the structure of the Roman church.[9] Hussite expectations of the end were

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[6]Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 58.

[7]Oberman, *Luther*, 59.

[8]E. M. V. M. Honée, "The Radical Reformer Thomas Müntzer (c. 1489-1525): The Impact of Mystical and Apocalyptical Traditions on his Theological Thought" in Michael Wilks, editor, *Prophecy and Eschatology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 68. Honée refers to Marjorie Reeves' detailed description of this tract in her *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

[9]One may see Milan Opocenský, "Eschatology and Social Transformation: The Legacy of the First Reformation," *Brethren Life and Thought* 36 (Spring 1991): 92-101; Milic of Kromeriz (died 1374), *The Message for the Last Days. Three Essays from the Year 1367*, edited by Milan Opocenský and Jana Opocenská (Geneva: World Alliance of

chiliastically expressed by the Taborites already in 1419. The old world was expected to end in 1419, and Christ would return in 1420.

By the second half of the fifteenth century the threat of the Turks increased eschatological anxiety. In the context of widespread insecurity, the old prophecies gained new attention in astrological forecasts as well as artistic productions. The most famous artistic depiction, but by no means the only one, is Dürer's *Apocalypse* series that appeared in 1498. "It is a dramatic sequence—oppressive, alarming in its reality, heralding disaster.... [Dürer] ventured to depict never seen, unimaginable things, events outside space and time, thunder and lightning, conflagrations and voices—the alleluias of the blessed and the despairing groans of the damned."[10]

In 1507 Josef Grünpeck published his *Neuen Auslegung der seltsamen Wunderzeichen* that included a woodcut depicting recently seen heavenly signs of the near end of the world. In the upper right of the picture a knight, the rider of the Apocalypse, leads an army flying over a walled city. Lances fly in all directions; a pillar topples from the upper left corner, and stones fly through the air; crosses, monstrances, flagellants' whips, as well as the instruments of Christ's passion, are also falling from the sky past the sun surrounded by rings. These signs of suffering and martyrdom accompany the vision of war breaking out in heaven. In the bottom half of the picture a flood endangers the city; a peasant hangs from a tree; a woman kills her suckling child so that it may not suffer the coming terror; and the bodies of suicides drape rocks. The picture leaves no doubt that the end is near.[11]

Such images of the collapse of the usual order of life increase in number around 1500. The anxieties and yearnings expressed in these images often focus on the clergy, the traditional supporters and defenders of order, who themselves turn out to be the source of disorder. Thus the clergy are

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Reformed Churches, 1998). The relationship of Taborite apocalypticism and Thomas Müntzer is examined by Reinhard Schwarz, *Die apokalyptische Theologie Thomas Müntzers und der Taboriten* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977).

[10]Karl-Adolf Knappe, *Dürer: The Complete Engravings, Etchings, and Woodcuts* (Seacaucus, New Jersey: Wellfleet Press, n. d.), xxi.

[11]Han-Jürgen Goertz, *Antiklerikalismus und Reformation: Sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1995), 7. One may also see Paul A. Russell, *Lay Theology in the Reformation: Popular Pamphleteers in Southwest Germany 1521-1525* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 47.

transformed into beasts and monsters. The pope appears as a monstrous multiple image: part ass, part whore, part scaly animal, part griffin. He is no longer the representative of Christ on earth, but rather the Antichrist who sits in the inner sanctum of Christendom. Later, the Cranach workshop will repeat these images in the woodcut series of the "Papal Ass of Rome"[12] and the *Passional Christi et Antichristi* series of woodcuts (1521). The Cranach woodcuts for Luther's Bible translations, especially the Apocalypse series, powerfully expressed his views of the papacy by placing the triple crown on the heads of the beast (Revelation 11; 16) and the harlot (Revelation 17).[13]

This is an appropriate place to pause for a brief reflection on the charge that scatology displaced eschatology in the old Luther. Referring to Luther's vehement anti-papal tract, *Against the Roman Papacy, Instituted by the Devil*,[14] Gordon Rupp remarked: "Somewhat reminiscent of Cochlaeus's attack on Luther in 1529, argument is swallowed up in scurrility, though in this case scatology takes the place of eschatology."[15] More recently Mark U. Edwards concluded: "The older Luther was a man who saw the world engaged in a metaphysical struggle between good and evil. He was a man gripped by apocalyptic hopes and fears; . . . So as his own death neared, bringing with it both promised relief and fear for the fate of the movement after his death, he became ever more pessimistic, praying not only for his own release but for the end of the

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[12]One may see *WA* 11:357.

[13]The protest of Duke George of Albertine Saxony led to the reduction of the triple crown to a single crown in Luther's "December Testament." But Duke George's court secretary, Jerome Emser, bought the woodcuts from Cranach for his own Bible intended to compete with Luther's; these woodcuts included other polemical scenes directed at the Roman Church. The woodcuts also influenced monumental frescoes in the Greek Orthodox monasteries of Athos, Greece—in a community that did not recognize the Apocalypse as canonical. Winfried Vogel, "The Eschatological Theology of Martin Luther. Part II: Luther's Exposition of Daniel and Revelation," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 25 (Summer 1987): 196-198.

[14]*LW* 41: 263-376; *WA* 54: 206-99.

[15]Gordon Rupp, "Luther Against 'The Turk, The Pope, And The Devil'" in Peter Newman Brooks, editor, *Seven-Headed Luther: Essays in Commemoration of a Quincentenary 1483-1983* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 270. Rupp adds: "The odd thing is that when Lukas Cranach drew a set of obscene illustrations to accompany the text, Luther was genuinely shocked, a spontaneous and almost old-maidish reaction, as we learn from his letters to intimate friends. But there it is, a repulsive document."

world."[16] Heiko Oberman, however, argues that Luther's language reflects neither the crudities of the time nor senility and the rantings of an aging, disappointed man, but is rather what a rhetorician may term "frank speech," that is, "exposure by confrontation." Luther's ferocious language "has the double purpose of unmasking the devil and shouting to God (*clamare, schreien*), so loud that he will intervene to skin the devil and expose him for all to see." Oberman asserts that "we will fail to grasp his [Luther's] self-understanding if we do not see him as emerging from the beginning of his public career onward as the apocalyptic prophet at the end of time, placed in the increasing power struggle between God and the devil."[17]

Oberman's argument is an important contribution to current debates on Reformation historiography, but it should not obscure the fact that all early Reformation preaching was imbued with eschatology. Bernd Moeller's examination of Reformation sermons claims they were "battle cries" in the widely perceived eschatological situation. In the presence of this sense of the nearness of the Kingdom of God, preachers depicted Roman opposition as anti-Christian. Moeller goes on to state that "Heiko Oberman's theory that Luther's eschatological orientation sets him apart from the rest of the Reformation finds no support in our texts, and so cannot be confirmed for this early period."[18]

Returning to images, a particularly impressive figure that developed during the Hussite revolt is a seven-headed beast with an enormous insect body embracing the dignitaries of the church, holding prisoner the pope, cardinals, and bishops. In another image this beast is shoved into the jaws of hell by a pious man. Here the pope is not the prisoner of the beast but rather is incorporated into the body of the beast—in a

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[16]Mark U. Edwards, *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics 1531-46* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 208. One may also see his chapter five: "Apocalyptic Expectations: The Scourge of God." For Edwards' discussion of *Against the Papacy at Rome*, one may see 182-200.

[17]Heiko A. Oberman, "Teufelsdreck: Eschatology and Scatology in the 'Old' Luther," in his *The Impact of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 64-65. For further discussion of Luther's scatological language one may see Josef Schmidt, "Luther the Satirist: Strategies and Function of His Satire" in Gerhard Dünnhaupt, editor, *The Martin Luther Quincentennial* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985), 32-47.

[18]Bernd Moeller, "What Was Preached in German Towns in the Early Reformation?" in Dixon, *The German Reformation*, 44.

Kafkaesque metamorphosis. The threatened change of the world is interpreted by the perverse change of the body.

Another aspect often present in these images is noteworthy. Women attack cardinals, bishops, priests, and monks, beating them with flails, pitchforks, and sticks; they throw water on them, and children throw stones at the clergy who are already on the ground. What kind of clergy are they who allow the weaker sex to beat them? In the words of Lucas Cranach the Elder in 1537: Everything has gotten out of hand. This is "the world turned upside down." In another of Grünpeck's tracts (*Ein spiegel der natürlichen himmlischen und prophetischen sehungen all trübsalen, angst und not*), published in 1508, there is an image of an upside-down church, resting on its steeple. The church contains peasants celebrating Mass at the altar; outside in the field, nobles and clergy are plowing. The order of estates is reversed when the church is upside down. The image is not a description of the present, but the terrifying vision of the future. But such pictures are ambivalent. On the one hand, they lament the relationships which could be destroyed, and on the other hand, they nourish the dream of retributive justice on earth.[19] The virulent anticlericalism of late medieval apocalypticism and chiliasm provided a potent brew for the *Schwärmer* of the sixteenth century.[20]

## Reformation

Even our brief comments illustrate the profound impact of the church's eschatology upon the people. To be sure, these images convey social and ecclesiastical criticism, but what gives them so much power is the encounter with the judging Christ, not only at death but also at the Last Day, perceived so imminent in the terrible signs and events of the times. Exactly this conception of judgment profoundly disturbed the thoughts and conscience of the Augustinian Eremite, Martin Luther. He confessed his fearful anxiety of the last judgment in his 1545 autobiographical reminiscence. The great decisive turn in his theology, the so-called

[19]Goertz, *Antiklerikalismus*, 9-10.

[20]Klaassen, *Living at the End*, 17: "Joachim had made much of the fact that the spiritual men could be taught directly by God and would in fact flee from what was then regarded as knowledge. This note began to increase in volume, in considerable part because popular prophetism was profoundly anticlerical. It led ultimately to the conclusion that when simple people began to speak for themselves and provide their own answers to the questions of faith, the endtime had arrived."

"Tower Experience," occurred precisely in relation to the last judgment. His discovery of the gospel basically changed his view of Christ's return and the last judgment. He now understood Christ's return and judgment as the joyous redemption of Christ's believing community. He could now unreservedly long for and pray: "come, dear last day."[21] In Luther's theology, eschatology functions to proclaim the gospel in a new key; it is to "strengthen our faith and to awaken our hope for the blessed day of our salvation." His commentary on Daniel does not end in despair, but with joyful anticipation of the "promised and certain" future return of our Savior Jesus Christ as a "blessed and glad salvation from this vale of misery and woe."[22] This is pastoral care at its best!

Leading contemporary Luther scholars emphasize the inseparable and intimate connection of eschatology and justification in Luther's biography and theology.[23] "Since in Reformation thinking justification is the *unconditional* acceptance of the sinner, for Christ's sake and not because of any previous, present or future quality in his life and morals, and is always founded outside of us in God himself—since that is the case, justification acquires an eschatological meaning in the Reformation that is foreign to it in Catholic theology."[24]

In Luther's doctrine of justification, the concept of death and the last judgment are of fundamental significance. Justification is received here and now, but will receive its full realization in the moment of judgment

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[21]Ole Modalsli, "Luther über die Letzten Dinge," in Helmar Junghans, editor, *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526 bis 1546*, 2 volumes (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983), 1: 331.

[22]Vogel, "Luther's Eschatological Theology," 188-189 with reference to *WA* DB 11/2: 50; 130.

[23]One may see George Forell, "Justification and Eschatology in Luther's Thought" in his *Martin Luther, Theologian of the Church. Collected Essays*, edited by William R. Russell (Saint Paul: Luther Seminary, 1994), 37-47. Forell's essay provides a review of the literature on the topic up to the late 1960s. Bernhard Lohse, *Luthers Theologie in ihrer historischen Entwicklung und in ihrem systematischen Zusammenhang* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 345-356; Oberman, *Luther*, passim; Oswald Bayer, "Rupture of Times: Luther's Relevance for Today," *Lutheran Quarterly* 13 (Spring 1999): 34-50; Oswald Bayer, *Schöpfung als Anrede: Zu einer Hermeneutik der Schöpfung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1986), 140-154; Ulrich Asendorf, *Eschatologie bei Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 36-48, 124-28.

[24]Berndt Hamm, "What Was the Reformation Doctrine of Justification?" in C. Scott Dixon, editor, *The German Reformation: The Essential Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 73.

before the eternal God. "Luther's stance toward death and judgment is therefore the touchstone of his biography as well as his theology for the truth and genuineness of all statements. A theology which does not include this horizon of the end-time in its reflections, misses the truth of the gospel as well as also the reality of human existence."[25] In this light, Luther rethought the whole of theology. Luther did speak of the immortality of the soul, but not in the sense of Hellenists and scholastics. Rather, Luther's argument for the immortality of the soul is strictly theological: God is the God of the living. "When we are dead, we are nevertheless not dead to God. For he is not a God of the dead, but rather the God of Abraham, etc., who are living, as Mt. 22:32 says, they are not dead but live to me."[26] "He [God] speaks however only to men. Thus where and to whom God always speaks, be it in wrath or in grace, he is certainly immortal. The person of the speaking God and the Word make clear that we are such creations with whom God wills to speak into eternity and in an immortal manner."[27] Luther is convinced that because God has created persons and speaks with them, the relationship between God and persons never ends. In the center of Luther's thought stands the view that community with God and with Christ does not cease through death, not because the human soul has an eternal essence, but rather because God has created man and speaks with him.

Death and judgment are connected. Here, however, Luther parts with the tradition that expects the last judgment at the end of history. In *Anfechtungen* he had already experienced *Angst* and terror before the last judgment, but with the discovery of the gospel he can rejoice over the last judgment and pray: "Come, [dear last] judgment, Amen."[28] On the basis of John 3:18, "Whoever believes in him will not be judged," Luther was convinced that whoever believes in Christ already is delivered from judgment and need not fear the last judgment.[29]

Yet Luther often emphasized that all our earthly conceptions are inadequate in view of the situation after death. "Before God Adam is as

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[25]Lohse, *Luthers Theologie*, 346. The following discussion of Luther's view of personal death and the goal of history depends heavily upon Lohse, 346-356.

[26]*WA* 37: 149,19-21.

[27]*WA* 43: 481, 32-35.

[28]*WA* Br 9 Nr. 3512, 17.

[29]*WA* 47: 102, 19-33.

present as the last man."[30] Thus Luther speaks of the abolition of time not only in view of personal subjective awareness, but also in view of God's eternity. Space and time are our categories and world, and these categories are not valid in view of God's eternity. The last judgment is an event that, on the one hand, occurs at the end of time, and on the other hand, occurs for every individual already after his death.

Not only the individual, but also history as such, proceeds toward an end. The expectation of the end of history belongs essentially to the Christian faith since the early church. Eschatology thus is not individualistic—though it is certainly personal!—but relates to the kingdom of Christ, the "mystical body of Christ."[31]

This lengthy treatment of Luther's view of the individual's death is generated in response to the recent popular Luther biography by Richard Marius, which presents Luther as a "catastrophe in the history of Western civilization" because he was obsessed by the fear of death. Marius presents a Luther so preoccupied with the terror of death that when not immobilized by profound depression he projected his fear unto others (for example, the pope, scholastic theologians, the peasants, the Jews) in deadly rages. "Luther," Marius wrote, "was preoccupied with death, and still more with what came afterwards. Luther said that the souls of the dead sleep until the day of doom. A never-ending sleep was the ultimate horror, the ultimate sign of the wrath of God, and nothingness the ultimate terror."[32] Luther said just the opposite. Luther summarized his view of death in his lecture on Psalm 90: "The law says: 'In the midst of life we are surrounded by death,' but the gospel reverses this sentence: 'In the midst of death we are surrounded by life because we have the forgiveness of sins.'"[33] Were Luther so terrified of death, it would be strange for him to reverse the medieval *dies irae* to an invocation of the *liebe jüngsten Tag* - "come blessed Last Day."[34] For the Christian, death

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[30]*WA* 14: 70, 8-71, 5.

[31]One may see Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 510.

[32]Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 484-485. One may see the review in *Lutheran Quarterly* 13 (Autumn 1999): 359-362.

[33]*WA* 40 III: 496, 4f: "Das ist vox legis: Mitten: Vox Euangelii: Media etc., quia remissionem peccatorum habemus."

[34]*WA* Br 9 Nr. 3512,17.

loses its terror and becomes "sleep" when received in faith; the last judgment loses its menace because it is the coming day of salvation based in justification. Thus with Simeon (Luke 2:29) Luther can petition to go forth in peace for his eyes have seen his salvation.[35]

Because Luther understands the justification of the sinner eschatologically-forensically in faith in Jesus Christ, he projects final salvation as always hidden in the life of the Christian and the church. "Where there is forgiveness of sins, there also is life and blessedness." Salvation is completely revealed in the eschatological future. In faith in God's promise the Christian anticipates eschatological salvation and passes through death to eternal life. All certainty about death depends upon God's word. Luther concentrates the conceptions of futuristic eschatology, which he shares with his time, theologically in the certainty that all who die in faith have their place in God's word and promise in Jesus Christ. They rest in Christ's bosum.[36]

We have seen that the later Middle Ages, as well as the early Reformation period, were partially characterized by an extraordinarily strong apocalypticism. Luther also shared, within limits, these apocalyptic convictions. It was above all Thomas Müntzer, along with various others of the "Left Wing" of the Reformation, in particular Melchior Hoffman and his followers in the city of Münster, who emphasized an apocalyptic chiliasm. As much as Luther continually referred to the imminent inbreaking of the end time, he still reckoned with a longer historical development: "I know full well that before me and after me the world remains and will remain."[37] Faith recognizes the signs of the time which are hidden from the world, but Luther did not accept calculations of its arrival.[38] Thus, for example, he rejected as lies and temptations the calculations of his student, Michael Stiefel, that Christ would return on October 19, 1533.[39] With the Augustinian tradition

[35]Lohse, *Luthers Theologie*, 352 with references to *WA* 35: 439, 2 and *AWA* 4 (1985): 78:229-231.

[36]*WA* 30/1: 316, 19f; *WA* 17/2: 229, 28; *WA* 43: 481, 32-35; *WA* 31/1: 456, 8; *WA* 43: 361, 3.19; Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen, "Luther II," TRE: 560.

[37]*WA* Br 1, Nr. 177, 21f.

[38]*WA* 17/1: 148, 13; 10/1/2: 93, 21-28.

[39]Stiefel's (also spelled Stifel and Styfel; died 1567) interpretations of Revelation and Daniel convinced him that Luther was God's avenging angel chosen to reveal the treacheries of the Antichrist. In his later years his numerological interests contributed

of the church, Luther rejected chiliasm.[40] He does not interpret Revelation 20 as eschatological but as church historical. In his *Supputatio annorum mundi,* he interpreted the 1000 years of Revelation 20:3-7 as the time from Christ to the eleventh century.[41] After this, Satan did his foul work, and the papacy (since Gregory VII) became possessed by the Antichrist, who rules by the sword.[42] In this time of affliction for the church and authorities, Luther awaits—without temporal calculation—for the return of Christ and the "dear last Day."[43]

The appearance of the so-called *Schwärmer* strengthened Luther's expectation of the end time that derived from his view of the papacy. The pope, according to Luther, does not accept Christ and His word. Luther is convinced that thereby the Antichrist himself is present in the church, as the Bible already prophesies. Already late medieval polemics against Rome often characterized the pope as the Antichrist, but Luther provides a new basis for this charge in claiming that the pope wills to stand above God's word. Expectations of the end time were also stimulated by the danger of the Turks. In 1526 the Hungarian forces suffered disastrous defeat at Mohács, and in the fall of 1529 a Turkish ruler stood for the first time before Vienna. In the advance of the Turks, Luther saw a punishment of God, indeed a mobilization of Satan in the final conflict. Thus he could view the papacy and the Turks in common. "The pope is the spirit of the Antichrist, and the Turk is the flesh of the Antichrist. They assist each other in killing, the latter bodily with the sword, and the former by doctrine and spiritually."[44] On the other hand Luther rejected the concept of a crusade against the Turks. It could be that the end of the world comes by the Turks, but then the end of the Turks would also occur. One should not seek God's secret counsel, but should do what one is entrusted to do. When this occurs in faith, then one need not fear before

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to his works on mathematics in which he provided "original contributions relevant to the discovery of logarithms and the application of binomial coefficients." Richard Ernest Walker, s.v. "Stifel, Michael" in Hans J. Hillerbrand, editor, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4:112-113.

[40]*WA* 41: 121, 13.

[41]*WA* 53: 22-184.

[42]*WA* 53: 152-154.

[43]Zur Mühlen, "Luther II," 560. One may also see Vogel, "Luther's Eschatological Theology," 187-188.

[44]*WA* TR 1 Nr. 330.

the apocalyptic enemies - the pope and the Turk.[45] Thus Luther rejects speculation about the kind and manner of completion of history.

## Reformation: The "Fanatics"

As we have seen, Luther was well aware of the medieval apocalyptic traditions, and used them against the papacy, the Turks, and the *Schwärmer*.[46] The fanatics' pervasive apocalyptical and chiliastic convictions led them to view history more univocally as a fall than did Luther. Also their prime concern was not for the coming end and the union with Christ, but for the destruction of all sinners by God's judgment; above all the clergy of both the Roman and Reformation churches, as well as the princes. The representatives of such apocalyptic often identified themselves as figures of the final drama, co-consummators of the apocalyptic end time.[47] These convictions dominate the Zwickau Prophets, Thomas Müntzer, and his disciple, Hans Hut.

Melchior Hofman's apocalyptic conception, while not entirely independent of that of the Zwickau Prophets and Müntzer, had its own character. Initially a follower of Luther, he was nevertheless also imbued from the start with a medieval apocalypticism and spiritualism. He calculated the cataclysmic end of the world for 1533, to be followed by the establishment of the Kingdom of God. The mighty and the learned would be destroyed and the suffering poor in spirit would be saved. We need not trace the stages of his development that led to his incarceration in Strasbourg and influence upon the Anabaptist kingdom of Münster. However, that he was a precursor of the disaster in that city may be seen in his ideas that the godless must be destroyed before the last judgment, that Christ's Parousia will be preceded by a world-wide theocracy ruled by a new Solomon advised by his prophet Jonah, and that the "apostolic

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[45]One may see George W. Forell, "Luther and the War against the Turks" in his *Martin Luther*, 123-34, and Gregory Miller, *Holy War and Holy Terror: Views of Islam in German Pamphlet Literature 1520-1545*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Boston University, 1994.

[46]One may see Gottfried Seebass, "Apokalyptik," TRE 3: 280.

[47]John M. Headley, *Luther's View of Church History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 231, 232: Luther "never claimed the Reformation as his own work and instead emphasized how he had been drawn unconsciously and helplessly into the matter." "He lacked the immediate self-awareness of the prophet and always wished to have his person disappear behind his work."

messengers" will be invulnerable and invincible.[48] In Luther's mind, however, fanatics such as Hoffman and his followers, the upheavals in the city of Münster, and the Peasants' War all stemmed from the Reformation's poster child of apocalyptic chiliasm—Thomas Müntzer.[49] Again, we need not detail the tumultuous course of Müntzer's career to its torturous end after the battle at Frankenhausen in 1525.[50] Rather, we can summarize his self-understanding by reference to his self-description as the sickle and hammer of God sent to prepare for the kingdom by destroying all the godless.[51]

In his *Interpretation of the Second Chapter of Daniel* (1524), known as the "Sermon to the Princes," Müntzer proclaimed that "a godless man has no right to live." In the next breath, Müntzer sharply expressed the difference between his reform and Luther's: "But our scholars come and—in their godless, fraudulent way—understand Daniel to say that the Antichrist should be destroyed without human hands."[52] A year later he exhorted his followers to action in the Peasants' War:

> Show no pity . . . Pay no attention to the cries of the godless. . . . Go to it, go to it, while the fire is hot! Don't let your sword grow cold,

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[48]Klaus Depperman, *Melchior Hoffman: Social Unrest and Apocalyptic Visions in the Age of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), 384-390.

[49]One may see Gottfried Seebass, "Reich Gottes und Apokalyptik bei Thomas Müntzer," *Lutherjahrbuch* 58 (1991): 75-99.

[50]For the stories of Müntzer and the Anabaptist kingdom of Münster, see Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), chapters 6 and 8.

[51]James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1973), 81: "What gave such pertinence and urgency to the wielding of the Sword against the godless was Müntzer's certainty that he was living in the last days of the world and that his time would see the Church brought to a fulfillment even greater than the Church of the Apostles. The names he gave himself and Martin Luther were full of apocalyptic significance. Like Melchior Hoffman, he thought of himself as Elijah, the messenger of the Apocalypse, and two of his names for Luther ('the spiritless, soft-living flesh at Wittenberg [Jude Epistle]' and 'Virgin Martin, the chaste Babylonian woman [Rev. 18]' made his enemy into an apocalyptic villain whose coming had been foretold for the last days. Driven by the belief that he was the 'grace-filled servant of God' who must step forth to renew the Church by the bitter truth, he sought for signs from God in events around him. From 1521 on to the end of his life he lived in anticipation of a Judgment in which he would participate as leader of the transfigured latter-day Church."

[52]Peter Matheson, translator and editor, *The Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 248-250.

> don't let it hang down limply! Hammer away ding-dong on the anvils of Nimrod [the princes], cast their tower to the ground! As long as they live it is impossible for you to rid yourselves of the fear of men. One cannot say anything to you about God as long as they rule over you. Go to it, go to it, while it is day! God goes before you; follow, follow![53]

Müntzer understood himself to be the sickle with which Christ will complete the last judgment (Revelation 14:15: "And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice . . . 'Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.'") and the hammer that shatters the rock (Jeremiah 23:29: "Is not my Word like a fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that shatters the rock?"). The sickle is an ambivalent symbol that refers to death and the consequent new life. It recalls, on the one hand, the temporal limitations of all existence. On the other hand, the sickle creates room for new growth for it allows the roots and seeds to remain. Also the sickle of the waxing moon as the female counterpart to the sun might refer to fruitfulness, especially in relation to the mother Mary enthroned. The sickle thus belongs to the apocalyptic signs of finality and eternity as well as death and life. The symbol of the sickle underscores the necessity of a complete development of apocalyptic. Similar ambivalent connotations relate to the hammer. It is an instrument of powerful destruction and also of construction.[54]

The difference between Luther's and Müntzer's self-perceptions as reformers is illustrated by the artwork of their followers. A woodcut from the Cranach workshop shows God the Father sending one angel with a sickle to harvest the wheat and another angel with a knife to harvest the grapes. The apocalyptic event is presented through the angel as an invisible, spiritual event. This image of the angel as harvester corresponds with Luther's understanding of Scripture wherein the harvest, according to Daniel 8:25, will take place without "human hands."

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[53]Matheson, *Müntzer*, 141-142. In the last phase of the Peasants' War, Müntzer referred to himself as the "sword of Gideon" (Judges 6-9). The Münsterites also believed themselves called by their baptism (one may see Ezekiel 9:4-11) to be executioners of the godless. One may see Klaassen, *Living at the End*, 110-111.

[54]Dieter Fauth, "Apokalyptik in der frühen Reformation," *Entwurf* 2 (September 1997): 49.

However, the Nuremberg Dürer student, Bartel Beham, one of the three so-called "godless painters" of Nuremberg, depicted the angel of Revelation 14:14-20, sent to earth to carry out the apocalyptic judgment of God, as a peasant in his woodcut for an edition of the New Testament of 1524. Thus he gave social concreteness to the image. In 1524, when Beham was creating his woodcut, Müntzer was also in the city. At the beginning of 1525, Beham was expelled from the city because he had read Müntzer's writings.[55] Already by 1521 Müntzer had connected apocalyptic and harvest symbolism from Revelation 14. He wrote to the Bohemians: "O ho, how ripe the rotten apples are! O ho, how rotten have the elect become! The time of harvest has come! That is why he himself [God] has hired me for his harvest. I have sharpened my sickle, . . . I call down curses on the unbelievers."[56] The work with the sickle is, according to Müntzer, to be realized in a two-fold way: Internally in studying "the living Word of God," as it works in one's soul, for example in dreams; externally, by fighting the enemies of God and destroying them. In fact, scythes and sickles were the weapons of the rebels. Like Müntzer, Beham grasped the entire Peasants' War as the apocalyptic work of God. Their views of apocalyptic coincided with the conviction that this was a "Holy War."[57] Beham and Dürer stood under the influence of Müntzer with regard to the Peasants' War, which he characterized as the apocalyptic end time event. Müntzer compared the present time to that of humankind before the flood. No one is prepared for the deluge to come for there is as little faith now as during the time of Noah. Dürer described and painted—in watercolor!—an apocalyptic dream he had five days after the battle of Königshofen/Franken (June 2, 1525):

> In the year 1525, on the Wednesday night after Pentecost, I saw in my sleep this vision of great amounts of water that fell from heaven. The first deluge hit the earth about four miles from me with such dreadfulness, with a huge thunderous gush and drowned the whole countryside. I was so terrified that I awoke before the other water fell. And the water that fell there was so much. And some of it fell farther away, some nearer. And it rose so high that it appeared as in slow motion. But as the first water hit the ground came nearer it fell with such speed, with wind and roar that I was so terrified that my

[55]Fauth, "Apokalyptik," 51.
[56]Matheson, *Müntzer*, 370-71.
[57]Fauth, "Apokalyptik," 51.

> whole body was shaking as I awoke and for a long time I could not stop shivering with fear. But when I arose in the morning, I painted it as I had seen it. God changes all things for the best.[58]

Müntzer relied on Matthew 24:1-2, Daniel 7, and Revelation 6 as central apocalyptic biblical texts with their symbols and concepts of suffering, martyrdom, "high time," fire, sword, hammer, anvil, and throne. He expected his faithful to become God's martyrs. According to Revelation 20:4-6, the martyrs shall reign with Christ at the end of time in a thousand-year interim kingdom. In Revelation 7:9-14 they pray before the divine throne to which the counter image is the throne of the godless. The hammer ringing on the anvil of the smithy of a new "high time" in the figure of the legendary Israelite army leader Nimrod shall encourage the faithful by an apocalyptic scenario to change their religious and social situation as the oppressed. In these citations Müntzer fused biblical-apocalyptic symbols with biographical implications. The vocation of minter from which Müntzer's name derived was depicted in the sixteenth century with hammer and die. All told, Müntzer's correspondence shows how he applied apocalyptic biblical texts and symbols directly to his own life relations as well as to his followers. When Beham presented the peasant as the angel executing apocalyptic judgment upon the earth he reflected Müntzer's convictions.

## Conclusion

The fact that in Luther's eyes the world is old and close to its end did not prompt personal despair or a flight from social responsibility or social ethics. The relevance of Luther's eschatology to life in the world is that it frees discipleship and ethics from the contingencies of success. Christians are free to sin boldly because neither their futures nor that of the world are dependent upon the results of their actions. As Luther put it: a cow gives milk because that is what she is made for. This perspective calls into question Robin Barnes' conclusion in his study of Lutheran apocalypticism. Barnes claims that Lutheran apocalypticism

> did tend to subordinate earthly hopes so thoroughly to the promise of the coming Kingdom that historical existence could be felt as a heavy and unwanted burden.... If the German idea of freedom has differed from that of other Western peoples, perhaps it may be

[58]Fauth, "Apokalyptik," 51.

> traced to a deep and ultimately gnostic revulsion against the reality of history itself, an impatient longing, often inspired but often misdirected for the Kingdom of God.[59]

To the contrary, it was the spirituality of both medieval monasticism and the *Schwärmer* that advocated ascetic rejection of the world. Such a distortion of eschatology is a "thanatos-centric theology" that denigrates the goodness of creation and relativizes earthly solidarity and mutual assistance.[60] In contrast to Müntzer, who refused to rejoice at the birth of his son, Luther understood the eschatological promise as the presupposition and motivation for the creation. Hence the famous line attributed to Luther: "If I knew the world would end tomorrow, I would still plant an apple tree today." Although this is an apocryphal line, it colorfully sums up Luther's faith.[61] In 1525, Luther saw the Peasants' War as a sign of the imminent end of the world.

> During this ending of days, Luther perceived God's creative will and sought 'to spite' the devil by marrying and having a family. Luther's decisions for his personal life were signs of his faith in God the Creator amid apocalyptic storm clouds. 'If I can manage it, before I die I will still marry my Katie to spite the devil. . . . I trust they [the peasants] will not steal my courage and [my] joy. . . . In a short while the true judge will come.'[62]

This brings us back to our opening point that for Luther, eschatology is inseparable from justification. As George Forell puts it: "Luther teaches us that justification by faith without this eschatological dimension is subjectivistic and individualistic self-hypnosis. Against all those

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[59]Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the German Reformation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 266. Barnes' argument goes back to Weber. One may see the rebuttal in Hans-Jürgen Prien, *Luthers Wirtschaftsethik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 88-89; and Carter Lindberg, *Beyond Charity: Reformation Initiatives for the Poor* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

[60]Petr Pokorný, *Die Zukunft des Glaubens. Sechs Kapitel über Eschatologie* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1992), 97.

[61]One may see Martin Schloemann, "Luthers Apfelbäumchen: Bemerkungen zu Optimismus und Pessismismus in christlichen Selbstverständnis," *Wuppertal Hochschulreden*, Band 7 (1976), 5-24. Schloemann remarks that this saying became popular after World War II.

[62]Bayer, "Rupture of Times," 39, with references to *WA* 18: 277, 35 and *LW* 49:111-12.

theological efforts in our time which attempt to reduce justification to an essentially psychological experience, Luther insists on an objective event at the end of history. . . ." Luther's hope for a real death and a real resurrection ushering in a new age "is not merely a psychological transaction within the mind of the believer or unbeliever, but it is an act of God involving not only the individual but also the individual's community and world. Luther reminds us of the reality of the future as the guarantee of our present experience." Forell continues, "eschatology without justification by faith is mere utopianism. For Luther, it is not history which is redemptive but the Christ who came in history. It is because of Christ's justifying deed that we may have hope. This is as valid against the *Schwärmer* in Luther's time as against those who today see the historical process itself as the agent of redemption."[63] Chiliastic convictions twist utopias into dystopias which enslave and terrify in order to liberate society. Thomas Müntzer and the prophets of the city of Münster are classic examples of enthusiastic engagement in revolutionary terrorism and apocalyptic crusade that "soured into a quasi-criminal struggle for survival and vengeance."[64] In contrast, Luther was not chiliastic, but rather opposed all attempts to bring in the kingdom of God.[65] His theology of the cross stood against the triumphalism of both the papacy and the *Schwärmer*. Indeed, Luther perceived the papacy and the *Schwärmer* as two sides of the same coin of confusion of law and gospel. They were, he said, like two wolves with their tails tied together. "The Anabaptists and sectarians were the new jurists and sophists who . . . effaced in a new way the distinction between the two Regimente. Lastly, the Anabaptists, Sacramentarians, and papists were alike in their abandonment of the gospel for their own special revelations."[66] They all

[63]Forell, "Justification and Eschatology," 45-46.

[64]Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, 197 and following.

[65]Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 511: "Early Lutheranism . . . unanimously and logically rejected every form of chiliasm—open and disguised, courageous and cowardly. Chiliasm would like to assure the halo for itself without paying the necessary theological price for it." One may see the Augsburg Confession, Article XVII; Tappert, *Book of Concord*, 38-39. One may see, however, Heiko Oberman's argument (*The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 47-52) that Melanchthon shifted Luther's eschatology toward the "hope for better times."

[66]Headley, *Luther's View of Church History*, 250-51. On the papacy as "pure enthusiasm" one may see the Schmalkald Articles III: 8, 4-5; William R. Russell, *Luther's Theological Testament: The Schmalkald Articles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press,

wanted to "Christianize" the social order, purifying it of those who were not elect in their eyes. For Luther, "the gospel's *primary* function is not—as assumed today, and was indeed the case in the City Reformation—to change *obvious* injustice by introducing social legislation to establish *biblical* justice, but to unmask *hidden* injustice, thus saving the souls of duped Christians and opening the eyes of the secular authorities for their mandate to establish *civil* justice."[67] When the gospel is made the blueprint for society it becomes a new, more oppressive, and terrifying law.

Finally, as Gerhard Forde has made so clear, theology is for proclamation.[68] Luther's eschatology is proclamation at its best. The return of Christ shall defeat the Antichrist. Luther's eschatology thus functions as pastoral care. Here he took over the early church's view of the consoling function of apocalyptic. In this sense the book of Revelation may be described as the gospel in another key. In his 1530 Preface to Revelation, Luther's fundamental perspective was based in justification and the certainty of salvation. "If only the word of the gospel remains pure among us, and we love and cherish it, we shall not doubt that Christ is with us, even when things are at their worst. As we see here in this book, that through and beyond all plagues, beasts, and evil angels Christ is nonetheless with his saints, and wins the final victory."[69] So also Luther ended his Preface to the Book of Daniel. "Whoever would read them [Daniel's visions and dreams] with profit must not depend entirely upon the histories or stick exclusively to history, but rather refresh and comfort his heart with the promised and certain advent of our Savior Jesus Christ, who is the blessed and joyful redemption from this vale of misery and wretchedness."[70] Thus in contrast to the medieval fear of the Judgment Day, "Dies irae, dies ille" (day of wrath, day of mourning), Luther prayed "Maranatha"—"come Lord Jesus." The "blessed Last Day" is God's work of deliverance.[71]

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1995), 92-93.

[67]Oberman, "Teufelsdreck," 62.

[68]One may see his *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

[69]*LW* 35:411.

[70]*LW* 35:316.

[71]One may see Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 419-425; Bayer, *Schöpfung als Anrede*, 151-152; Vogel, "Luther's Eschatological Theology," 196.

# Death and Resurrection as Apocalyptic Event

David P. Scaer

## The Inevitability of an Apocalyptic Theme

"At the Dawn of the Third Millennium: Fanaticism, Eschatology, and Death" was an inevitable theme for the 2000 Symposium at Concordia Theological Seminary. The year 2000 is the best of all calendar possibilities: a new year, century, millennium. This homiletical privilege will be denied future generations of preachers. The downside is that calendar concerns in theology are an accommodation to the times and can be embarrassing. "Millennium" some have judged the most useless English word. Trendiness in religious matters is annoying. The New Testament writers paid no attention to such things. They were concerned with their message, not world events or, in this case, nonevents. When sermons say what everyone else says, the "otherness" of the gospel is lost.

## The Apocalypse: Doing Our Part

The December 21, 1999 CBS "60 Minutes II" defined the apocalypse as Christ's thousand year reign on earth (Revelation 20:2-6), which will begin when Christians are vaporized into heaven by the rapture. To arrive at this definition, the show's producers apparently combined the thousand year reign with the Apocalypse, the alternate name for the book of Revelation, where this reign is predicted (20:2-7). Contemporary apocalypticism, as defined by Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*,[1] involves three events: the establishment of Israel as a state, the capture of Jerusalem, and the reconstruction of the temple. Establishing an earthly Jewish kingdom was known during the Reformation and condemned by Augsburg Confession XVII.[2] Most Neo-Evangelicals make the success of

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[1](Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1970). At the present time there are five million (!) copies in print. Undoubtedly some have found their way into Lutheran homes.

[2]"Rejected, too, are certain Jewish opinions which are now making an appearance and which teach that, before the resurrection of the dead, saints and godly men will possess a worldly kingdom and annihilate all the godless," in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, edited by Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 38-39.

***Dr. David Scaer is chairman of the Department of Systematic Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, and editor of the* Concordia Theological Quarterly.**

Israel an article of faith.[3] The Ascension narrative that Jesus would return in the same way in which He left (Acts 1:11) has motivated some to prime the apocalyptic pump, apparently without success. Although Israel has allies in the likes of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, its military remains on alert to assure that no one establishes the millennial kingdom with or without Jesus—call this "synergistic apocalypticism." What God fails to do, the enthusiasts will.

## "Apocalypse Now"

An apocalyptic event is an extraordinary act in nature or history in which God brings His final condemnation on unbelief into the present. Such events are in the near or not too distant future and bring divine judgment upon those who have known and rejected the gospel. God's patience with unbelief has been exhausted. God's ordinariness in which He approaches us in the preached word and the sacraments is replaced by the extraordinariness of the apocalyptic, so that those who see these events are awestruck (Matthew 17:6; 27:54). Not every extraordinary natural or historical event is apocalyptic, but apocalyptic events are in every case extraordinary. Although apocalyptic events do not signal that God has written the world's final chapter, they do spell finality for that generation. The time of grace has come and gone; their *kairos* is over. An event predicted only for a distant future that no person living then will experience is not apocalyptic. Biblical apocalyptic events include the world's destruction by the flood (Genesis 6:11-17), Sodom and Gomorrah's incendiary end (Genesis 29:24-25), and Jerusalem's destruction in the sixth century B. C. by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:9). These Old Testament apocalyptic themes appear in Jesus' preaching. Anyone not heeding His Sermon on the Mount faces a watery apocalypse (Matthew 7:27). Capernaum will go the way of Sodom (Matthew 11:23-24). Coming destruction is like the flood (Matthew 24:27-38; Luke 17:26-27). His own death and resurrection will be an apocalyptic judgment against the generation that rejected Him.

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[3]The topic in 2000 for the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, which is scheduled for November 15-17, is "Israel: Past, Present and Future." Information taken from a letter of Darrell L. Bock of Dallas Theological Seminary, Program Chairman (December 1999).

### Apocalyptic: Beyond Law and Gospel

In spite of the terrors instilled by apocalyptic preaching, which necessarily precede the predicted events, apocalypticism is something beyond the law-gospel dichotomy. Missing is the note of hope, a virtue that the law implicitly promises in preparing for the gospel. The law's devastating diagnosis is not only preliminary to, but necessary for the solution provided in the gospel. Law is not God's retribution leveling the field with sinners, but an incision into the diseased soul to address the wretchedness of the human condition to lay it bare for the gospel's saving balm. Even if no one is capable of taking advantage of the law's conditions, its preachment is an act of divine mercy in preparing for a better future in the gospel. The law tells us about ourselves and the gospel tells us about the God who is love, loves the Son, and, in loving the Son, loves the world. Apocalyptic preaching does not describe the human condition, but God's coming—not in the mercy of the gospel but in judgment against unbelief. Unlike the law, apocalyptic judgment is not God's universal condemnation of sin, but His carrying out of a divine verdict against particular rejections of the gospel. Apocalyptic events are divine retribution on those who see but do not perceive and who hear but do not comprehend. Such acts hold out no promise of a future salvation (Matthew 13:14-15). Flood waters engulf the world, fire reduces Sodom to ashes, and Jerusalem's stones are left in an unreconstructable disarray. In the apocalyptic event there is no "tomorrow" for those who have rejected the gospel. Judgment against those who reject the gospel is as final as Noah's flood (Matthew 24:34-39; 1 Peter 2:5; 1 Peter 3:20). By the sacramental rainbow God pledges to spare the world from water, but not from all destruction.[4] Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction by celestial fire is a pledge of retribution against unbelievers.[5] God's chosen people no longer inhabit Jerusalem's precincts. A remnant is saved, but nearly all are eternally condemned. In each of Matthew's five discourses Jesus includes an absolute judgment on those hearers who refuse to believe Him and His words (7:21-27; 10:14-15; 13:47-48; 18:32-33; 25:41-46).

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[4]Genesis 9:16: "When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth."

[5]Genesis 19:24: "Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven." One may also see Matthew 10:15; Romans 9:29; 2 Peter 2:6; Jude 1:5.

Jerusalem is Sodom where Jesus was crucified (Revelation 11:8) and Babylon, which persecutes God's saints (18:18-24). She is forever forsaken (Matthew 23:37-38).

### Apocalyptic Motif in Luther and the Lutheran Confessions

Heightened apocalyptic awareness characterized several periods of church history in which the world's end seemed immanent.[6] Lutheran hesitancy to include a developed apocalypticism in its theology may have resulted from the fanaticism of the Peasants' Revolt and, in the present, today's neo-Evangelical preoccupation with Israel.[7] Luther lacked this sensitivity. He found himself living in the Last Days and his extravagant language in condemning the Jews and the papacy was apocalyptic.[8] Without this understanding, some have concluded that he was anti-Semitic and overly critical of the papacy. Melanchthon attributed the Reformer's hyperbole to a personality flaw, rather than understanding that Luther saw the events accompanying the Reformation as apocalyptic ones through which God was bringing a swift judgment against the papacy, the Jews, and the German populace for their rejection of the gospel, which God had allowed to shine through the Reformation.[9] The Last Days were at hand and alarms had to be sounded. Zwingli had fallen in battle. Charles V had sacked Rome. The outrageous immorality

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[6]In the third century Montanus predicted an earthly reign of Christ and had the famous theologian Tertullian as a disciple. Joachim of Fiore predicted the end of the world in the twelfth century. William Miller made the same prediction for the years 1843 and 1844.

[7]Lutheran theology either ignores the apocalyptic or relegates it to a distant and, hence, an untouchable eschatology. For example, Francis Pieper's three volume *Christian Dogmatics* does not discuss the topic and there is no listing for it in the index volume. John Stephenson does not provide a listing for apocalyptic in his index, but discusses the topic under "The Signs of Our Lord's Coming." He addresses aberrant interpretations of the passages that are most often seen as apocalyptic and directs his discussion to a future fulfillment of them. One may see *Eschatology*, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, edited by Robert D. Preus, volume 13 (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Luther Academy, 1993), 63-97. One may see note 43.

[8]See Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, translated by Eileen Walliser-Schwartbart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 292-97; Smalkald Articles, II, IV, 10.

[9]Oberman notes that in his funeral oration, "Melanchthon did not neglect to mention Luther's sharp tongue and heated temper, even though it was a time when profound sorrow called for the comfort of unadultered praise" (*Luther*, 10).

of the Anabaptist communities threatened to undo the Reformation and unravel the fibers that held society together.[10] Luther saw himself sent before the great and terrible day of the Lord.[11] The Formula of Concord saw removal of the gospel as final judgment.[12]

## A Missed Opportunity

Millennialism, the idea that a serene kingdom will be established on earth in relationship with Christ's return, belongs to our colonial heritage and peaked this century with President Woodrow Wilson's attempt to export the American dream with the League of Nations. Today societal millenarianism does not awaken that fresh enthusiasm that greeted the twentieth century. The timing is off. In theology, the precision of the moment counts for everything. Timing is a like a diamond cutter striking the right fissure. Wycliff, Savanarola, and Huss failed to be the reformers Luther became because the time was not ripe. A dawning millennial utopia in 1900 was followed by a war that brought apocalyptic horrors for the neo-Orthodox Karl Barth and the confessional Hermann Sasse.[13] World War II rekindled the fires of apocaylptic judgment. Christian Canaan lay in ashes. Her sons were dead. Paradise was lost. Then to accommodate Marxism, which fueled Communism, the theology of hope and then the theology of revolution in the 1970s used futuristic themes to promote political agendas. Through Ernst Bloch's futuristic philosophy, Jürgen Moltmann drank of Hegel's philosophy, which looked to the future for final solutions.[14] German theologians found a common philosophical basis to dialog with Communists. At first, the theology of hope was monergistic: God would deliver his people. On its heels came an impatient theology of revolution, determined to bring about heaven on earth with revolution, a method particularly attractive to some Latin

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[10]For Luther the devil was as much at work among the Anabaptists, the Sacramentarians, and the Zwinglians as he was among the papists. One may see Oberman, *Luther*, 229.

[11]Oberman sees the matter rightly: "In the tumult of the Last Days, individual qualities are lost in collective judgments and 'all who are not with us are against us'" (*Luther*, 229).

[12]*Solid Declaration*, XI, 57-58.

[13]"American History and Theological Nerve," *First Things* 99 (January 2000):72-74.

[14]Jürgen Moltmann acknowledged his dependency on Ernst Bloch, who was a philosophical Marxist. One may see *Religion, Revolution, and the Future*, translated by M. Douglas Meeks (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1969), 15-19.

American priests and in practice akin to the Peasants' Revolt and today's biblically motivated fanatics. These theologies no longer occupy the lead position in theology, upon which feminism has a weakening grasp. With the calendar as the *norma normans*, these futuristic theologies would have been perfectly suited for the year 2000. Had the theology of revolution been delayed a quarter century, it might have provided fanatical apocalypticism with a scholarly philosophical-theological base. In turn, the theology of revolution would have found willing soldiers to march under its banner.

### Jesus and the "Son of Man": Recovery of an Old Theme

An exception to the current scholarly malaise greeting the third millennium is the "apocalyptic Jesus." Bart D. Ehrman takes advantage of the millennium change to revive the theme that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet who expected deliverance by the "Son of Man." A revolutionary Jesus with an apocalyptic agenda of bringing the kingdom of God on earth is perfectly suited for launching the new millennium, but unfortunately, the theme is not new and hence without shock value.[15] According to this view, Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet looking to further His revolutionary movement with help from the heavenly "Son of Man," especially in delivering him from the agony of the cross. Instead, He died hopelessly.[16] Later, an anonymous early church community erroneously concluded that Jesus was Himself the "Son of Man." Without critically analyzing their sources, the Evangelists took this misidentification over into the Gospels. Since Albert Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical Jesus,* this surgical separation of the "Son of Man" from Jesus has been standard scholarly fare.[17] In the place of one Jesus as the Son of Man, scholars offer two figures: Jesus and the "Son of Man." The apocalyptic card has been played too often for Ehrman's *The Apocalyptic*

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[15]Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Chapter eight is entitled "Jesus the Apocalyptic Prophet" (125-140) and chapter nine "The Apocalyptic Teachings of Jesus" (141-62). The final chapter bears this title, "Jesus as the Prophet of the New Millennium Then and Now" (230-46).

[16]This theme of a revolutionary Jesus facing a hopeless death appeared in the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar.*

[17]Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1948).

*Jesus* to be startling. He serves leftovers with the elegance of a gourmet chef, but they are still leftovers.

### The Late, Notorious Bishop of Woolwich

A fascinating twentieth century figure was the late John A. T. Robinson, at first a Cambridge don, then Anglican bishop of Woolwich, and at Cambridge again at the time of his death. His deviations were a breath of fresh air in the world of the theologically predictable, whether it be of the orthodox or heterodox variety. If Luther's metaphor is the drunken peasant falling off one side of the horse and then the other, Robinson was like the pendulum of a fine clock set in an expensive oak casket, moving back and forth with graceful ease from outrageously liberal views to unforgivably conservative ones. Finding that others saw him as a theological elitist, he produced *Honest to God* as a popular introduction into the demythologizing and form criticism of Rudolph Bultmann and the neo-Orthodoxy of Paul Tillich and Barth and ushered in the "God is dead" theology of Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton. He was a progenitor of Joseph Fletcher's situation ethics.[18] If Jesus did not really exist in the way the New Testament said He did, and if God was so far away from us to be outside the realms of ordinary communication or so deep within the depths of human existence that He cannot be separated from it, then why not say so?[19] Robinson did, and for his generation God evaporated into a Barthian cloud and dissolved into a Tillichian fog. The bishop removed the "let's pretend" biblical dress from neo-Orthodoxy and laid bare its principles by taking them to their logical conclusions. He prepared the world in which a "God outside of us" and a "God inside of us" would no longer exist. Then the pendulum swung right. The bishop, now back as Cambridge scholar, published *The Redating of the New Testament* and *The Priority of John*.[20] These publications consigned the once darling of the left to the unredeemable right and eternally ostracized him from the fraternity of scholars. These books enjoyed no reviews, no

[18]John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

[19]Robinson could speak of God in the depth of non-religious experience. *Honest*, 62.

[20]John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976); John A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, edited by J. F. Coakley (Oak Park, Illinois: Meyerstone Books, 1985). He was diagnosed with cancer in 1983 at which time he was preparing this book for the 1984 Bampton Lectures. It was published posthumously (vii).

second printings. He was ignored – a scholar's worst fear – and set adrift on an ice flow headed for warm waters. How far Robinson backed away from his former views about God is not known, but for confessional Lutherans most Anglicans are among life's inscrutable mysteries. Their liturgical form rarely translates into orthodox belief. Clearly the bishop underwent a conversion, but it is hard to say what it entailed. Nonetheless, a conversion it was. Perhaps he died as a subordinationist like Origen or a semi-Arian,[21] but either fate was better than dying believing in the deity that emerged in *Honest to God.*

In *Jesus and His Coming* Robinson argued that Jesus expected the apocalyptic events about which He preached to happen in his own life time.[22] These included the Son of Man sayings, which saw His death as divine judgment. These sayings were delivered at the end of Jesus' life and collected in Matthew's final (19:1-26:1a) or fifth discourse (23:1-26:1a). The other Evangelists, including the fourth, proceeded in the same way. In His last words Jesus focused His predictive vision on His death and resurrection as the final apocalyptic event in which God would judge Israel for not believing in Him. Robinson is careful not to deny a second coming, but sees it as an extension of Jesus' coming in judgment by death and resurrection. "For Jesus, the messianic act would certainly not be exhausted in his death and resurrection. On the contrary, this moment would release and initiate the right of God in which *henceforth* the Father's redeeming work could be brought to fulfillment which hitherto it was denied."[23] He called it "inaugurated eschatology." Something different really did happen with Jesus' death and resurrection. After Easter, Christians projected His apocalyptic preaching into their future, but Jesus' future was His cross and resurrection. In recognizing the apocalyptic preaching of Jesus as a predictive description of His coming in judgment in His crucifixion and resurrection and not merely in a distant event world, the late bishop broke with the scholarly world in several ways. The need to date the composition of the Gospels after

[21]*The Priority of John*, 341-397. Robinson frames his Christology within the framework of contemporary scholarship, which requires detaching himself from Chalcedon.

[22]John A. T. Robinson, *Jesus and His Coming* (1957; reprint, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979).

[23]Robinson, *Jesus and His Coming*, 81.

A. D. 70.[24] was removed and he could reassign traditional dates to the New Testament. Matthew, and not Mark, was the first Gospel and may have been written as early as A. D. 40 and hardly later than A. D. 50. Paul's Epistles were written after Matthew and some after Luke.[25] This was revolutionarily unacceptable for scholars, but redemptive for *Honest To God*'s author. The bishop often traveled wrong roads, but he ultimately arrived at the right destination in seeing that Jesus saw His death and resurrection as God's vindication of Him.

### A Look at the Evidence

Martin Kähler noted that the Gospels were the accounts of the death and resurrection of Jesus with introductions. He was right. The Gospels are not level playing fields, but ascents culminating in Jesus' death and resurrection. As each Gospel progresses, implicit references to death and resurrection give way to explicit ones to prepare listeners for the actual events themselves. This is a reasonable, yet demonstrable expectation. Each Evangelist intends to make the final discourses authoritative, theological, and interpretative preludes to Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus is the interpreter of His own death. In addition to editorial arguments that the last discourses are about what God will do through crucifixion and resurrection, Gethsemane gives a rare picture into the mind of Jesus, who was obsessed not with a far off return, but with the agony of His death and its meaning in God's plan of salvation. We should therefore expect to find in Jesus' final discourses not predictions of a distant fantastic future, but parables of His death and resurrection—and we are not disappointed.

Millennialism, the belief in an earthly Jewish kingdom, relies on passages in Jesus' last discourses, especially Matthew 23:36 ("Truly, I say to you, all this will come upon this *generation*") and 24:34, ("Truly, I say to you, this *generation* will not pass away till all these things take place"). "Generation" is understood as a prediction that the Jews will remain a people until Christ's return; however, all Matthew's uses of "generation" refer to his contemporaries who heard and, in most cases, rejected Jesus, and not to the race of Jews.[26] These passages can no more be used to

[24]Robinson, *Redating*, 105-106.
[25]Robinson, *Redating*, 351-358.
[26]11:16; 12:29, 41, 42, 45; 16:4; 17:17.

support Israel than anti-Semitism. Jesus preaches in the style of the prophets so that the predictive word embraces the future through current events. Prophetic predictions were not verbal abstractions, but took on life in extraordinary historical occurrences or natural events soon to be experienced by the hearers. These occurrences then became the lens through which future generations understood the events they would encounter. Deliverance through the Red Sea held out promise of a greater future deliverance (Psalms 136). Nathan's promise to David that Solomon would build the temple (2 Samuel 7) extended to Jesus as the final temple, a claim for which He was sentenced to execution (Matthew 12:6; 27:40). Paul expanded the idea of the temple to include believers (Ephesians 2:18-22). Jesus saw Israel's history coming to reality in His time. In turn, Jesus' predictions fulfilled by His death and resurrection stretched into the future and shaped it.

Matthew conveniently gathers the crucifixion's apocalyptic signs in 27:50-53: 1) the shout of triumph; 2) the release of the Holy Spirit; 3) the tearing of the temple curtain from the top to the bottom; 4) the earthquake; 5) the splitting rocks; 6) the opening sepulchers; 7) the resurrection of the sleeping bodies of the saints; 8) their entering the "holy city" after Christ's resurrection; and 9) their appearance to "many." Add to these 10) the darkness covering the earth (verse 45); and 11) the first cry, which is described as a bellowing shout (verse 46). By two editorial devices the Evangelist ties the crucifixion to the resurrection as sides of one event: 1) the report of the resurrection of the dead is contained within the account of the crucifixion, but the resurrected saints appear in the "holy city" only after Jesus' resurrection (27:53), even though the complete account of the resurrection first comes in 28:1-10; and 2) an earthquake accompanies the resurrection (28:2), which recalls the one attached to the crucifixion or it may be the same one (27:54). Earthquakes, splitting rocks, and the four events connected with the resurrection of the saints are recognizably apocalyptic. Jesus' triumphant shouts are not those of a helpless victim, but of the victorious Immanuel, "God with us," who carries out judgment on the enemies of His people (1:23). Earth-covering darkness fulfills the prediction of 24:29, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken," and suggests the pericope in which this passage is located finds a full focus in the death of Jesus. His death is in every way *the* world shattering event. It defines apocalyptic.

The identification of events accompanying the crucifixion as apocalyptic is secured by the response of those with the centurion "who saw the earthquake and what took place [and] they were filled with awe, and said 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" (27:54; one may compare 17:6). In His crucifixion the Son of Man had come with power and glory, as He promised the high priest (24:30), yet gentiles (Romans) and God's covenant people did not recognize it.[27] Not only is the cross surrounded with these apocalyptic phenomena, but the cross itself is "the sign of the Son of Man in heaven" (24:30), the one apocalyptic event that spectacularly exceeds all others. Here Christ is lifted up and draws all men to Himself (John 12:31-34). The cross is an historical event—and more. It is proclamatory judgment against those who rejected Him and is appropriately accompanied by events associated with the Last Days. His executioners and all who reject Him "shall look upon him whom they have pierced" (John 20:37; one may compare Revelation 1:7).

There are two passages that are not generally, if at all, seen as christological references. Matthew 24:28, "wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together," is understood as example. Dead flesh attracts vultures, that is, people take advantage of bad situations. But does this meaning fit? The proper translation is "Where the corpse is, there the eagles gather." English translations temper the full impact of this passage by using body and carcase instead of corpse, and vultures instead of eagles.[28] The *sensus literalis* is more productive. Around Jesus' corpse gather eagles mounted as insignia on Roman military standards. Then follows the prediction of a darkness encircling the earth (verse 29) and the sign of the Son of Man (verse30), which is the cross. Another reference pointing to the cross as *the* apocalyptic event is 24:15: "So when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)." Scholars refer it

[27]To demonstrate his position Robinson also relies on John 3:14; 11:52 as Jesus being lifted up and drawing all men to Him (*Jesus and His Coming*, 172-173). The high priest and the Sanhedrin seeing the Son of Man coming in judgment is a promise that is about to be fulfilled, that is, in the crucifixion (*Jesus and His Coming*, 46).

[28]KJV, "For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together."ASV, "Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together." AS, "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather." RSV, "Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together." NRS, "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather." NKJ, "For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together."

to the setting up of the emperor's statue in the temple.[29] Understanding "the holy place" as the temple runs counter to Jesus' claim that He is the temple. Appropriately Christians transferred allegiance to Jesus and soon lost interest in the Jerusalem building. Also Matthew sees no redemptive value in the city that rejected Jesus (23:37) for whom its temple was no longer a "a house of prayer," but is "a den of robbers" (21:13). Jerusalem hardly qualifies as "the holy city" into which the resurrected saints enter (27:53). The Evangelist adds an instructive rubric intended *only* for the liturgical lector: "let the reader understand." Understand what? Abruptly the lector is alerted that "the desolating sacrilege" is something very important, arguably the most important something in the Gospel. This and the Markan parallel (13:14) are the only occurrences of this kind of rubric. The referent cannot be the emperor's statue. Jesus was as indifferent to the emperor as He was to the temple, as were the early Christians who were urged to honor Him (1 Peter 2:17). Why should Christians care if his statue were erected in the temple, which was designated for destruction and whose authorities continued to reject Jesus? If Paul can speak of the crucified Jesus as a curse for us (Galatians 3:13), then "the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place" can describe the cross placed in Golgotha. At the heart of Christianity is that Christ as *the* sinner is an abomination to God. This Jesus recognizes in the cry of dereliction: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (26:46). By adding "where it ought not to be" before "let the reader understand" (13:14), Mark provides a further interpretation that God ought not to be at Golgotha. But He is! "Let the reader understand." Not only is the fulness of the deity present and revealed in the ignominy of the cross, but it is only there that the sinner can find Him. Where Jesus contrasts "abomination" with "the holy place," Paul, in describing the cross, contrasts "folly" and "wisdom," and in it he glories.[30] Paul's fully developed theology of the cross clearly has Jesus as its source.

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[29]W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 3 volumes (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988-1997), 3:345-47. It is used to date the Gospels after the fall of Jerusalem in A. D. 70.

[30]1 Corinthians 1:18: "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Galatians 6:14: "But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

Absence of the Ascension in Matthew is crucial to understanding how he focused God's judgment in Jesus' death and resurrection. He does not move beyond the crucifixion and resurrection to the ascension as Luke does, who has two accounts of it (Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:1-6). By including angels at the Ascension, Luke sees it as theologically spectacular as His conception, birth, and resurrection, in all of which angels are prominent. Where Luke includes the promise of Jesus' return (Acts 1:11), Matthew has no departure and accordingly no promise of return. The one who is perpetually with His followers cannot return: "Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Judgment has already been carried out on those who knew that His promise to destroy and rebuild the temple was a reference to His death and His resurrection (27:63). His accusers knew that the charge that Jesus would destroy government property, which was a capital crime, was bogus (26:61). After they succeed in having Jesus crucified, they took steps to prevent a fabricated resurrection. When a real resurrection happened, they package it as body theft (28:11-15). Since His opponents fully understood that Jesus' parables spoke of His death and resurrection and then took steps to stop His program, they face certain condemnation.

Apocalyptic judgment plays a prominent role in all Jesus' preaching and is introduced by Matthew as early as the genealogy (1:11-12) and the birth narrative where the slaughter of the infants brings Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians into the present (Matthew 2:17-18; Jeremiah 31:16-17) and anticipates a greater one. God's judgment on Israel consummates in Jesus' death and resurrection, which together are two sides of the one divine event. Resurrection is as necessary as death and to locate importance on either side of the one divine act at the expense of the other does an injustice at one level to the biblical texts and at another to the divine plan itself.

### Neo-Evangelicals and Higher Critics as Allies

For neo-Evangelicals the apocalyptic passages point to Israel.[31] As a result, neo-Evangelicals have a vested interest in not identifying them with Christ's death and resurrection. At the root of this aberrant

[31]For a full discussion and refutation of the sectarian usage of the apocalyptic sayings of Jesus, one may see chapter 7, "The Signs of Our Lord's Coming," in John Stephenson's *Eschatology*, 63-97.

interpretation is not the nonuse or misuse of objective, hermeneutical principles, but a christological deficiency in biblical interpretation. Critical scholars are not likely to follow the neo-Evangelical conclusion that the final discourses point to Israel and premillennial return of Christ, but their historical-critical methods discount the miraculous and at best Jesus' resurrection is only a retrojection of the church's Easter faith back into His life.[32] Simply put, the church believed He rose from the dead, but as an event in history it is unprovable. Because His resurrection is historically problematic, His return is hardly immanent. Alleged predictions were read back *ex eventu* into the mouth of Jesus. The king's order to destroy the city of the invited guests who did not attend his feast (Matthew 22:7) is regarded as an historical allegory of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem.[33] This supports the majority view that the Gospels could not have been written before A. D. 70.[34] In spite of different methods and goals, conservative neo-Evangelicals and liberal scholars agree that the apocalyptic discourses attributed to Jesus are not His descriptions of His crucifixion and resurrection.[35]

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[32]Bart D. Ehrman uses the principle of what he calls "the criterion of dissimilarity." If there is any coherence between what the church preached and what is attributed to Jesus, then what is said of Jesus is biased and hence questionable. *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, 91-94. Bultmann used a similar method in demythologizing the Gospels.

[33]By placing the Gospels after the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70 scholars make it impossible for the apocalyptic preaching to be a prediction of what He would soon accomplish by death and resurrection. For scientifically valid reasons it seems improbable that the Mark 6:52-53 fragment dates from before A. D. 70, even though the debate over the date of this fragment is hardly concluded. Robert H. Gundry notes that higher critics who held that the Gospels could have only been written after the fall of Jerusalem could not even entertain the possibility that a Gospel manuscript might come from before this time: " . . . but under the usual dating of Mark the chronological problem remains, and higher critics are loathe to give up the *ex eventu* understanding of Mark 13:1-2, 14-23 that an earlier date [for Mark] would torpedo," "No *Nu* in Line 2 of 7Q5: A Final Disidentifcation of 7Q5 with Mark 6:52-53," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118 (Winter 1999): 698. Jesus was not the only apocalyptic preacher and there is no reason that He could not have predicted a destruction that seemed inevitable years before it happened.

[34]Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 43.

[35]If the scholars are right in positing late dates for the Gospels, then the question arises why the Evangelists failed to take advantage of the theological and apologetic significance of the destruction of Jerusalem in confronting an increasingly anti-Christian Judaism. Had Jerusalem already fallen when the Gospels were written, the truth claims of the new religion over the older one would have been proven. It would

## Bach Got It Right

Artists and composers are often better biblical interpreters than preachers and scholars. The doctrine of the universal priesthood means that the Scriptures are too important to be left to the often arbitrary and contrived hermeneutical rules whose authority rests on the orthodox pedigree of their proponents or the incessantly changing criteria proposed by historical critics. Artists have the advantage of placing on one canvas items and events that may take theologians several chapters to unpack. It is easier to paint the crucifixion and resurrection on one canvas belonging to one event, which it is for God, than it is to explain how the cross's humiliation is the moment of Christ's exaltation (John 17:11) or that the resurrected Lord remains the crucified Jesus (Matthew 28:5; John 20:27). Paul understood this (1 Corinthians 2:2). Similarly Peter's death glorifies God (John 21:19). In addressing the emotions with the intellect, composers involve more of the human nature. *A Mighty Fortress* sung rouses the troops for battle. Recited at the end of a sermon, it goes flat. Musicians have at least four parts that blend different themes into one unified message. Johann Sebastian Bach, the 250th anniversary of whose death was commemorated at the 2000 Symposium, could use two choruses and, hence, eight parts. He was Luther's faithful disciple, perhaps the most faithful one, in handling the themes of death and resurrection in his cantatas, such as *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit* or *Komm suss Tod* or *Christ Lag in Todesbanden*. His *Saint Matthew* and *Saint John Passions* concentrate on interpreting Christ's death chiefly, but not only, from a human perspective, which may account for its appeal even among unbelievers. Such devotees of Bach's passions do the Lutheran thing in taking the first step to God by approaching Him in the utter desperateness of Christ's humanity, but they do not take the determinative second step by stepping through an agonizing death into the redemptive and apocalyptic significance of that death. For Lutherans this is unintelligible tragedy. Bach recognizes that the Evangelists see Christ's death as the proclamation of His divinity and in this he sees what the theologians often do not. In the *Saint Matthew Passion* he includes the apocalyptic significance of the death of Jesus (Matthew 27:51-53) and he transposes it into the *Saint John Passion*. In this death scene the contralto aria introduces the *Christus Victor* theme: "The Hero from Judah hath triumphed in strength." Then the tenor Evangelist sings Matthew 27:51-

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have been the ultimate trump card.

53 with its ripping of the temple veil, the quaking earth, and the resurrection of the saints. All this is accompanied by running up and down on the keys of a harpsichord to approximate God's opening up the earth in judgment. In the *Saint Matthew Passion* this is accomplished by a bass fiddle. Inclusion of Matthew 27:51-53 into the *Saint John Passion* appears to be an alien intrusion into this Gospel; however Matthew's apocalyptic resurrection of the saints corresponds with Christ's words in John: "for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth" (5:28-29a). Robinson correctly notes this about John's description of the crucifixion: "In ['the single redemptive act,' that is the cross] God 'glorifies' the Son; in it Jesus is 'exalted', and ascends, and in it the Spirit is given. The Passion is the decisive, the eschatological moment, when the world is judged (12.31) and the end is reached (13.1) and all things are finished (19.28-30)."[36]

## Conclusion

A more detailed study of Jesus' final discourses as apocalyptic, interpretative predictions of His death and resurrection rather than that of far distant future events deserves more attention. The intent of this article is simply to introduce the topic within the climate afforded by the turn of the millennium and to indicate its possibilities for biblical interpretation, theology, and preaching, and to offer certain correctives.[37]

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[36]*Jesus and His Coming*, 166-67.

[37]Stephenson properly says "we must be careful to respect the genuinely prophetic quality of the New Testament teaching concerning the signs of our Lord's coming; . . . "(96-97). He also notes quite correctly ". . . to a great extent, many of the signs specified in the Olivet Discourse were already fulfilled on Good Friday, that is, within a week of our Lord's utterance" (97). This essay attempts, in a preliminary way, to show that Good Friday, at least from Matthew's perspective, was a complete judgment on the Israel of that time. There is no future. Luke and Paul focus on a cosmic judgment which is not different from the one made from the cross but a projection of it into the future. Recognizing that Matthew's perspectives are different from Luke's is the best antidote against neo-Evangelical and other sectarian obsessions with Israel and will provide for a far richer Christology than customarily found in Lutheran theology.

For this essay, I am in debt to Johann Sebastian Bach's interpretative music and John A. T. Robinson's courage to break with the scholarly flock and to understand the apocalyptic words of Jesus within the context of His redemptive death. Tribute is also due to the friendship of the Anglican scholar Christopher Stephen Mann, who opened a window of biblical interpretation through which I have only recently looked.

# Pietism and Mission: Lutheran Millennialism in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

## Introduction

A noted historian of Christianity in the United States assessed the influence of pietism in the following sweeping terms: "There is no area of American life which is free from our pietistic concern; none in which the pietistic attitude is not a significant factor."[1] Pietism is part of the atmosphere Americans breathe. Believing that style does, in fact, inform substance, it is not too much to say that pietistic practice has significantly formed the theology and practice of American Christianity.[2] As a distinctly American church, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod has also been formed in fundamental ways by pietism. While students at Leipzig University, the Walther brothers, Theodore Buenger, and Theodore Brohm, gathered together in what amounted to a pietistic conventicle to build one another up in the Christian faith. Unfortunately, they tried to do so on the basis of the law and only drove themselves to despair.

> The less a book invited to faith and the more legalistically it insisted upon contrite brokenness of heart and upon foregoing complete mortification of the old man, the better a book we held it to be. Even such writings we usually read only so far as they described the griefs and exercises of repentance; when a description of faith and comfort

[1]William G. McLoughlin, "Pietism and the American Character," *American Quarterly* 17 (Summer 1965): 178. McLoughlin also says (164): "It was this dynamic, sectarian form of pietistic perfectionism which lies at the basis of American civilization."

[2]F. Ernest Stoeffler, editor, *Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976); Randall H. Balmer, "Eschewing the 'Routine of Religion': Eighteenth-Century Pietism and the Revival Tradition in America," in *Modern Christian Revivals*, 1-16, edited by Edith L. Blumhofer and Randall H. Balmer (University of Illinois Press, 1993).

*Lawrence R. Rast Jr. is assistant professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, and associate editor of the* **Concordia Theological Quarterly.**

> for the penitent followed we usually closed the book, for, so we thought, this is as yet nothing for us.[3]

It was Martin Stephan's preaching of the gospel that finally pulled these desperate young men out of their pietistic self-absorption and moved them toward a biblical understanding of justification by grace through faith. There are no few comments by Walther throughout the years of his ministry, and by his students into the twentieth century that warn of the evils of pietism. Such admonitions, however, have been cast to the wind in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. In places pietism is held up as the model of Lutheranism. Not coincidentally, this move toward pietism has in large part taken place at the same time our church has anglicized. Where before there was a healthy concern over the errors of pietism, now we are directed toward pietism as a means of bridging the gap between Lutheranism and the American Evangelicalism. Pietism is a natural "touchpoint" between Evangelicalism and the LCMS because the LCMS has been "characterized" by "intense pietism" and "strict Lutheran orthodoxy."[4] Luecke claims that the twentieth century is characterized by a rigid orthodoxy expressed in a narrow liturgical practice that, in fact, does violence to the broader character of LCMS doctrine and practice. He hopes to "restore the balance," for pietism's "experiential contact has repeatedly shown its worthiness as a wellspring for new church life. It is

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[3]C. F. W. Walter cited in D. H. Steffens, *Doctor Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1917), 42.

[4]Luecke unfortunately bases this claim on the familiar thesis of Abdel Ross Wentz, long-time historian at Gettysburg Seminary and biographer of S. S. Schmucker. The thesis is simply that pietistic Lutheranism is *the* historical form of Lutheranism in the United States. Confessionalism of the type associated with the Missouri Synod is the late-comer to the scene as is therefore something of an aberration. Schmucker was unduly condemned by Midwestern Lutherans in the mid nineteenth century. Wentz's thesis is stated clearly in his *The Lutheran Church and American History* (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, 1923), and emerges as well in his *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955). Abdel Ross Wentz' son, Frederick, recently repeated this thesis in his "Birthright Americans: The Shape of the Muhlenberg-Schmucker Tradition," *Seminary Ridge Review* 1 (Summer 1999): 12-27. One may see Sydney Ahlstrom for a thoughtful, yet gentle, critique of the Wentz thesis. "The Lutheran Church and American Culture: A Tercentenary Retrospect," *Lutheran Quarterly* 9 (1957): 321-342. For a brief resume of Schmucker's theology and its contemporary influence, one may see Lawrence R. Rast Jr., "The Triumph of 'Schmuckerism,'" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 62 (April 1998): 148-151.

a style that has a rightful place in Lutheran theology and history."[5] Luecke conveniently fails to note Walther's stinging criticism of pietism mentioned above, which implicitly argues that pietism compromised the article of justification. Advocates of pietism in our midst have yet to come to grips adequately with the theological maladies of pietism.

## Historical Background and Chief Characteristics

While the term "pietism" has its roots in the seventeenth century, it was in the middle nineteenth century that historians became seriously interested in the historical development of pietism as a movement. In 1863, H. F. F. Schmid of Erlangen produced a history of the movement where he restricted the use of the term to the Lutheran communion.[6] He identified Johann Arndt as the proto-pietist or the grandfather of pietism, and the movement's official beginning was dated to the publication of Philip Spener's *Pia Desideria* in 1675.[7] Other interpreters noted the emergence among certain Lutherans of themes characteristic of the Roman Catholic mystical tradition and the *Theologia Deutsch*.[8] Finally, certain historians noted that a similar movement was materializing simultaneously with Arndt in the Reformed tradition and that Spener appeared to have been significantly influenced by this particular

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[5]David S. Luecke, *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance: Facing America's Mission Challenge* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988), 86-92.

[6]F. Ernest Stoeffler, "Pietism: Its Message, Early Manifestation, and Significance," *Covenant Quarterly* 34 (1976): 4. One may also see Albrecht Ritschl, *Geschichte des Pietismus in der lutherischen Kirche des 17. Und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1880-1886). There is vigorous ongoing historiographical dispute regarding the orgin of pietism. Stoeffler, the foremost English-speaking historian of the movement, largely finds pietism's roots in the Reformed tradition. For a different perspective, one may see Kurt Aland, "Philipp Jakob Spener und die Anfänge des Pietismus," in *Pietismus und Neuzeit*, Band 4 - 1977/1978, 155-189 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979).

[7]Johann Arndt, *True Christianity*, translation and introduction by Peter Erb (New York, Ramsey, and Toronto: Paulist Press, 1979); Johann Arndt, *True Christianity: A Treatise on Sincere Repentance, True Faith, the Holy Walk of the True Christian, Etc.*, translation and introduction by Charles F. Schaeffer (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1868); Robert A. Kelly, "True Repentance and Sorrow: Johann Arndt's Doctrine of Justification," *Consensus* 16 (1990): 47-69.

[8]Christian Braw, *Bücher im Staube–Die Theologie Johann Arndts in Ihrem erhältnis zur Mystik*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, volume 39, edited by Heiko Oberman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985); *The* Theologia Germanica *of Martin Luther*, translation, introduction, and commentary by Bengt Hoffman (New York, Ramsey, and Toronto: Paulist Press, 1980).

trajectory of the Reformed tradition. It remained for historians in the twentieth century to make the connections explicit. Among English speaking historians, the bulk of the work proceeded from the pen of F. Ernest Stoeffler and, later, C. John Weborg and Ted Campbell, thereby shifting the historiographical tradition.[9] Stoeffler and others have helped us to understand the multifaceted character of pietism by distinguishing a five-fold division in the movement: 1) Spener-Halle; 2) Moravian (Zinzendorf); 3) Württemberg; 4) Reformed; and 5) radical pietism. What they have also helped to demonstrate, although they would be unlikely to accept my strong assessment, is exposing pietism for what it is—an intrusion of Reformed and Mystical theology and practice into the Lutheran communion.

## The Character of Pietism

Stoeffler identifies four characteristics of pietism: 1) the radical religious renewal of the individual expressed in the *praxis pietatis*; 2) the biblical understanding of the living God as an ever-present and never-failing reality in the midst of man's problems; 3) the human support for the renewed life experienced in the context of the Christian *koinonia*; and 4) a sense of deliberate distinctiveness as over against not only the "world," but also the general membership of the churches of the day, whose attitudes and conduct were regarded as being often motivated by the spirit of the "world."[10] While a good start, Stoeffler's definition is incomplete. It requires the addition of at least fifth and sixth points. Pietism was also distinguished by a vigorous sense of mission. The story of the modern missionary movement has its roots in the narrative of pietism. Spener, August Herman Francke at Halle, Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, and Heinrich Melchior Muhlenberg all shared a central commitment to the spread of the gospel to those apart from Christ.[11]

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[9]John Weborg, "Pietism: 'The Fire of God Which . . . Flames in the Heart of Germany,'" in *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, 183-216, edited by Frank C. Senn (New York and Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1986); Ted A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart: A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991).

[10]Stoeffler, "Pietism: Its Message," 10. One may also see F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965); and F. Ernest Stoeffler, *German Pietism in the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973).

[11]One may see, for example, Arthur James Lewis, *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer: A Study in the Moravian Contribution to Christian Mission and Unity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962); Leonard Riforgiato, *Missionary of Moderation: Henry Melchior*

Secondly, some of the most vigorous millennial scholarship has its roots in pietism's "hope for better times" for the church.[12]

Valentin Ernst Löscher, in his complete *Timotheus Verinus*, captured the nature of the threat of millennialism as mediated through pietism.

> Wherever 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 some blissful events which the church will still experience, but also the imagination of a very great essential change; they think that the kingdom of the cross . . . and the church militant in this life will cease. . . . [Millennialists teach] that baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the kingdom of the cross will cease before the day of judgement.[13]

This paper will build on Löscher's critique and argue that his assessment of pietism was correct, namely, that by compromising the theology of the cross, millennialism of a pietistic stripe compromises the distinctive Lutheran doctrine of justification by grace through faith. It will do so by first briefly examining the development of millennialism within pietistic Lutheranism. It will then look at two concrete examples of Lutheran millennialism, Johann Georg Schmucker and Joseph Seiss. It will then conclude with some observations on millennialism's ongoing attack against the church.

## Pietism and Millennialism

While Spener had expressed a "hope for better times" in the church, other Lutheran interpreters took the issue much farther. In 1692 Johann Wilhelm Peterson "astonished his fellow Lutherans with an apocalyptic alarm,"[14] arguing that "the dawn of the gospel of the Kingdom is

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*Muhlenberg and the Lutheran Church in English America* (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1980).

[12]K. James Stein, "Philip Jakob Spener's Hope for Better Times in the Church-Contribution in Controversy," *Covenant Quarterly* 37 (August 1979): 3-20.

[13]Valentin Ernst Löscher, *The Complete Timotheus Verinus*, part one (1718) translated by James L. Langebartels; part two (1721) translated by Robert J. Koester (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999), part 1, 144, 147. One may also see Hans-Martin Rotermund, *Orthodoxie und Pietismus: Valentin Ernst Löschers "Timotheus Verinus" in der Auseinandersetzung mit der Schule August Herman Franckes* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1959).

[14]Stoeffler, *German Pietism*, 103.

breaking through with its shining splendor."[15] Johann Anastasius Feylinghausen and Joachim Lange both published significant enough works to draw the attention of Löscher. However, the greatest Lutheran proponent of millennialism in the eighteenth century was Johann Albrecht Bengel.

Johann Albrecht Bengel was born June 24, 1687 at Winnenden in Württemberg, the son of a Lutheran pastor.[16] He died on November 2, 1752. Bengel was enormously influential and is best known for two integrally related and mutually reinforced elements in his thought and practice: his work on the text and exegesis of the New Testament and his eschatology. Bengel was one of the first to organize manuscripts into "families," such as the African and the Byzantine. He also articulated a well-known textual critical principle: *Proclivi scriptioni praestat ardua,* "the more difficult reading is to be preferred to the more simple." His most famous exegetical work was his *Gnomon* (pointer), which was published in 1742. It was his intent to show from "the original meaning of the words (*ex nativa vergorum vi*) the simplicity, profundity, harmony and salubrity of divine revelation."[17]

Another of Bengel's principles was: "Import nothing into Scripture, but draw everything out of it and overlook nothing."[18] One of the ways that he sought to "overlook nothing" was to turn his attention very carefully to the topic of eschatology. Bengel's writings on eschatological themes included his interpretations of the Apocalypse, *Erklärte Offenbarung* (1790), *Ordo Temporum* (1741), *Cyclus* (1745), and *Weltalter* (1746). In these volumes, as well as in the *Gnomon,* Bengel gave himself over to flights of millennial speculation, culminating in his prediction in the *Ordo* that the Christ would return in 1836 or 1837.[19] While worthy of more serious study, we make only a passing note of Bengel in order to show that there

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[15]Löscher, *Timotheus Verinus,* part II:73.

[16]A fine, though brief, treatment of Bengel is Jaroslav Pelikan, "In Memoriam: Joh. Albrecht Bengel June 24, 1687 to November 2, 1752," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 24 (November 1952): 785-796. Much of the biographical detail in this section is drawn from this article.

[17]Adolph Spaeth, "Bengel, Johann Albrecht," in *Lutheran Cyclopedia,* edited by Henry E. Jacobs and John A. W. Haas (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 47.

[18]Konrad Gottschick, "Bengel, Johann Albrecht," in *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church,* edited by Julius Bodensieck, three volumes (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), 1:205.

[19]Pelikan, 790.

was, by the middle of the eighteenth century, a pronounced stream of millennial expectation and exegesis in pietistic circles. The popularity of his work, especially the *Gnomon*, provided an exegetical program for Lutheran pietism that would bear especially rich fruit in the United States. It is to two lesser-known Lutheran exegetes that we now turn, in order to discern the deep-rooted nature of pietism's influence on American Lutheranism in the nineteenth century.

### A Dive into Futurity: The Eschatology of J. George Schmucker

Johann Georg Schmucker was born August 18, 1771 in Michaelstadt, Germany, the son of Johann C. Schmucker. In 1785 the family emigrated to the United States, finally locating permanently in the area of Woodstock, Virginia. Interested in the work of the ministry early on, he began his ministerial studies in 1789 under the noted theologian and missionary, the Reverend Paul Henkel of New Market, Virginia. In 1790 he moved to Philadelphia and studied classics at the University of Pennsylvania and theology under J. H. C. Helmuth and J. Friedrich Schmidt. In 1792 he joined the Lutheran Pennsylvania Ministerium and served congregations in Hagerstown, Maryland and York (town), Pennsylvania. He was elected to the presidency of the Ministerium several times, and served the Ministerium in a number of other capacities. He took a significant leadership role (along with his son, Samuel) in the founding of the General Synod (1820) and the seminary at Gettysburg (1826). He edited *Lutherische Magazin*, authored a number of articles, and published several books. Among his books, the most significant is his commentary on the Revelation of Saint John, which was published in German and eventually found its way into an English translation.[20] He died on October 7, 1854.[21]

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[20]John George Schmucker, *Die Prophetische geschichte von den siegen Christi und Seiner Kirche* (Baltimore: J. F. Zetzener, 1843). The full title in English translation reads *The Prophetic History of the Christian Religion Explained, or, A Brief Exposition of the Revelation of St. John : According to a New Discovery of Prophetical Time: By Which the Whole Chain of Prophecies Is Arranged, and Their Certain Completion Proved from History Down to the Present Period: With Summary Views of Those not Yet Accomplished* (Baltimore: Schaeffer and Maund, 1817-1821).

[21]James L. Haney, "John George Schmucker and the Roots of His Spirituality," in *Lutheranism and Pietism, Essays and Reports 1990,* Lutheran Historical Conference, volume 14 (Saint Louis: Lutheran Historical Conference, 1992): 40-66; Beale M. Schmucker, "Schmucker, John Geo., D. D.," in *Lutheran Cyclopedia,* 432.

Schmucker's conviction of the near coming of Jesus provided the impetus for his eschatological work. With the tumultuous events of the French Revolution and Napoleon, along with his belief that the Order of the Illuminati were now running world affairs, providing the immediate context, Schmucker observed that "So corrupted is the present state of the world; so panting the vitiated heart of man for liberty, to follow its depraved inclinations without restraint or remorse." "The christian world has arrived at a very portentous period, full of great and alarming events . . . the end of the present form of civil and ecclesiastical economy is near."[22] Schmucker's pietism becomes quite evident when he articulates the goal of this study. The purpose is to teach what human beings need to do in order to be found obedient at the day of the Lord's return. It is every Christian's duty to read and study the prophetic portions of the Scriptures, but beyond that they must put the duties outlined there into practice.

> We are there also provided with particular instructions, annexed to each prophecy, by which believers may know their duty in every state of trial and discipline to which they may be exposed. . . . It is therefore incumbent on the people of God, with the faithful Boereans, to search the Scriptures, that they may know the signs of the times, and observe the particular instructions given for each period. . . The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children forever that we may do them.

While recognizing that he is in a long line of interpreters of the Revelation of Saint John, Schmucker notes that older explanations were necessarily in error due to the fact that "the signs of the times had not yet appeared."[23] Thus what sets Schmucker's work apart is the fact that it appears at the due time; that moment in prophetic history when the historic prophecies have been fulfilled and their interpretation has become clear. To put it another way, Schmucker has found the long-missing key to the interpretation of Revelation. That key will unlock that most elusive of human dreams "knowing the time when the end will come." However, Schmucker anticipates the criticism of certain interpreters who would adduce the words of Jesus, "But of that day and

[22]Schmucker, *Prophetic History*, 5, 3.
[23]Schmucker, *Prophetic History*, 7.

hour knoweth no man" (Mark 13:32). He argues that the words of the Lord in this respect do not refer to the second advent of Christ, but instead to the end of the world. These two events will be separated by the glorious millennium, and therefore, it is possible, with the appropriate prophetic hermeneutic, to determine the timing of Christ's return, though not the end. The unique contribution, then, of Schmucker's work is his prophetic chronology, which will reveal the very year during which the Lord's second advent will occur.

In this endeavor Schmucker is in no way alone. In fact, his perspective is in large part driven by the work of Bengel. Bengel's widely accepted chronology provided Schmucker with the authority to produce his own. In Schmucker's mind, Bengel has rightly pointed to chapter thirteen as the chronological key to the book. Where other exegetes of the Apocalypse have taken "a day in the Revelation to signify a year," Schmucker follows Bengel in distinguishing between "prophetic time" and "natural" or "common time."[24] Yet, Bengel's chronology is also flawed. Rather, argues Schmucker, one must rightly distinguish the times. Verse five in chapter thirteen (the forty-two weeks) speaks of prophetic time, while verse eighteen (the 666) refers to natural or common time. In other words, "if forty-two months give six hundred and sixty-six lunar years" then we can calculate exactly the length of a prophetic hour, day, week, month, and year (666 years of natural time equal forty-two months of prophetic time). Thus we end up with the following chronological key:

| *Prophetic Time* | | *Common Time* |
|---|---|---|
| ½ an hour chap. viii. 1. | = | about 4 days. |
| 1 hour chap. xiv. 15. | = | 8 days. |
| 1 day . . . . . | = | 196 days. |
| 1260 days chap. xii. 6. | = | 677 years, 97 days. |
| 1 month chap. ix. 15 | = | 13 years, 318 days. |
| 5 months . . . . | = | 79 years. 19wks. 1 day. |
| 1 year . . . . | = | 196 years 117 days. |
| 1 h. 1 day, 1 m. 1 year | = | 212 years 275 days. |

Thus, if one then proceeds from the appropriate starting date, one can come to the correct conclusion regarding the time of Christ's return.

[24]Schmucker, *Prophetic History*, 19, 22.

Again, Schmucker criticizes his predecessors, noting that they have proceeded from an erroneous date, namely A.D. 96, the time of John's writing of the Revelation. In fact, argues Schmucker, the proper date is A.D. 72, the year of the destruction of Jerusalem. At this point we already anticipate an error in Schmucker's calculations, given that he has the date of the destruction wrong. But he offers a disclaimer of sorts, arguing that, given the fact that our calendars are of some little inconsistency among themselves, and, therefore, his calculations could be from six to ten years off. That, however, does not stop Schmucker from adducing a date for the return of Christ: 1850.

Given Schmucker's unusual interpretive key to the Revelation and his bold prediction of a date for the return of Christ, we must now turn to the character of that return. Schmucker turns first to the "hallelujah" of the great choir in Revelation 19. Here, again, his pietism comes to the forefront. This choir, he argues, is composed of a special rank of believer, those who have "advanced to a higher degree of felicity and knowledge, by obtaining a more enlarged view of the government, measures, purposes and kingdom of the Messiah." Participation in this choir is not predicated, however, on a faithful affirmation of a particular confession. In other words, what one believes is not the basis for this advanced place in the divine choir. Rather, "this choir consists of a select number of Christians, from all denominations in all parts of the world . . . who are far advanced in holiness." Thus, those deemed worthy of the preeminent worship of the Lamb are those who have progressed the furthest in their walk of faith. Their works receive due reward from the Lord, for "they receive a special call from heaven, and an extraordinary out pouring of the spirit of Christ, by which they are animated and encouraged, to proclaim the commencement of his *Millennial reign*." They are the models of what the true Christian is, and they embody the biblical order of salvation; for they have heard the summons of Christ and have responded by giving themselves to the Lord who demands their obedience by their "free agency." "Christ espouses every individual member of his Church, when they first forsake the world, sin and Satan, and turn unto him by a thorough change of heart, upon which they receive many tokens of his loving kindness."[25] Here we see pietism in its most crass form. Justification is conditioned on the repentance and obedience of the individual who is confronted with the law of God.

[25]Schmucker, *Prophetic History*, 517, 519, 529, 521.

Sanctification, too, is a matter of human willing and distinguishes the advanced Christian from the nominal Christian. That is, while many profess to be Christians, only those who have progressed satisfactorily in their walk of obedience will receive the superadded gift of the Spirit and the right to sing in the millennial choir. He concludes:

> The bride of the Lamb then, is not the whole visible Church of Christ; nor any particular sect, party, or religious community in the world; nor even all who possess vital godliness and experimental religion. . . . It is a great number of a *certain christian character*, selected from all churches, who are particularly qualified for the Lord's secret and special purposes. This chosen number of saints are the bride, who is said to have prepared herself for her husband. . . . In a spiritual sense this figure may indicate the faithful and loving endeavours of the bride of the Lamb, to revive and exercise all her christian graces, in confident expectation of the Lord's second Advent, that she may be acceptable in his sight.[26]

Note well what Schmucker argues here. Human beings are acceptable to God not by the imputed righteousness of Christ applied to the sinner through word and sacraments. He explicitly rejects this notion. "Some have explained this as referring to the robe of Christ's righteousness imputed to us by faith, . . . But this cannot be the true sense here." Rather, argues Schmucker, humans are "qualified" on account of "a certain Christian character"; "that all who are here numbered with the bride of the Lamb, are truly experienced Christians, advanced in holiness." These Christians are like the five wise virgins of Matthew 25 who are the Lamb's "spiritual kindred" and "friends." What makes them advanced in holiness? Pietism's program predominates: for the true Christian participates in "Bible societies, Missions among the Heathen, Tract-associations, . . . Sunday schools, and revivals of religion," and they include "Itinerant preachers." No small component is their attentiveness to the word of prophecy. What has happened to Christ and his atoning work? In other settings Schmucker will talk about Christ's atoning death, but the benefits are always conditioned on the voluntary action of the willful subject in choosing to make the benefits of Christ his won.

[26]Schmucker, *Prophetic History*, 523 (Emphasis added).

Schmucker implicitly rejects Lutheran christology and sacramentology; that is to say, he has compromised the article of justification.[27]

At Christ's visible return the world will be revitalized (changed), though it will not be without sin. Schmucker's millennium is a 1,000 years of progress. It is a time when the mass of humanity will have the opportunity to advance in the holiness program of the pietists.

> All obstacles to the promulgation of the gospel among the Heathen will cease in great measure, and the grace of God connected with his word and ordinances, will have a free course, and develop [*sic*] its whole power and celestial beauty among the children of men. All saints will be more perfect, and virtue shall shine forth in her genuine lustre, and meet with deserving recommendation. Plans and enterprises, for the happiness of man and the glory of the Lord, will meet with more general support and suitable sacrifices from the citizens of Christ's kingdom and never want for divine tokens of approbation and success.[28]

While a theocracy will be established, Christ will invest the most qualified of His people with the superintendency and general responsibility for running the affairs of the millennial kingdom.

At the end of Schmucker's millennium comes the judgment. Here his pietism takes a dreadful and anti-Christian turn. For Schmucker, as we have already seen, has already compromised the article of justification. Those who will be judged approvingly by Christ and the saints are "those who accepted the Gospel invitation to repentance and faith in the atonement and redemption of Jesus Christ, and abode in him." Thus one's eternal destiny is predicated on the voluntary act of faith, which is expressed in a life of obedience. In a perverse twist, though, Schmucker even undercuts his missionary program. For in discussing those human beings who have never had the opportunity to accept or reject the Christ through no fault of their own, Schmucker notes: "There can be no doubt that charitable, well disposed and virtuous Pagans, who no opportunity to hear the Gospel of Christ, or to enjoy the benefits of the christian dispensation, will find mercy and further instruction in the world to come, but their happiness will be far below that of true Christians." Also

[27]Schmucker, *Prophetic History*, 524, 530.
[28]Schmucker, *Prophetic History*, 531.

included among those that are not of advanced holiness, yet qualify for the kingdom are children, the blind, deaf and dumb, Israelites and Jews, and, finally, Christians who have "long sinned against grace," that is, have not been sufficiently obedient. The millennium will supply the forum in which these may "acquire the necessary qualifications for the future theatre of action. These will there be placed in a state of moral improvement and discipline, in order to secure their constancy and mature their capacities for happiness."[29]

Christianity for Schmucker is a religion of obedience to the will of God. God's word legalistically provides the demands and conditions humans must fulfill, would they join the millennial choir that welcomes the returning Christ. Beyond the borders of the Christian faith, however, anyone who has, to the best of his ability, lived a life in accord with the will of God as revealed in the book of nature, qualifies for salvation. This is pietism taken to its extreme, and would very likely be rejected by the likes of Spener. Nevertheless, Schmucker purposefully claimed the pietist label as his own, and saw its practice as the true practice of Lutheranism.

### As the Light Increases, the Shadows Deepen: Joseph A. Seiss

In 1892, Joseph Seiss reflected on the history of Lutheranism in the United States during the last half of the nineteenth century and summarized his role in that history as follows:

> The last fifty years have seen many changes and revolutions. It has been an era of important alterations and modifications also in the condition and spirit of our Church in this country, especially in the line of the conservation of its historic faith and cultus. But desirable and salutary as those changes have been, they were not achieved without various severe and trying conflicts and contentions which have not yet ceased. There had crept in a creedless Rationalism; then a fanatical Pietism; then a pressure for a supraconfessional and harsh Exclusivism. All these, so alien to true evangelical religion, had to encountered and resisted. Nor was it possible to displace them without wars of words and many battles. In some of these it was my lot to be thrown, so as to be compelled to take my stand on the issues in question, to defend my position, and to become the object of

[29]Schmucker, *Prophetic History*, 565, 401-403

attack and criticism from those whose isms, prejudices and errors I could not accept.[30]

Indeed, as one considers particularly the controversies of English-speaking Lutherans from 1840 to the turn of the century, one will find Dr. Seiss in the midst of most of them.[31] The story of his life reads like a history of late nineteenth-century Lutheranism. As an author, there are few American Lutherans who published more than he did in the nineteenth century – perhaps none.[32] Controversy and creativity come together in Seiss's writings on the millennium, astronomy, and pyramidology. Dr. Seiss was a one of the early adherents in America of the dispensational premillennialist system. These works include *The Parable of the Ten Virgins, Voices from Babylon, Lectures on the Apocalypse, The Last Times, The Day of the Lord, History and Prospects of the Jews, The Lord at Hand, Millennial Concordance, The Gospel in the Stars, or Primeval Astronomy,* and *The Great Pyramid: A Miracle in Stone.*[33] In the *Prophetic Times,* which Seiss edited for more than a decade, he helped popularize an emerging eschatology – dispensational premillennialism.[34] According

[30]Joseph A. Seiss, *Notes of My Life,* transcribed by Henry E. Horn and William M. Horn (Huntingdon, Pennsylvania: Church Management Service, 1982), 274.

[31]The one arena in which he was not a major player was the Predestination Controversy. However, that is not particularly surprising or odd, because it did not primarily concern the Eastern Lutherans (both New and Moderate) nearly as much as those in the West (the Old Lutherans).

[32]Jens Christian Roseland, *American Lutheran Biographies; or, Historical notices of Over Three Hundred and Fifty Leading Men of the American Lutheran Church, from its Establishment to the Year 1890* (Milwaukee: Press of A. Houtkamp & Son, 1890), 706.

[33]Joseph A. Seiss, *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* (Philadelphia: Smith, English, and Company, 1862); Joseph A. Seiss, *Voices from Babylon; or, The Records of Daniel the Prophet* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1879); Joseph Augustus Seiss, *The Apocalypse. A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Smith, English, & Company, 1865); Joseph A. Seiss, *The Last Times: An Earnest Discussion of Momentous Themes,* 1st edition (Baltimore: T. N. Kurtz, 1856); Joseph A. Seiss, *The Day of the Lord: A Lecture on 2 Peter 3:3-4* (1861); Joseph A. Seiss, *History and Prospects of the Jews: A Lecture Delivered in the First Lutheran Church of Cumberland, MD., on the Evening of Feb., 10th, 1851* (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania: Printed by H. C. Neinstedt, 1851); Joseph A. Seiss, *The Lord at Hand: An Advent Sermon* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication House, 1863); *Millennial Concordance: Mostly from Dr. Seiss's Last Times* (Philadelphia: To Be Had By Addressing the "Prophetic Times", n.d.); Joseph A. Seiss, *The Gospel in the Stars* (Philadelphia: E. Claxton and Company, 1882); Joseph A. Seiss, *A Miracle in Stone – The Great Pyramid* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1877).

[34]Lawrence R. Rast Jr., "*Prophetic Times,*" in *Popular Religious Magazines of the United*

to Seiss, however, this understanding of the end times was in no way innovative. Rather, he claimed that the orthodox church of the earliest periods held to the doctrines that the *Prophetic Times* confessed: the appearance of a personal Antichrist, the restoration of the Jews to Palestine, the material nature of the new heavens and new earth, and the translation of the saints.[35] Further, he argued for its legitimate place in historic Lutheranism, specifically in the persons of Luther, Spener, Bengel, and, notably, J. G. Schmucker. While he rejected Schmucker's date for the return of Christ, Seiss approved of Schmucker's overall perspective regarding the millennium. "His chronological reckonings are in many points untenable and defective, but his conceptions of the nature of the kingdom of God, and of the grand outlines of the purposes of God concerning it, exhibit an understanding of the Scriptures and penetration into the Divine revelations, from which much real instruction is to be derived."[36]

One of Seiss' primary objectives was to overcome what he called the "modern theory of the millennium," or what historians technically refer to as "postmillennialism." Postmillennialists believed that through the efforts of the church and society, the millennium would soon dawn, a 1000 years of relative peace would result, and that Jesus would come to gather His followers to Himself at the end of the period, which was interpreted both literally and figuratively. Seiss countered that the view that human society was ever improving and that, slowly and surely, through the influence of the gospel and human institutions, the millennium was preparing to dawn, was an antiscriptural and unorthodox position. Often he cited the words of Jesus, "When the Son of Man comes will he find faith?" as proof of this position, but just as often he tested this doctrine on the basis of the thought of the early church and confessions of the Reformation. "There is not a respectable or acknowledged Creed in Christendom, ancient or modern, known to us, which either directly, or by implication, teaches the doctrine of the universal conversion of the world, or the intervention of a thousand years of general righteousness, liberty, and peace, prior to the resurrection of

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*States,* edited by Mark Fackler and Charles H. Lippy (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995).

[35]Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 90 and following.

[36]J. G. Schmucker, "The Millennium," *Prophetic Times* 2 (February 1864): 24-26.

the dead. " Thus, Seiss concludes, "the Confessions of the Reformation not only do not contain it, but pointedly condemn it."[37] Seiss often cited Augsburg Cconfession XVII, "We condemn those who spread abroad Jewish opinions, that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall get the sovereignty in the world, and the wicked be brought under in every place."[38]

It might seem somewhat disingenuous for Seiss to condemn the postmillennialists for their doctrine when it appears his position might also be condemned by AC XVII. The explanation lies in his interpretation of that article. Seiss chooses to stress the Augustana's emphasis on the word "before" the resurrection. Seiss claims that the Augsburg Confession condemns only that eschatological scheme that places the millennium before the return of Christ. But might not one argue that in the premillennial scheme the same weakness is present? After all, premillennialists believe that Jesus shall return to the earth and establish his millennial kingdom *before* the final resurrection and judgment.

So it might seem to the casual reader. But Seiss resolves the issue by introducing two of the distinctive tenets of dispensational premillennialism: the two (or more) stage second advent and the deathless rapture.

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[37]Joseph A. Seiss, "The Modern Millennium: Is It Orthodox?" *Prophetic Times* 4 (August 1866), 123-127. One may also see Joseph A. Seiss, *Millennialism and the Second Advent* (Louisville, Kentucky: Pentecostal Publishing Company, n.d.).

[38]Seiss, "The Modern Millennium," 123-124. Spener, and later Bengel, both claimed to be confessional Lutherans, that they accepted the Augustana as the *grundbekenntnis* of the Lutheran Church. Thus, what is one to make of AC 17? Spener and Bengel replied that AC 17 did not necessarily condemn all understandings of the millennium. Rather, what it rejected was a false belief regarding the nature of the millennium. John Weborg notes (C. John Weborg, "Pietism: Theology in Service of Living Toward God," in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, edited by Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnson [Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1991], 169): "For pietists there was another way to argue the case. If the doctrine of justification by grace through faith is used as a model, then the very monergism that brings about justification can bring about the kingdom. God will do it, and in the case of Spener, in a post-millennial form. Concrete fruit of the gospel, present and active in the lives of persons and churches, was intrinsic to God's prophetic program. Since God had promised better times for the church, any activity in that regard was not a human effort trying to usurp what was rightfully God's work. It was the obedience of faith, and it was faith active in love, first as love of God and his Word and then as love of neighbor. The millennium would be a period of maximum fruitfulness."

For Seiss, the second advent of Christ will take place in stages or parts. Just as the first advent of Christ stretched over a number of years, so also the second advent will be a series of events. "His first coming, including His birth and His resurrection, is foretold as *one event.* Even so His second coming, foretold in like manner as *one event,* is to consist of two or more great parts, acts, or stages." This twofold coming consists, argues Seiss, of Christ's coming *for* His church (the rapture) and Christ coming *with* His church.[39] The rapture is a kind of resurrection, and, therefore, the premillennial system does not compromise the Augsburg Confession.

> In Rev. 4th and 5th, we also find a vision of certain saints in heaven, singing before the throne, and *already* crowned as the victorious subjects of final redemption; and yet the chapters chronologically subsequent to these describe earthly scene—wars, plagues, pestilences, wickednesses of men and nations, and administrations of judgment on the earth, extending through a period, on no system of interpretation, less than seven years in duration. And as we thus have men already redeemed and crowned in heaven (which crowning can only be in the glorified and post-resurrection state), and kings, nations, peoples, and orders of men, living, sinning, warring, and dying on the earth at the same time, it must needs be that at least some of the saints are taken, while yet the mass of mortals are for a time still left. *And as there is no resurrection of dead saints without a corresponding rapture of living saints,* it is impossible for these sacred pictures to be realized without just such a separation and experience as that described.[40]

Promises such as Romans 8:11 ("If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also *quicken your mortal bodies* by His Spirit that dwelleth in you"—Seiss emphasis) applies to the general resurrection of the dead, but even more specifically to the rapture.[41] In short, in the dispensational premillennial system there *is* a resurrection of the dead and a translation of the saints to heaven prior to Christ's establishment of His kingdom on earth. In other words, it is only after the resurrection of the dead that "the godly

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[39]Joseph A. Seiss, "The Difficulty Solved: Two Stages of the Advent," *Prophetic Times* 2 (October 1864): 157.

[40]Joseph A. Seiss, "The Deathless Rapture: A Sneer Answered," *Prophetic Times* 4 (September 1866): 141. Emphasis added.

[41]Seiss, "Deathless Rapture," 140.

shall get the sovereignty in the world, and the wicked be brought under in every place." Therefore, at least in Seiss's mind, the dispensational premillennial system harmonized with both Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

Critics charged that the premillennial system was pessimistic in outlook and led to a despairing passivism. Seiss, sensitive to this charge, responded by striving invariably to let the good news of the gospel message triumph over the more negative aspects of the doctrine. Further, he was aggressively involved in missionary work both in the General Synod and later in the General Council. "I support and advocate from the pulpit and platform, according to the ability given me, the cause of Bible, missionary, and tract societies, believing them to be the Lord's instruments in preaching or making known the Gospel."[42] As long as the Lord continued to spare the world from the tribulations to come, he stated, then all God's people should sing "Hosanna in the highest!" The offer of salvation remained open to all people, and the Savior maintained communication with His people through the word and ordinances. Most importantly, though, readers should daily expect the coming of the Savior, for in this expectation all believers will find comfort. "Is our religion after all so frail a thing, that faith must dread to take the very blessedness for which it prays and hopes! Nay, reader, sing Hosanna! Blessed is He that cometh! Hosanna in the highest!"[43]

It was his conviction of the near coming of the Lord and the manner in which that would energize people for mission and ministry that led to the publication of Seiss's commentary on the parable of the ten virgins.[44] One of the issues facing advocates of the new millennialism was the question of just who would be included in the rapture. For Seiss, the rapture is limited to specially committed and obedient saints. The interpretive key to the parable for Seiss is the oil—what it is and where to get it. For it is the oil that garners one the designation of being wise or foolish.

Notably, the ten virgins, argues Seiss, are all members of the church. They have faithfully confessed the Christ. However, not all are well prepared for the Lord's return. "There will be people saved who are not

[42]Joseph A. Seiss, "The Advent Doctrine," *Prophetic Times* 5 (August 1867): 119.

[43]Joseph A. Seiss, "The New Year," *Prophetic Times* 10 (January 1872), 16.

[44]Joseph A. Seiss, *The Parable of the Ten Virgins: in Six Discourses, and a Sermon on the Judgeship of the Saints* (Philadelphia: Smith, English, and Company, 1862).

a part of Christ's bride, albeit they belong to his household."[45] There is a distinction to be made within the church between those who are well prepared for the Lord's return (the Bride) and those who are not (the household). In this picture of Christ's acknowledged people every one has the lamp of public profession, and that in the regular way of established custom and order.

> All were true virgins; all had lamps; all went forth animated by the same faith and hope; all slumbered alike; all had their lamps lit and burning for a time; all were alike awakened by the cry, which they all alike understood; all fell to trimming their, by that time, dim and dull lamps; and the foolishness of the five consisted simply and only in not having sufficiently reckoned and provided for the full necessities of the case; attempting to remedy which, at that late moment, disabled them for a place at the marriage, and in that inner and privileged circle of the redeemed known as the Bride the Lamb's wife.[46]

What thus distinguishes the Bride is that they attain a higher level of Christian obedience:

> A deeper and higher consecration than that which pertains to the ordinary Christian profession. The difference, therefore, between the wise and the foolish is, that the wise laid in above and beyond what the case seemed to require, and that to the utmost possible measure, whilst the others contented themselves with what appeared to be the ordinary necessities of the case.

Therefore, concludes Seiss, one of the main points of the parable is that "it sets forth the fact that not all true Christians are equally eminent in their attainments and sanctification."[47]

> It does not leave a man, because he is sincere and earnest in his profession, securely to persuade himself that eternity's sublimest honors are for him. It was meant to teach us that we must give ourselves to the work of a sanctification, and pray and seek for a fulness of unction from the Holy One, which transcends far the

[45]Joseph A. Seiss, "The Wise Virgins–Who Are They?" *Prophetic Times* 3 (August 1865): 157.

[46]Seiss, "Wise Virgins," 159-160.

[47]Seiss, *Parable*, 24.

> ordinary average with which people are willing to remain content, if we would ever reach our Saviour's bosom, and share in his royal prerogatives.[48]

Seiss calls this higher Christianity "the church of the first born," which is open only to the saints, for it "requires more, even than chaste virginity of character and sincerity of faith and profession." It requires the addition of what Seiss calls "a wise discreetness, which never rest whilst there are positions of greater excellence and profounder consecration to be attained." Thus, the oil that fills the virgins' lamps is "the high resolve and deep-seated consecration which bring about such a surrender to God's will and service." Thus, where the wise virgins had a more than ample supply of oil, the foolish virgins "lacked in this fullness" of Christian commitment, an "all-sacrificing depth of devotion."[49]

Christ's desire is that all of His people be wise unto salvation, and so He uses a myriad of means to rouse his people that they may not find themselves lacking at His reappearing. These announcements will drive the dedicated Christian into a posture of self-examination that results in a striving to prepare for a worthy reception of their Lord. Seiss uses Matthew 24:28's and Luke 17:34-37's references to the carcass and the eagles as a means to generate such devotion. The carcass and body have the same referent.

> We take both s referring to Christ, who was dead, and is alive again forever. It was he who became a victim for us, having borne our sins in his own body on the cross. Our wants as sinners are satisfied in his death. He is really the body on which the saints feed. He gave himself to death for the salvation of his people, and has invited men to eat his flesh and drink his blood, declaring that unless they do this they have no life in them. . . . There is therefore a deep and blessed relationship between the once crucified Saviour and his people, which well corresponds to that of the eagle and the slain body on which it lives, and to which it ever seeks.[50]

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[48]Seiss, "Wise Virgins," 160.

[49]Seiss, *Parable*, 24, 25.

[50]Joseph A. Seiss, "The Carcass and the Eagles," *Prophetic Times* 4 (February 1865): 27.

Yet, for Seiss, Christ's gathering of His people refers not only to His atonement and the Lord's Supper, it is specifically eschatological in character. The eagles being drawn to the body has its ultimate fulfillment in the rapture of the church.

> What we take as being referred to in this gathering of the eagles to the body is, therefore, the same as what is more literally described in the 4th of 1st Thessalonians.... It is to be a sudden flight.... While all are busy with the ordinary cares, pursuits and occupations of life; some in the field, some in bed, some at their common toil; and everything running on its accustomed course; suddenly, and quite unknown to the gay and godless world, here one, and there another, shall be secretly and mysteriously stolen away, "caught up," .... Invisibly, noiselessly, miraculously, they shall vanish from the company and fellowship of those about them, and mount up as eagles to that Lord by whom they live.[51]

Preaching is thus necessarily evangelistic and missionary in character, and its purpose is to point people to the atoning work of Christ and the necessity of the life of obedience. "To trim our lamps as Christians is to make a thorough examination of our condition; to look into what is wanting with a view to have everything in perfect order;... by fresh acts of appropriation, to fill our souls with the fulness [*sic*] of grace and the unction of the Holy Spirit." Here, then, is the tension in Seiss's idea of salvation. Seiss, on numerous occasions, stated that one is saved by grace alone through faith. But, he went on to say, faith is advanced through deeds of obedience to God's will. Thus, both the wise and the foolish virgins are Christians because both have been saved solely by the application of the benefits of Christ's vicarious atonement—both classes of Christians are saved by grace. They are, however, of different classes—there is a difference in "*degree*, not kind or quality." The foolish virgins had "oil," but "just not quite enough to be in a state of readiness" when the Bridegroom came. Thus, concludes Seiss, "The Royalties and Priesthoods of the world to come are not to be reached by the common orders of saintship. They are not reserved for such as never rise in their piety beyond the ordinary run of Christian attainment." Rather, in order to qualify for the heavenly kingdom, "there must be a fullness of self-sacrifice for Christ, a completeness of obedience, a thoroughness of

[51]Seiss, "The Carcass and the Eagles," 27, 28.

sanctification, an ampleness in all the graces of the indwelling Sprit, and a meekness and fidelity under the cross, resembling that of Christ himself, or there will be no crowns, no thrones, no kingdoms. . . . We must be like Christ, and purify ourselves as he is pure, or we never can be with him and see him as he is." Seiss summarizes it in a rather pithy fashion: "To be *saved* is one thing; to be *rewarded* another. The one is through the grace of God only; the other is according to works and attainments only."[52] To put it Seiss's idea in its most crass form: those who do not achieve sainthood (foolish virgins) will indeed have mansions in Christ's kingdom—they simply will not be in the same neighborhood as Jesus and the saints (wise virgins).

And where is this "other side of the tracks" for the lesser Christians? It is the earth itself. Christ will take His saints to His "new home where [the bride] is to dwell with him." That new home is the heavenly Jerusalem, where they enjoy the direct presence of God. This is, of course, nothing other than the rapture of the church, where Christ comes to take His true followers home to Himself in heaven. The foolish virgins, however, are "left behind." They remain in that place "where they were before the Bridegroom came," and, notably, "where their generations continue forever." In other words, though left behind, mere confessing Christians would enjoy eternity in the very earth that had been their home during the normal course of their lives. Prior to that time of enjoyment, however, Christ would prepare this world for them by judging evil and throwing down the Antichrist, Man of Sin, the False Prophet, and "all them that have oppressed and afflicted earth." He will then establish a christocracy under which "the whole earth is then to be speedily converted to its rightful Lord" and there will be nothing "to hinder a universal revival of righteousness," which will lead to the restoration of the Jews. There will be a "great tribulation," but it applies to unbelievers—who must ultimately pass away. That ultimately leads to a world, under Christ, for "earth must be brought into equation with heaven." So even while many perish in unbelief and are judged, "the world and the race shall be restored." "From the moment that the sign of the Son of man is seen in the heavens, the empire of death is doomed. From that moment it shall decay, and wither, and dissolve, until every trace of it is at length

[52]Seiss, *Parable*, 53, 67, 68-69, 120. One may also see Joseph A. Seiss, "The Present Dispensation," *Prophetic Times* 4 (July 1865): 105: "Those thus privileged are laid under the deepest *obligations*."

expunged from the earth, and the beauty and glory of Eden put in its place. When this is achieved, then, and only then, redemption will be complete."[53]

In summary, then, Seiss hopes to invigorate his hearers to mission and ministry so that they may be prepared for the heavenly kingdom, not just the earthly one, when Christ returns. He sees a people who are vigorously watching and anticipating their Lord's near coming. To "watch" means to have a living faith that Jesus is soon to arrive; to be in constant expectation of this arrival; to make efficient preparation for it. In short, watching is work—the work of faith, and it consists of obedience to the will of God. "It lies in the very essence of saving faith to obey law, to make sacrifices, to submit to self-denial, and to work with the same fear and trembling and persevering earnestness as if [salvation] depended on us alone to achieve. . . . And he who counts that he is fulfilling the injunction of the text without laborious *work*, does but deceive himself, and is marching to a destiny of disappointment, mortification, and unavailing regrets."[54]

## Conclusion

The opening of this paper noted David Luecke's argument that pietism is a legitimate model of Lutheran belief and practice, particularly if we are to recapture a sense of balance in the LCMS and to reinvigorate our sense of mission. What I hope this paper has demonstrated is that pietism—at least in its expressions within American Lutheranism—cuts at the very heart of the biblical witness and the Lutheran confession. Seiss would even prove Löscher right by stating that in the millennial kingdom here on this earth there would no longer be any need for the administration of baptism, for Christ in Matthew 28 said we would baptize only "unto the end of the age." What it shows is that for pietism there is a different ecclesiology at work, and this ecclesiology has decided christological ramifications. Schmucker and Seiss both refer to the atoning work of Christ on behalf of mankind. They both affirm that it is through grace alone that one becomes a member of Christ's church. However, that church is an aggregate of individuals who have dedicated themselves to

[53]Seiss, *Parable*, 101, 90, 91, 95, 112, 96, 97. One may also see Joseph A. Seiss, "The Earth Restored to the Brotherhood of the Heavens," *Prophetic Times* 4 (August 1866): 114: "God will not annihilate the earth, but will purify it."

[54]Seiss, *Parable*, 143-144.

a life of willful obedience. Put another way, the true church is defined and initiated by the works of its members—faithful response to Christ's call—and maintained by their voluntary and intentional fulfillment of the law's demands. The mark of the church, therefore, is the collective obedience of its consecrated members, not the word and sacraments.

Obviously, such an understanding departs radically from the Augsburg Confession's clear testimony. Indeed, there is a perichoresis of pietism in American Christianity and thus also in the LCMS—the wonderful opportunity we have in such a context is to proclaim clearly that "men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works but are freely justified for Christ's sake through faith" and that "in order that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted."

# Sectarian Apocalypticism in Mainline Christianity

Larry Nichols

Apocalypticism has played an important role in the way that many cults and sects have thought, taught, written, and wrangled about things eschatological. Whether it be Millerites or Mormons, the Watchtower or Waco, the People's Temple of Jonestown, or Heaven's Gate in California, the theme of the coming Apocalypse has been the *leitmotif* that has roused and animated the fervent spirits of sundry portentous prophetic gurus who, like roosters, crow out into the millennial dawn, rousing their willing herds of devoted followers.

The title of this paper, however, is "Sectarian Apocalypticism in Mainline Christianity." A closer look at the history of apocalypticism and/or millennialism reveals only too well that the cults are simply biting from the (usually Protestant) hand that feeds them. Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916), the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, had both Presbyterian and Congregational roots. Joseph Smith's (1805-1844) family decided that they were Presbyterians, even though the young Smith himself was not predestined to remain one. Calvinists also bear the responsibility for the back door loss of Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910), the plagiarizing founder of Christian Science.

The goal of this paper is to examine briefly apocalypticism's checkered history in the modern period and, in particular, significant developments of the nineteenth century, as well as the current millennial ravings at the end of the twentieth century. Second, we will be alluding to millennialism as often, if not more frequently, than apocalypticism. Millennialism provides the theological, historical, and philosophical contexts through which apocalypticism must be understood. Many sects that conclude that the end of the world is immanent are invariably in search of a millennial utopia to follow. We will explore this in its secular, sacred, political, and religious domains. This paper will argue that millennialism is philosophically rooted in Gnosticism. The Gnostic quest for an anthropocentric utopia has shaped numerous religious and secular eschatologies throughout history, and is certainly the underlying

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***The Reverend Larry Nichols is pastor of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Greenville, Rhode Island, adjunct professor of Philosophy at the Community College of Rhode Island, and first vice-president of the New England District of the LCMS.***

foundation of current mainline and Evangelical Protestant Christian thought. Gnosticism has ultimately led to postmodernism, and postmodernism has proven to be Gnosticism's Achilles' heel. Finally, a modest proposal will be made concerning how the church may counter apocalyptic and millennial claims through an apologetics that is consistently Trinitarian, catholic, evangelical (in the best sense), Christocentric, incarnational, ecclesiological, and sacramental.

## A Brief History of Millennialism in Modern Christianity

The middle of the eighteenth century marks a time of renewed apocalyptic and millennial activities. Bengel's *Commentary on Revelation* (1740) renewed interest in the study of the Book of Revelation, particularly in pietistic churches. Millennialism was certainly a popular theme at this time in theosophical circles.

Then came the nineteenth century. Perhaps the Romantic era was the most visionary and utopic period in history. Religious visionaries imagined new ways to read the Bible and seek solace in a coming and future kingdom. In 1832, Edward Irving (1792–1834) and his Catholic Apostolic Church imagined the close proximity of a heavenly world and the return of Christ to establish it. John Nelson Darby, founder of the Plymouth Brethren (1847), spearheaded the dispensationalist interpretation of the Bible. His ideas caught on like wildfire in America, particularly in revivalist meetings and amongst itinerant frontier evangelists. Apparently, however, Darby was not the originator of the idea of a pre-tribulation rapture. Both he and Irving were inspired by a woman named Margaret MacDonald, who reported a revelation given her by God during a healing service in Port Glasgow, Scotland in 1830. MacDonald reported in her vision that there was a two-stage process to the Second Coming of Christ. This idea was embraced by both Darby and Irving and was destined for much fuller development in many of the Bible Schools (Moody, Fuller, Dallas, and others) during the twentieth century in the United States.[1]

[1]A good study of the history of the origin of the pre-tribulation rapture theory is

America was and is the land of unbridled freedom of religious expression. No small amount of millennial fervor preoccupied those who had come from Europe to seek it. In Salt Lake City, Utah, Brigham Young (1801–1877) led the band of Mormons and declared the Salt Lake Valley to be the new "Zion in the Wilderness." Mormonism, of course, is one of the most influential of homegrown religions in the world. "If there was ever a story tantamount to the quintessential American melodrama, it is the story of the Mormon Church. That it is an interesting story is beyond doubt. That it is a significant story is beyond question. That it developed into what it is today is for many, beyond belief."[2]

Perhaps the most notable and significant American nineteenth century millennial marvel was William Miller (1742–1849). In 1836, Miller, a farmer from Low Hampton, New York, published his *Evidence from Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ*. Possessing no formal theological training, Miller declared that he had unraveled the mysteries of Daniel and Revelation and pinpointed 1843 as the sure year for the return of Christ. In January of 1843, Miller became more specific, announcing that the year between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844 would be the time of the end. When March 21 came and went, Miller's disappointment was temporarily postponed when one of his followers pointed out that according to Habakkuk 2:3, Miller had forgotten to take into account the need for a "tarrying time" of seven months and ten days. This brought the new date to October 22, 1844. The amount of pamphleteering, the excitement, the press coverage, and the large following surrounding Miller was simply amazing. When 1844 came and went, with no Apocalypse, there was utter disillusionment, anger, and many abandoned Miller's movement. This is known in American religious history as the Great Disappointment.[3] Those that remained would later be banded together as Seventh Day Adventists, led by Ellen G. White (1827–1815). White told the remaining remnant that Miller had failed because he did not teach a proper observance of the Sabbath day.[4]

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Dave MacPherson's *The Incredible Cover-Up: The True Story of the Pre-trib Rapture* (Plainfield, New Jersey: Logos International, 1975).

[2]George Mather and Larry Nichols, *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions, and the Occult* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 186.

[3]One may see Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan Butler, editors, *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987).

[4]Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981),

Darwinism, Freudianism, speculative idealism, Marxism, and the advent of biblical criticism, all fertile activities of the nineteenth century European mind, paved the way for many to turn their backs on religious forms of utopia and the abandonment of a religious milieu for the quest for the better world. Apocalyptic fears and millennial hopes were recast from the sacred to various secular paradigms amongst the learned and the cultured despisers of religion.

Protestant liberals in the nineteenth century tried to retain a reworked religious version of Christianity. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) relocated the essence of Christianity from the head to the heart and summarized Christianity as a "feeling of absolute dependence." Later in the nineteenth century, Adolph von Harnack (1851–1930) proffered that the essence of Christianity did not lie in its old-world "husk," namely its eschatological context. The utopic vision for Christianity is the removal of the old husk so as to get at the kernel. For Harnack and the older Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889), and liberal theology in general at the close of the nineteenth century, this kernel was Christianity's "value" to culture in its excellent program of ethics and morality. In Harnack's view, part of the old husk was, in essence, a Christianity stripped of any of the old orthodoxy's claims altogether. "The history of the church has shown us that it was necessary that 'primitive Christianity' had to disappear in order that Christianity might remain."[5] The Christianity that would remain for Harnack was not fixed doctrine or dogma, but the gospel as "dynamic reality." Jesus awakens the consciousness of people in all ages. For Harnack, it should also be noted that this was a gospel *of* Jesus rather than a gospel *concerning* Him. The gospel of Jesus embraces three themes. One of them is eschatological and this is important to point out because Harnack's theology would have a profound effect on twentieth century liberal thinking. The three themes of the gospel for Harnack were: "Firstly, the kingdom of God and its coming. Secondly, God the Father and the infinite value of the human soul. Thirdly, the higher righteousness and commandment to love."[6] For our purposes, this emphasis recast Christianity and a concept of the millennium into a "my kingdom is exclusively of this world" mode.

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[5]Adolf von Harnack, *What is Christianity?* translated by T.B. Saunders, introduction by Rudolf Bultmann (New York: Augsburg Fortress, 1957), 13-14.

[6]von Harnack, *Christianity?* 56.

An important historian, even if he was no friend to Christianity, was Franz Overbeck (1837–1905). A close friend of Nietzsche, Overbeck protested vehemently the idea that Christianity had now graduated into a wonderful and beneficial this-worldly religion. He maintained that Christianity is only to be understood correctly in its eschatological context. He went so far as to say that Christianity becomes a form of paganism when it blends Christ with culture. Thus for Overbeck, Harnack was the high priest of unchristian and modern theology.[7]

Nineteenth century thinking in most all of its forms had a tremendous influence on the twentieth century. The Irvingites, Darbyites, Campbellites, and revivalists of the nineteenth century, on the one hand, passed on their ideas to the Fundamentalist and Evangelical movements of the twentieth where apocalyptic and millennial themes became highly embellished. Schleiermacher, Hegel, Darwin, Harnack, Troeltsch (to name just a few), on the other hand, paved the way both academically and culturally for twentieth century figures such as Barth, Bultmann, Tillich, and Sartre. Contemporary theological themes included the death of God, existentialism, the social gospel, Marxist liberation theology, positivism, deconstructionism, and, eventually, postmodernism. All of these "isms" had important implications in the development of popular twentieth century forms of millennialism and apocalypticism in mainline Christianity.

Millennial communities blossomed and flourished in the twentieth century. The decade of the 1960s, with its utopic themes of counterculture and commune, resulted in revolt upon all mediating institutions, the church included. Mainline Christian churches were abandoned for cults, "non-denominational" denominations, and a renewed and vigorous individualism. Evangelical and Fundamentalist mega-churches and para-church (the charismatic movement) ministries sprang up, emphasizing the need for one's personal relationship with Jesus in spite of, and even apart from, the church. The new birth was widely understood not in the context of baptism, but in terms of individual decision. The assassinations of two Kennedys, the gunning down of four students at Kent State, the murders of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., the Vietnam War, and the Cold War, with its accompanying fear of nuclear holocaust, set the

[7]Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century, Volume II 1870-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 225.

tone for the feverish millennial impulses of the 1970s. End times themes filled pulpits, coffeehouses, books, tapes, and movies. Many believed the rapture was around the corner. Sermons pointed to the computer called "the Beast" in Brussels, Belgium, which was believed to be capable of assigning every man, woman, and child on earth an identification in three sets of six numbers each, or literally 666. The Antichrist was figured to be anyone from Henry Kissinger to the Shah of Iran; the papacy was but his able-bodied assistant. Then there was the painting of Christ knocking, not at the door, as in the Burne-Jones work, but upon the United Nations building as if it were a door. Other artistic flare included depictions of cars falling off of bridges, an airplane suddenly without its raptured pilot, and bridges collapsing signaling the beginning of Armageddon. An impressive array of end times maps were readily available, inspired by the margin notes of the Scofield Reference Bible. Of course there were (and still are) the pontifications of Hal Lindsay in his best selling book, *The Late Great Planet Earth.*[8]

There was no small amount of millennial fervor in the 1980s. In 1982, the planetary alignment known as the "Jupiter Effect" spurned yet another series of books, articles, sermons, and wide-eyed certainty in the Fundamentalist, Evangelical, and Pentecostal communities that this was indeed the time of the end. The year 1988 featured the influential *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988.* In this instance, another Evangelical enthusiast and NASA engineer, Edgar Whisenant, claimed to have figured right where so many others had gone wrong.[9]

John Leland's excellent article in *Newsweek*, November 1, 1999, sums up very well the millennium madness of the 1990s. He writes of a modern day American Elijah who predicted that the year 2000 would usher in the end of the world. In the latter part of this century he led thousands of Americans to Jerusalem to await the return of Christ. The Reverend Bobby Bible, a Los Angeles-based Fundamentalist preacher, as late as December 31, 1999, stood on the Mount of Olives with his followers proclaiming that the end was coming on January 1. Leland noted that there were about 100 Christians living on the Mount of Olives, the very

[8]Hal Lindsay with C. C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

[9]Edgar C. Whisenant, *On Borrowed Time: The Bible Dates of the 10th Week of Daniel, Armageddon; The Millennium: 88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988* (Nashville: World Bible Society, 1988).

spot where they believe that the Bible says that Jesus will return to earth.[10] In addition to Brother Elijah and the Reverend Bible, another American, called "Brother David," had been waiting in Jerusalem with five followers in an ecstatic prayer vigil because, as he reported to *Newsweek*, "I feel that the Lord is returning, and the millennium is to be the time of his coming."[11] Israeli authorities, well aware of Fundamentalist Christianity's preoccupation with the marriage between Zionism and apocalypticism, have already expelled a number of these groups from their country.

According to a *Newsweek* poll, eighteen percent of Americans expect the end of the world, or Armageddon, to come within their lifetime. Jerry Falwell has recently announced that the "Antichrist" is already among us. Earlier last year, Falwell distributed a packet known as "the Y2K Time Bomb," which included a video, *A Christian Guide to the Millennium Bug*. The package also included a "Family Readiness Checklist," admonishing people to stock up on such items as gardening utensils, cotton swabs, and peanut butter and jelly. "Y2K is God's instrument to shake this nation, to humble this nation," Falwell had said in a broadcast in 1998.[12] Some prognosticators in today's popular Evangelical circles have replaced Kissinger with Bill Gates as the Antichrist. According to this version of things, the President of Microsoft has already put a mark upon the forehead (your computer terminal), and a mark upon your right hand (the mouse). Hundreds of websites are now springing up describing various millennial scenarios. Many doomsdayers are no longer standing on street corners or on soapboxes warning passers by of the impending Apocalypse, but they have retreated into cyber-space and the world wide web.[13] Movies such as "The Omega Code" and Schwarzenegger's "End of Days" are among Hollywood's versions of the Apocalypse, with many more no doubt to come.

On the other hand, J. Gordon Melton reports that he is surprisingly disappointed that there have not been even more apocalyptic enthusiasts than are currently on the scene. "I expected to have a field day with millennial groups," he says. "And there was nothing." Ted Daniel, who

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[10]John Leland, "Millennial Madness," *Newsweek* (November 1, 1999).

[11]Leland, "Millennial Madness."

[12]Hanna Rosin, "Maybe It's Not the Apocalypse," *The Washington Post* (December 28, 1999).

[13]Leland, "Millennial Madness."

runs the Millennial Center in Pennsylvania and keeps a close eye on doomsday cults explains, "It's the usual pattern. If you're a millenarian prophet, you have to keep people excited. But once the date gets closer, you back off." Indeed, a number of Fundamentalist and Evangelical writers backed off as January 1, 2000 approached. The Reverend Ralph Moats had relocated from California to Montana in 1992 to prepare for doomsday. He calls his sect the "End Times Harvest Church." However, in December 1999, Moats said that he believed that January 1 would be just another New Year's Eve.[14]

Other Evangelical writers besides Falwell and Moats who previously had prophesied and profited from people's millennial expectations include Toronto-based minister Grant R. Jeffery, author of *The Millennium Meltdown* and *Armageddon: Earth's Last Days.* Just prior to the New Year, Jeffrey adjusted his predictions, expecting them to unfold "only distantly." But apparently not too distantly. "It's not a January problem," Jeffrey declares. "It will manifest itself throughout the year, like maybe in March or April or May, or even later." Damian Thompson, author of *The End of Time: Faith and Fear in the Shadow of the Millennium,* maintains that "people who last year became excited about the millennium bug are suddenly saying, 'I never said that. It was him, not me.'"[15] One year ago, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, who have sold more than 10 million copies of the *Left Behind* series, prophesied global upheaval on January 1, 2000. "The Y2K bug could trigger financial meltdown," their website warned, "making it possible for the Antichrist or his emissaries to . . . dominate the world commercially until it is destroyed." Now Jenkins and LaHaye are backing down and claiming that "We don't think it relates to Y2K at all. We are bemused by people who do."[16]

Nevertheless, for many Evangelicals, the Apocalypse is indeed around the corner. It is still coming. But more and more retreated in the final weeks before the advent of the year 2000. Some dispensationalists have calculated that the year 2007 will trigger the end because that will mark the end of the seven-year Tribulation. Others look ahead to 2033, counting from Christ's death rather than His birth.

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[14]Leland, "Millennial Madness."
[15]Rosin, "Maybe It's Not the Apocalypse."
[16]Rosin, "Maybe It's Not the Apocalypse."

### The Effects of Gnosticism in Christianity and Millennial Thought

Evangelicals, Protestant liberals, and others have certainly steered away from Fundamentalist extremism and biblical literalism. But they have not remained untainted. Some form of apocalypticism, utopia, millennial impulses, or visions for the future seem to have had their effects on much of Christendom. This is evident in an early book by Carl F. H. Henry, perhaps the leading systematician of Neo-evangelicalism. In his book, *Evangelicals in Search of an Identity,* Henry, along with numerous other Evangelicals, laments that the doctrine of the church is the missing link in Evangelical circles.[17] While Evangelicals understand the essential message of redemption and almost sound Lutheran when expounding on justification, by (unconsciously "felicitously") rejecting or at least failing to understand the Chalcedonian Christology of the church, they (more consciously) dismiss the real presence of Christ in the sacraments outright. In this regard, the distinctions "liberal" or "conservative" bear little meaning. This removal of catholic Christology from the Reformed Protestant world has had profound effects for the entire history of Protestantism—both conservative and liberal. One example to demonstrate that Protestants of all stripes basically arrive at the same conclusion is from one of the great liberal Protestant theologians of this century, Reinhold Niebhur (1892-1971). Niebuhr writes excerpts in a diary he kept while he served as a pastor of a small Protestant congregation in Detroit in the early part of the twentieth century:

> . . . visited old Mrs. G. today and gave her communion. This was my first experience with communion at the sick bed. I think there is a good deal of superstition connected with the rite. . . . Yet I will not be too critical. If the rite suggests and expresses the emotion of honest contrition it is more than superstition. But that is the difficulty of acting as priest. . . . Whether it is a blessing or a bit of superstition rests altogether with the recipient.
>
> I must admit that I am losing some of my aversion to the sacraments cultivated in my seminary days. There is something very beautiful about parents bringing their child to the altar with a prayer of thanksgiving and as an act of dedication. . . . Incidentally Mrs. G gave me a shock this afternoon. After the service was completed she

[17]Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelicals in Search of an Identity* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1976).

> fished around under her pillow and brought forth a five dollar bill. That was to pay me for my trouble. I never knew this fee business still existed in such a form in Protestantism.[18]

The concept of the kingdom of God as Christ's church manifesting Christ's presence in earthen vessels of water, bread, and wine is firmly rejected in the greater world of Protestantism. And therefore, the forgiveness of sins bestowed by the church through word and sacrament is not understood nor believed to be the goal of the kingdom of God in this world. Moral improvement (postmillennialism and Protestant liberalism), or rapture and escape (dispensational premillennialism and Fundamentalism), a this-worldly political kingdom (Marxism, capitalism, etc.), all become the much-sought-after utopias lying outside of the church. The heart of the matter today is the same as it was when Luther battled with Zwingli in 1529. Zwingli's theology is rooted in Gnosticism. Luther's refusal to give him the "right hand of fellowship" following the debate was because of Zwingli's essentially Gnostic thinking, which affected all his doctrine, especially his Christology. Luther's conclusion had far-reaching implications for today. Christology and Second Article theology in general is missing from the concept of spirituality in the twentieth century. In the interest of ecumenical relations, Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner introduced the concept of "anonymous Christians" to describe those who have not heard the gospel and embrace it unconsciously within their own religion, be it Buddhism, Islam, or others. John Hick has emphasized that First Article theology, rather than Second, should be the bridge over the troubling implications of the classic Christian claim of the exclusivity of Christ as the sole means of salvation. The title of Hick's book is telling: *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religion* (1988).[19]

The word "spirituality" has come into widespread usage in the last thirty years. It has found a home in nearly every form of religious expression. The New Age movement, Wicca, neo-paganism, multiculturalism, Hinduism, and nearly every "ism" under the sun can "connect with" or "center" on "spirituality." But a thoroughgoing Gnostic

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[18]Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves From the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic,* forward by Martin E. Marty (1929; reprint, San Francisco: Harper Row Publishers, 1986), 6-7.

[19]John Hick and Paul F. Knittner, editors, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religion* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987).

divorce has taken place between Christology and spirituality, even unwaringly, and not so "felicitously," amongst today's version(s) of Reformed theology: Evangelicalism, Catholic mysticism, and the like. One should not be surprised therefore to hear the "modern *spiritual* life" described in the following way:

> God is not a supernatural being off in the distance somewhere. God, or the sacred, or the spirit is the encompassing spirit all around us and within us.
>
> The central claim is that the Christian life is about the opening of the self at the deepest level to the sacred. Spirituality is about becoming conscious of and intentional about a relationship with the sacred, acting compassionate toward others. Conscious and intentional because we are already in relationship with God.[20]

The Millennial fever to which both sects and denominations have today succumbed is rooted in a disease of a more primal nature. Millennialism has its roots theologically, philosophically, and historically in Gnosticism. Thomas Molnar writes: "The utopian tendency in man's mind is very strong and appears in almost every age."[21] The opening words of Scripture, "In the beginning God created . . ." tell of the faithful marriage of God to His beloved creation with man as His crowning jewel. But when the serpent uttered the fatal question "Yea, hath God said?" and when the forbidden fruit was eaten, unholy knowledge (*gnosis*), sin, and the loss of Eden resulted. How to regain that which was lost has been man's quest ever since. From the time of the Tower of Babel to the babblings and musings of philosophers, sages, poets, and worldly wise men throughout history to the present day, there have been long and well chronicled accounts of man's feeble attempts to bridge the gap between himself and God through knowledge.

Ted McAllister, in his outstanding book *Revolt Against Modernity: Leo Strauss, Eric Vogelin, and the Search for a Post-Liberal Order*, points out that Gnosticism is a belief in the power of knowledge to transform reality and thereby create an earthly perfection.[22] Is it not millennialism in its various

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[20]From a lecture titled "Revisioning Theology at the Millenium," given by Marcus Borg, professor of Religious Studies, Oregon State University.

[21]Thomas Molnar, *Utopia: The Perennial Heresy* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 3.

[22]Ted V. McAllister, *Revolt Against Modernity: Leo Strauss, Eric Vogelin, and the Search*

forms that contends that God is preparing a better world tomorrow or a this-worldly paradise regained? Somehow or other the present world in which we live is filled with pain, imperfection and evil, and life is, as Thomas Hobbes noted, "cruel, miserable, brutish, and short."

For unbelieving Gnostics, the "problem of evil" is not resolved in the sacred knowledge and proclamation of God's word, the historical event of Christ crucified, and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Christian church. Kant convinced many that this sacred knowledge was "noumena" and epistemologically inaccessible. He resolved the problem by looking to human knowledge and the autonomy of human reason. Reason will ultimately bridge the gap between what "is" and what "ought to be." For Kant, religion is to be discovered "within the limits of reason alone." Kant would conclude that the essence of religion is "the moral law within." Man is obligated to obey this "categorical imperative." This is merely another form of utopianism.

Utopians also long ultimately for a "better place" in social structures and mediating institutions of society—chiefly government. Politics and social engineering are the appointed means of carrying out their various visions. The "better place" theme appears throughout the history of philosophy as evidenced by the Idealism of Plato, Berkeley, and Hegel.

Karl Marx, Hegelian to the core, presents the politicalization of utopia. His radical program to interpret history as the dialectic of class warfare and political struggle had as its unfolding a this-worldly utopia. The quest for utopia divorced from God's revelation of His kingdom and church on earth leads to the manufactured earthly or heavenly kingdoms derived from human reason. Molnar clearly understood this:

> We may speak of heresy in its strict sense only in the case of utopians who admit to religious beliefs; but in reality, all utopians follow the same pattern: the liberation of man from *heteronomy*, from the guidance and providence of a personal God, in the name of *autonomy*, of moral self-government. But since this would lead immediately to anarchy, the emancipated individual is necessarily

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*for a Post-Liberal Order* (Lawrence, Kansas: Unversity of Kansas Press, 1996). The volume is a revision of McAllister's Ph.D. dissertation in history at Vanderbilt University.

> plunged by the utopian into the collectivity which will assume his guidance and provide for him.[23]

America, with its rigorous commitment to battling the evil ways of communism and spreading its own version of utopia on earth—democracy and capitalism—is also filled with a "this-worldly" and political vision of utopia. One need only think of the themes of some of the administrations in just this century alone. Roosevelt's "New Deal," Kennedy's "New Frontier," Johnson's "Great Society," Bush's "New World Order," and Clinton's "Bridge to the Future" all bespeak the constant refrain of the better place motif so strongly resonating in human consciousness. Harold Bloom contends in *The American Religion* that the real religion of America is not Christianity. He argues, quite convincingly, that it is Gnosticism.

> As Americans, we are obsessed also with information, and we regard religion as the most vital aspect of information. I reflect that Gnosticism was (and is) a kind of information theory. . . . Information becomes the emblem of salvation; the false Creation-Fall concerned matter and Energy, but the Pleroma or Fullness, the original Abyss, is all information. *What they [Americans] actually seek to restore is not the church of the first Christians, but the primal Abyss, named by the ancient Gnostics as both our foremother and our forefather.* Our national millenarianism, so pervasive in the nineteenth century, and still tempestuous among Fundamentalists and Pentecostals, associates itself with the books of Daniel and Revelation and leads to our crusading wars and unwholesome fantasies. . . . Only a Gnostic reading of the Bible can make us into the land of Promise. The new irony of American history is that we fight now to make the world safe for Gnosticism, our sense of religion.
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> Yet Gnosticism, if we are to consider it a religion, or at least a spiritual stance, is anything but nihilistic or hopeless, which may be why it is now, and always has been, the hidden Religion of the United States, the American Religion proper.[24]

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[23]Molnar, *Utopia*, 23.

[24]Harold Bloom, *The American Religion* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 30; 50 (emphasis added).

Perhaps there is no better illustration of the force of Gnosticism than the twentieth century and largely American preoccupation with the fast-paced progress of science, scientism, physics, and technology. Science is indeed Gnosticism's sacred text. For many it provides the only source of authentic knowledge. Only that which can be subsumed under the rubric of the "scientific method" is knowable. For scientism and positivism, reality is reduced to "phenomena," matter in motion, observable, measurable, and so on. Quantum physics has additionally attempted to demonstrate that all matter is in constant flux. All things outside of science, like morality, ethics, and religious "truths," are therefore also outside the bounds of epistemological certainty, unknowable, and hence purely subjective. Science, therefore, is to be hailed as the new and true way to salvation. Gnosticism has nearly come of age as its essence is the belief in the power of knowledge to transform reality. Technology provides the means for knowledge to increase and along with it, the power to discover more information and more knowledge. Christianity has no place in this new metaphysics. According to Eric Voegelin, Christianity has been displaced in two phases. It has been "despiritualized and respiritualized." For once positivism "destroyed" Judeo-Christian consciousness, individuals were now open to "respiritualization" from non-Christian sources.[25] The new "spirituality" includes such ideologies as humanism, scientism, New Age spirituality, multiculturalism, neo-paganism, biologism, psychologism, spin politics and the like. We have seen the steady disintegration of the worldly utopia of Marxism in recent decades. We have also witnessed an epistemological disintegration of Gnosticism in the latter half of the twentieth century. Saint Paul wrote long ago for Timothy as a young pastor to "instruct those that oppose themselves" (2 Timothy 2:25). Notice that Paul says to instruct those that oppose not Timothy or Christianity, but themselves. All varieties and versions of unbelief gradually reveal their false foundations and utter hollowness. Gnosticism's creed has always been the contention that knowledge is the key to the utopia that man so earnestly desires. But knowledge that is not founded upon the truth of God's word is a knowledge that will eventually culminate in both logical contradiction and solipsistic collapse. Scripture declares that the "fear of

[25]Michael B. Federici, "Logophobia: Eric Voegelin on Scientism and the Postmodern Corruption in Politics," *The Intercollegiate Review* 35 (Fall 1999): 14-21.

the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 7:1). And it is the only basis upon which one may build a knowledge that "will not pass away."

Postmodernism is Gnosticism's creed turned on itself. Gnosticism's quest has been a search for meaning and utopia through knowledge. Its long journey has brought it to the nihilistic conclusion that there is no meaning. Richard Tarnas summarizes for us the essence of the postmodern mind:

> What is called postmodern varies considerably according to context, but in its most general and widespread form, the postmodern mind may be viewed as an open-ended, indeterminate set of attitudes that has been shaped by a great diversity of intellectual cultural currents; these range from pragmatism, existentialism, Marxism, and psychoanalysis, to feminism, hermeneutics, deconstruction. . . . Out of this maelstrom . . . a few widely shared working principles have emerged. There is an appreciation of the plasticity and constant change of reality and knowledge, a stress on the priority of concrete experience over fixed abstract principles, and a conviction that no single a priori thought system should govern belief or investigation. The critical search for truth is constrained to be tolerant of ambiguity and pluralism, and its outcome will necessarily be knowledge that is relative and fallible rather than absolute or certain. Hence the quest for knowledge must be endlessly self-revising.[26]

For postmodernism, truth is not to be discovered or encountered nor is it something revealed. Rather it is merely a mode of discourse or a narrative shaped by a context. Hermeneutical principles contextualize meaning and language certainly does not render or refer to anything as "meaningful" or "true." Language is but a mode of power. To put it in the words of Richard Rorty, postmodernism is whatever one's colleagues allow one to get away with.

Herein lies the ultimate contradiction. If nothing is true or meaningful, then how can anything that the postmodernist says about meaninglessness be true? The search for meaning, millennium, and utopia, finally arrives at the ultimate conclusion that there is no meaning

[26]Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), 395-396.

to be discovered anywhere. Solomon anticipated this centuries ago: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 12:8).

### Denouement: The Church as God's Kingdom on Earth and Future Glory!

There is no better way to combat Gnosticism, especially as it has run its weary course, than to declare that God has already established His kingdom (utopia if you will) on earth. It lies not in millennial dream worlds or the various political infrastructures of the kingdom on the left. It is His kingdom and it is indeed His glorious bride, the church! The Apostles' Creed embodies this central truth. The First Article speaks of God's Creation of the world, and, contra Gnosticism, Scripture declares "And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1). Article II proclaims the gospel in the person and work of Jesus Christ who became flesh to redeem the world. Francis Pieper reminds us that:

> . . . the *Gloria in excelsis* of the angels sounds forth its glad message, "Peace on earth," not in some future millennial kingdom, but at the birth of Christ and the preaching of the Gospel at that event, and that Christ says not of the citizens of a future millennial kingdom, but of all who believe the Gospel: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you" (John 14:27).[27]

The Third Article of the Creed declares the Holy Spirit and the one holy catholic and apostolic church to be where the very communion of saints takes place. It is the one central activity of the church to bestow the forgiveness of sins to this very communion of saints and not to an invisible, disincarnate "church" in some spiritual or invisible existence known only through Gnostic insights and visions of some future longing. From Invocation to Benediction, the liturgy proclaims the work of Christ's church on earth: to communicate the gospel through God's divinely appointed Means of Grace—word and sacrament. From the Confession to the Creed and the prayers, the Lord's Supper and the singing of the *Agnus Dei*, the church proclaims to the world that God, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, bestows the forgiveness of sins. Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and there is the "peace which passeth all understanding," including the fallen understanding of the

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[27]Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 volumes, (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 3: 521.

Gnostics who are forever looking for their utopia not in forgiveness, but in knowledge. Here is where a thoroughly sacramental theology must come to bear. To dismiss the sacraments as mere symbols places the power to combat unbelief in words that have no physical reference point, but only a "spiritual" (whatever that means) one. Words then become the tool of Gnosticism and thus lead to a "verbal advantage" for those who would exchange their physical reference for a disembodied spiritual one. A non-sacramental theology leads to a spirituality that has no relationship to the Holy Trinity, creation, and the communion of saints and sinners gathered around it through word and sacrament. Hence we are back to spiritualizing and right back to the "finite not comprehending the infinite" of Calvinism. For example, the divorce of creation and reality from spirituality and knowledge. Christianity has always and must always oppose this separation.

The church is the very embodiment of Christ's kingdom and Christ's person and work on earth.[28] Earth, however, is not the church's final destiny. A this-worldly reign of Christ, which is the essential hope of the Millennialists, "misdirects and thus destroys the true Christian hope, which looks for that wonderful glory of heaven (Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Corinthians 1:6-8) into which the church militant shall be gathered at Christ's second coming (Matthew 25:34; 5:3, 10-12)."[29] Until that time, we undergo the trials and tribulations that Scripture declares that we will suffer. Whatever the apocalypse that we must face in this life, Luther's *Ein feste burg* proclaims triumphantly that even though "The old evil foe now means deadly woe," and even though "with might of ours can nought be done," and even though "devils all the world should fill," we confess that "one little Word can fell him," and that "for us fights the Valiant One whom God Himself elected." And therefore, "the kingdom ours remaineth."

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[28]David Scaer, *Christology*, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, edited by Robert Preus, Volume 7 (Fort Wayne: The International Foundation for Confessional Lutheran Research, 1989), 108.

[29]John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1933), 622-623.

# Theological Observer

## Out of the Mouths of Babes – Almost

Experience may not be the best teacher, but it is certainly the most convincing. This means we cannot have certainty about anything we are taught in a classroom until we actually get into a hands-on situation. In medicine this requires that after two years of classes, future physicians actually go to hospitals and do rounds in the sub-disciplines of orthopaedics, ophthalmology, gynecology, pediatrics, obstetrics, oncology, and so forth. Is there any reason we cannot do the same thing in theology? Part of teaching dogmatics is addressing false doctrines. This is not done because we Lutherans want to be negative, but true doctrine implies false doctrine in the same way a good God implies an evil satan. Should the case arise that a false doctrine is not obvious in teaching the true doctrine, it will sooner or later surface. My suspicions are that seminary students are not convinced that what the instructor says about other churches and their false teachings is really so.

Some years ago I thought that a course in dogmatics should include visiting other seminaries in the United States or even visiting the theological schools of German universities and attending the lectures and, where possible, meeting with the professors to discuss how they do theology. This would not be a fact finding trip, though some might suspect that this was the motive. Imposing on someone else's hospitality for purposes of interrogation is minimally unethical and assures that a return trip will be denied. Field trips are standard in colleges. In seminaries students are given the opportunity to visit the Holy Land and museums where artifacts from the biblical period are collected. How about a field trip in dogmatics? If students learn to preach by listening to and watching others preach, they can develop theologically by hearing theologians whose books they have read or, more likely, whose positions heard about from others. Hearsay is never really good enough. Organizing these kinds of field trips to other theological schools would be complex and is not likely to happen. Besides it would take away valuable time from students who have family obligations that require at least part time and some times full time employment.

Should it prove impossible for the mountain to come to Mohammed, Mohammed can come to the mountain or he can bring the mountain with him. This happened when a student at on the of the seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America transferred to Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne. In making references to what are current ELCA theological positions, the instructor was no longer limited to official documents, which are sufficiently explicit, but he could ask this student what he had learned from ELCA professors. This student's experiences were made more accessible, when he set down his experiences in the campus paper. In spite of the brevity demanded by student publications, his article is a combination between a spiritual autobiography and a theological one. Our interest was not tracing his spiritual footsteps – after all everyone has a spiritual biography – but to hear about what happens in ELCA seminaries. What do their students hear? Hearing and learning are two different

matters, as all teachers know. Mohammed had brought the mountain to us, a kind of field trip in reverse. For the record, the student was a member of an ELCA congregation and intended to serve as a pastor in that church. He was not an LCMS plant.

The article provides the names of the professors, so we are not dealing with such generalities of "ELCA professors teach." Recorded in the article are observations and not deductions. Names of the professors are not included here, but the professors mentioned in the article will be identified by their disciplines. So let's begin. Old Testament class was team taught by a Lutheran clergyman and a female Presbyterian minister who had left the Lutheran church because "she was 'tired of leaving her mind at the sanctuary door.'" A full exercise in higher criticism was supplied by the Lutheran minister and feminist theology offered by his Presbyterian counterpart who provided "post-modern feminist readings of the texts." (This is the usual fare at mainline seminaries and at meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature.) Also, Genesis is a collection of stories of ancestor worship. (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the twelve patriarchs were really gods of separate tribes. This is old hat.) The Greek II professor denied the "'Real Presence' of Christ's body and blood at the eucharist." Hebrew class informed the students that Adam was sexless until Eve was created. (If this were indeed the case, he [it] hardly needed Eve.) A tutor in Hebrew was surprised, when she was invited to speak in chapel, since she was neither an M.Div. student nor in the ministry, and to boot she was "an open lesbian." Introduction to Theological Studies emphasized different aspects of liberation theology. The positive side of the course was learning Luther's explanations of the Apostles' Creed in the Small Catechism and the downside was learning of "the seminary's unofficial policy to refrain from using masculine names and imagery for God." (Would this include Father and Son?) Now to the chapel. For a "joint Jewish-Lutheran chapel service" all Christian symbols that could possibly offend the Jews were removed. With this development Episcopalian students removed themselves to celebrate their own eucharist. Thank heaven for sectarian Anglicans! Of course there is much more to what happens at this ELCA seminary and others. For starters our readers can do their own research in finding the periodical in which the article in which these tidbits are found. Then they take their own field trips to the nearest ELCA seminaries and come to their own conclusions and write their own articles. (Depending on length, literary style and historical-critical analysis, they will be considered for publication by the editors on these pages.) After reading about this seminary's student's theological pilgrimage, I wondered how we could speak of our "fellow Lutherans in the ELCA." If this phrase has any meaning, it cannot refer to these seminary instructors but to a quickly dwindling lay remnant in the congregations. As mentioned nothing is finally conclusive for us, unless we experience it for ourselves and so everyone might want to consider organizing her or his own field trip. The student author was hesitant in jumping from one seminary to another and from one church body to another. When he took the leap of faith, he knew himself to be morally obligated to explain his impending action

to the congregation of which he was a member and which had spiritually supported him. He said that if he believed in what seminary taught him, he would have no reason to belong to any church at all or for that matter to be a Christian or even a believer in God.

David P. Scaer

## Rediscovering the Treatise As Ecumenical Response

When the year 1577 arrived and Lutherans were bringing their authoritative documents to a conclusion in the Formula of Concord, the Treatise on the Power and the Primacy of the Pope was no longer seen as one of the distinctive confessions of the Lutheran Church. The Formula, in both the Epitome and Solid Declaration, had subsumed Melancthon's document into Luther's Smalcald Articles and so it was generally thought that the Reformer had also authored the Treatise. Finding reasons for the confusion is not hard to find, since both the Treatise and the Smalcald Articles were formalized at conclaves of theologians and princes held in the city of Smalcald in the month of February 1537. Still this hardly an acceptable reason for the confusion. Worthy of some note is that the princes subscribed to Melanchthon's Treatise, but they backed off from Luther's more fiery Smalcald Articles.

Even without training in literary criticism, someone on the Formula's authorial committee should have noted that the measured, scholarly style of the Treatise could have hardly come from the pen which had given birth to the Smalcald Articles, a document that left no doubt about what Luther thought about the pope. Perhaps the confusion resulted from a subliminal response on the part of the writers of the Formula, who wanted as few reminders of Melanchthon as possible. After all his name does not grace its pages. Speak about gratitude! By submerging it into the Smalcald Articles, they made the Treatise Luther's child and its true parent was forgotten. This slight of history has been rectified in the ordination rite of the Agenda of Lutheran Worship, which requires candidates to give a specfic confessional allegiance to the Treatise. In view of recent less friendly exchanges over the doctrine and practice of the ministry in Lutheran quarters, the Treatise might have value beyond inclusion in the ordination liturgy. It addresses the place of the pope in Christendom and the differences between bishops and priests, issues that now concern the ELCA, but also of some interest to the rest of us. Before locating the specific usefulness of the Treatise, a few preliminary remarks are in order.

In the last few years a large majority of world Lutheranism has involved itself in ecumenical alliances that could have hardly been imagined a generation ago. For anyone with with any sense of tradition and confessional heritage, these actions have been mind boggling. In one action the ELCA entered into full altar and pulpit fellowship with four churches that are thoroughly Reformed in doctrine, practice and heritage, and another action wiped the slate clean with the

Roman Church on the issue of justification. Then the ELCA went fishing in Anglican waters and agreed to have bishops in the apostolic succession ordained their bishops. Bishops from the Church of Sweden would be acceptable substitutes for Episcopal ones. At first glance it may seem that the ELCA got the short end of the stick in this bargain. It had to accept bishops consecrated in the line of apostolic succession, but the Episcopal Church was not asked to accept the Augsburg Confession, which is the identifying document of the Lutheran Church. Instead of bearing the name of "Lutheran," some churches appropriately have called themselves churches of the Augsburg Confession and have added the word "unaltered" as a final salvo against the Reformed. It also comes as close to being the universally acceptable and minimum confession among Protestants. John Calvin signed it and traces of it surface in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Communion. In aligning themselves with the ELCA, Episcopalians make a point of priding themselves in their lack of doctrinal precision. Apostolic succession is the one exception, but then again this may be a required practice and not a doctrine. Without this succession the Episcopal Church would be less than episcopal, since "episcopal" means "bishop," and, in their case, bishops standing in an unbroken line since the time of the apostles. Likewise a Lutheran church that equivocates on the Augsburg Confession is hardly Lutheran at least in the historical sense which has been in place since June 1530. A second look at the agreement may show that neither the ELCA nor the Episcopal Church came out on top.

Incumbent ELCA bishops will not have to be (re[?]-) consecrated by Anglican bishops to be continued in office and men and women now functioning as ELCA pastors will not need to go to an Episcopal bishops for another ordination. Up to this time the Anglican Communion recognized only their own ordinations and those administered by Roman and Orthodox bishops. (For the record the LCMS does not recognize any ordination administered to women, even if it is passed on to them through the line of apostolic succession.) The agreement with the Episcopal Church only requires that bishops in the apostolic success participate in future consecrations of ELCA bishops. Bishops not in the succession will assumably participate as they do now. Since the character of ordination is an unsettled issue in some Lutheran quarters, it seems awkward to look upon the consecration of bishops as an additional required church ritual. Why make the consecration of bishops by bishops standing in the apostolic succession a necessary requirement for the ministry, when some Lutherans find no divine mandate for ordaining pastors? More has to be said about this in looking at the Treatise. It will take some years before all ELCA bishops stand in the line of apostolic succession and even more time before these properly consecrated bishops subsequently properly ordain candidates for the ministry. During the interim, in which the sweet water of apostolic succession is mixed with the salty water of an inadequate ordinations, the Episcopal Church has agreed to recognize the validity of the Sacraments in the ELCA administered by pastors who have not been ordained by bishops with apostolic succession. Considering that a totally

properly consecrated clergy may not be in place for at least another fifty years, this is a remarkable concession on the part of the Episcopal Church for whom apostolic succession is supposedly nonnegotiable. At least for the interim it is negotiable. Since some ELCA bishops, who do not now possess this succession, may still be ordaining pastors twenty years from now, a total saturation of apostolic succession into its clergy could conceivably only be completed by year 2070! As a united communion the ELCA and the Episcopal Church have about nine million members, with the ELCA accounting for at least sixty percent of the total combined membership. The ratio of practicing clergy in each group may fall somewhere around the same percentage. So that for two validly ordained Episcopal clergy persons celebrating a valid Holy Communion now, there are three non-validly ordained Lutheran clergy persons doing the same thing validly. At least they were non-validly ordained up until the agreement and doing less than fully valid rituals. The Episcopal Church has made a huge concession in conceding that sacraments can be validly administered by those Lutheran pastors not standing in the apostolic succession. So when push comes to shove, apostolic succession is not all that necessary. Someone may ask if Lutheran pastors do not need apostolic succession in the year 2000, would they really need it in the year 2100. There is still another twist to the arrangement. With the Episcopal Church's declining membership, preserving the apostolic succession may be the ELCA's gift for its new partner church. What the ELCA has freely received it can freely give back to the church that bestowed it. This rare ecclesiastic gene and endangered species has been preserved.

Among the ELCA's ecclesiastical achievements, however, the agreement with the Episcopalians earns a only silver medal. The gold goes to ELCALWF *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* with the Vatican. A bronze goes to the ELCA agreement to practice altar and pulpit fellowship with four Reformed churches. Subsequent fellowship with the Moravians doesn't even place. In its ecumenical dexterity in stretching the hands of fellowship into every corner of Christendom, the ELCA has accomplished what the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, and the National Council of Churches all attempted but failed.

My ranking of the ELCA's ecumenical accomplishments breaks with the crowd. In spite of the wide publicity, first place goes not to the Roman connection but to the Reformed connection. The agreement with Rome changes nothing in the parishes of either church, but the one with the Reformed does. Rome does not welcome Lutherans at its altar, but on the other hand laity and clergy of Reformed and Lutheran churches can move back forth with impunity. Lutheran churches have not become one church with Rome, but Lutherans and Reformed churches have. Some Lutherans may recognize that Reformed liturgies will be less definite in identifying the bread of the Lord's Supper with Christ's body. Someone might notice that a Reformed minister serving in his own church or in an ELCA parish may not be overly concerned about properly disposing of the consecrated bread and wine which Lutheran understand really are Christ's body and blood. Organizational changes are secondary but are bound to happen by combining

foreign and domestic missions, seminaries and publishing houses. How about Augsburg-Westminster Press?

Second place among the ELCA's ecumenical accomplishments goes to the Episcopal connection. Episcopal liturgies are so close to Lutheran ones that ELCA parishioners should feel at home with them. Though we have argued that in allowing a non-apostolically ordained clergy to administer the Sacraments, the Episcopal Church has perhaps unwittingly gutted their own polity which is the glue which holds them together, a real problem has already surfaced in the ELCA in requiring Episcopal bishops to participate in the consecration of ELCA bishops. A good number of ELCA clergy and pastors are opposed to this. Since there are an abundance of Episcopal bishops, they will be on the ready when called upon to share the leaven of apostolic succession in the consecrating of ELCA bishops. To prime the pump they might also show up for the ordination of ELCA pastors.

Still in the center of public's attention is *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,* since it seems that Rome has taken it less seriously than Lutherans have. Whatever progress was made in the *Joint Declaration* seems to have been unraveled by *Dominus Deus,* a document issued on September 5, 2000 by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The man behind the pope's encyclical is the capable Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who would be Rome's prime minister, if the position existed. At the heart of the document is that Rome sees itself as the only expression of the catholic church: "there exists a single church of Christ, which subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him." In spite of the negative response from Lutherans to this claim, this hardly startling. Without it should, Rome would have given up its one reason for existence. Without a pope Rome would not be Rome. Confessional Lutherans make a similar claim but not for their leaders but for their doctrine. Rome attaches the reason for its superiority to her allegiance to the pope and Lutherans attach their uniqueness to its doctrine formulations. *Dominus Deus* makes an exception for the Eastern Orthodox churches who have a valid apostolic succession without recognizing papal supremacy, but this concession will not win any those whom it intends to please. The Orthodox community of churches is more fervently anti-Roman than even Luther's most ardent defenders, among whom we in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod count ourselves the foremost. The problem for Protestants is that *Dominus Deus* places Protestant Christianity on the edge of the true church, that is, Rome. "The ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the eucharistic mystery, are not church in the proper sense; however, those who are baptized in these communities are by baptism incorporated in Christ and thus are in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the church (read: Rome)." If half a loaf is better than none, then the rest of us do not leave Rome's table hungry. Our eucharist does not measure up to Rome's standards, but our baptism does. On our sacramental score card one out of two is not bad. Since Rome counts seven sacraments, we come up with a significantly lower percentage. *Dominus Deus*

would not have mattered, if the ELCA had not made some significant concessions on the central Lutheran doctrine of justification with Rome. Because of the agreement some Lutherans were right in expecting a slightly better treatment from the pope. Of course the Lutherans were not the only ones with hurt feelings. Anglican (Episcopal) bishops, ordinations, and sacraments remain invalid and unrecognized and the quarreling Eastern Orthodox patriarchs, metropolitans, and bishops remain united in their opposition to any authority the pope claims over them. Lutherans loose on two counts. ELCA agreement on justification has not moved the pope's heart and the apostolic succession gained through the Anglican connection does not meet muster in Rome. It looks like we are all back at square one-1537.In spite of Rome's traditional claims, *Dominus Deus* does hold out, as noted above. Lutherans say something similar when we say that Christians in false churches are saved because they believe those doctrines that we say are necessary for salvation. A continued disappointment is Rome's universalism in allowing for salvation outside of Christendom-but that position is a natural result of its teaching on the role works in salvation.

Melanchthon's Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope was adopted by Lutherans at Smalcald to address problems that are still with us almost half a millennium later. This document specifically denies the bishop of Rome's claim "to be superior by divine right to all bishops and pastors" and that his decrees have divine authority behind them. In the same document Lutherans refused to accept that submission to him determined the boundaries of the church. According to Roman Catholic definition during the Reformation Lutherans were outside of the church and *Dominus Deus* is hardly saying anything less or more. So why the fuss. Luther, Melanchthon, Martin Chemnitz, and the other Lutheran fathers knew exactly what the pope's terms were and we should hardly be amazed that things have not changed.

What might not be as obvious is the role the Treatise has in the ELCA accession to having Episcopal bishop consecrated their bishops. Apart from the confessional principles which are applicable in this situation, this agreement is fraught with inconsistencies, the chief of which is that Lutheran and Episcopal bishops may not be the same kinds of "bishops." A less imaginative person would say this is mixing apples and oranges, not that this is bad in every case. In America ELCA bishops were called synod presidents until the 1980s and their functions were closer and still are to that of LCMS district presidents and not bishops in those churches like Rome, the Eastern Orthodox and Anglican communions, which see bishops as the chord which holds the church together. All these bishops serve until retirement and have the right to ordain for life. Traditionally Lutheran presidents or bishops stood for election after their terms expired. Lutherans saw the divine office in that of the pastor and not the bishop as these other communions do. For Lutherans the bishop was an extension of the pastoral office and for Episcopalians the pastor (a.k.a. as rector, vicar, archdeacon) was seen as an extension of the bishop. In bringing churches with the same doctrine but with different polities together, these do not have to remain insurmountable obstacles.

Problematical is who has the right to ordain. This also can be a point on which compromise in practice is possible. With only one known exception the Lutherans did not ordain any new clergy until the Reformation was into its twentieth year, because they were determined to maintain the ancient church practice of ordination by bishops. Only when the Roman bishops did not cooperate, did Luther and the reformers, especially his colleague, Johannes Bugenhagen, take it upon themselves to ordain pastors. Ordination by bishops did have symbolic significance in asserting that a pastor was assigned to a particular place, but that his ministry was bestowed and recognized by the entire church. More than a mere parochial act, it was the act of the church catholic. It still has this catholic significance today in that it expresses a vertical unity with all the pastors who ever served the church since the time of the apostles and horizontal unity with all pastors who preach the gospel and administer the sacraments now. So even today in the LCMS district presidents have the responsibility for ordaining candidates for the ministry or at least authorizing these ordinations. The Treatise holds that the parochial and episcopal functions belong to the one office of the ministry and by human arrangement some ministers exercise some functions and others exercise other functions. In certain situations a pastor can take the place of a bishop and ordain: "it is clear that an ordination performed by pastor in his own church is valid by divine right." Problematic in the ELCA arrangement is that bishops may or should ordain, but this privilege can only be exercised by bishops standing in the apostolic succession.

Take this scenario. We could agree in the LCMS to have only district presidents/bishops ordain candidates for the ministry and this could be done at district and synod conventions or in the home or calling congregation of the candidates. Lutheran churches have diverse practices. Bugenhagen and Luther did the ordaining in Wittenberg weeks and months before the candidates reached the congregations they were called to serve. The situation could arise that a district president would not be available for example in some remote location in Asia, Africa, or Russia to ordain pastors. There is no reason that the people should be deprived of a pastor until a synod or church president were available. In such a case a pastor designated by the authorizing church and its president could and should ordain and this ordination would be of no lesser value than one administered by a church president or bishop. Such was the case in the first Lutheran ordinations in America. Justus Falckner was ordained by Andreas Rudman under the auspices of the Church of Sweden, and Rudman spoke of both the legitimate and historic character of the practice:

> Episcopal authority to consecrate churches, ordain, etc. has been delegated to me by the bishop [in Sweden] especially in a case of this kind. It has been done before in Pennsylvania among the Swedes by Domine Lars Lock, who ordained Avelius [Abelius Zetskoorn] there, etc. Moreover, you remember that Lutherans in Holland have no bishop and

> nevertheless have ordained by joint action of the presbyters. Henceforth let there be no doubt. . . .[1]

Ordination by pastor will no longer be allowed in the ELCA, even though it is specifically allowed by the Treatise and was the necessary practice in America until at least the founding of the Pennsylvania Ministerium in 1748, a predecessor body of the ELCA. Its church council will not allow for the exceptions requested by a member synod.

We do not question whether participation of Episcopal bishops in the ELCA consecrations and ordinations is proper, since both churches claim a necessary modicum of agreement in faith or lack of faith, depending on perspective. Such mutual participation would not be possible for the LCMS, since we are not even close to any kind of agreement with either the Episcopal Church or for that matter the ELCA. The ordination service is itself a confession of a shared faith and on this account along with other reasons it is a catholic rite, that is, we are doing something the church has always done. Since within the next half century the majority of clergy in both the Episcopal Church and the ELCA will be women, it must be clearly said that ordinations administered by women, whether they are bishops or pastors, and received by women, are neither valid nor catholic. In ordaining women the ELCA has contravened a specific apostolic word (among other things) and are guilty of libertinism and, by insisting that only bishops ordain pastors, they have fallen in the other direction into legalism and denied a certain freedom specifically allowed by the Lutheran Confessions.

David P. Scaer

[1]VanLaer, *Lutheran Church in New York,* cited in *The Lutherans in North America,* edited by E. Clifford Nelson, revised edition (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 13.

# Book Reviews

***New England's Moral Legislator: Timothy Dwight, 1752-1817.* By John R. Fitzmier. Religion in North America Series, edited by Catherine L. Albanese and Stephen J. Stein. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998. xii+261 Pages.**

John R. Fitzmier long-time professor of American religious history at Vanderbilt Divinity School and now Dean of the School of Theology at Claremont provided a model of historical narrative and interpretation in his study of Timothy Dwight. Dwight is not a particularly well known figure to confessional Lutheran pastors—but he should be. President of Yale from 1795-1817, Dwight and his institution wielded a significant influence on American culture generally and American Protestantism specifically during the early national period (about 1790-1840). It was during this period of American history that a distinctive form of Lutheranism, the "American Lutheranism" of Samuel Schmucker and Benjamin Kurtz, began to emerge, and Timothy Dwight's distinctive theological themes found their way into this expression of Lutheranism. Fitzmier's biography outlines Dwight's life and thought and provides an outstanding entry point for understanding the multifaceted and nuanced thought and experience of Timothy Dwight.

Fitzmier divides the work into five chapters. Following an introduction that introduces the reader to the issue of Dwight's functional blindness—a theme that reappears throughout the book—Fitzmier provides an extended overview of Dwight as the "Light of Yale." Chapters two and three consider Dwight's work as a preacher and theologian respectively, while chapters four and five examine his work as a poet/historian and moralist. The picture that Fitzmier paints illustrates a remarkably insightful and productive theologian who simultaneously embraced and resisted, shaped and rejected, the emerging American culture.

Dwight envisioned an American Protestant church that embodied what he called "Godly Federalism." But more than a articulating a mere abstract theology, Dwight crafted "a distinctively American homiletic" (103). This homiletic "resisted theological precisionism" and sought to overcome the threat of infidelity and immorality. It emphasized the life of sanctification in the hearer—"'ought' and 'should' framed Dwight's homiletics" (104), and was based on Holy Scripture and common sense.

In other words, Dwight shaped American Christianity through his preaching, as well as the preaching of his students. The content of this preaching would have significant effects, reaching also to the field of American Lutheranism. Fitzmier shows that Dwight was in many ways instrumental in the growing dominance of moral government theology in American Christianity. Dwight's doctrine of the atonement did not include any notion of objective or general justification and the doctrine of imputation. Rather, Christ's death vindicates or fulfills God's law so that the possibility for the salvation of individuals exists. As Dwight writes: "The atonement of Christ in no sense makes it necessary that God should accept the

sinner on the ground of justice; but only renders his forgiveness not inconsistent with the divine character. Before the atonement, he could not be forgiven. After the atonement, this impossibility ceases" (118). Thus Christ's work merely fulfills the law for the law's own sake—not for the sake of sinners. The righteousness of Christ is not applied to the sinner through the means of grace. Rather the sinner now has the opportunity to be justified—such justification being inseparably bound up with the moral life of the person who willingly takes the burden of obedience to the law upon himself. This, of course, is very close to the theology of Schmucker and Kurtz, and Dwight's influence is apparent in the work of both of these Lutherans. Above all, the American Lutherans were concerned with the sanctified life interpreted in a strictly moral fashion. Scripture and common sense were the means for instructing and engendering the Christian life. That life would express itself, in the case of the American Lutherans, in advocacy for social reform, such as temperance and abolitionism.

Which is all to say that this is an excellent exercise in theological biography whose implications reach into the area of American Lutheranism. Still, several typographical errors mar the text—careful editing should have excised these. Also, the word "eschew" appears far too often. A fine index and outstanding notes show the breadth of Fitzmier's command of the sources. Fitzmier has produced a model of theological biography. It weaves together compelling narrative and careful theological definition, all the while engaging the existing historiography, in both a supplementary and corrective sense.

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

***When God Becomes My Enemy: The Theology of the Complaint Psalms.*** **By Ingvar Fløysvik. Saint Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1997.**

This book, one of the first publications of Concordia Academic Press, is a revision of Ingvar Fløysvik's doctoral dissertation at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis. As the title indicates, the book is a detailed study of the Old Testament complaint psalms, the theme of which may well be summarized as *When God Becomes My Enemy*. Since this group of psalms has consistently challenged—and oftentimes frustrated—those who teach and pray the psalter, Fløysvik's punctilious examination and explanation of them is a welcome, though not wholly adequate, theological treatment.

The 206-page work is divided into three sections. The first section defines and delineates those psalms that fall into the category of complaint, explains the rationale behind Fløysvik's helpful structural analysis which accompanies his exegesis, and provides a series of questions one ought to ask regarding each psalm to ascertain the theological assumptions of the author. Drawing upon the work of E. S. Gerstenberg and C. C. Broyles, Fløysvik defines complaint psalms as "psalms in which God is partly or totally blamed for the distress the people or the individual are currently experiencing" (17). Using this definition, one finds nineteen such psalms in the psalter.

The second and major section contains a thorough exegetical treatment of five complaint psalms (Psalms 6, 44, 74, 88, and 90), which exemplify the characteristics of the corpus. Each psalm is analyzed according to the same pattern: translation, translation notes, structure, stanzas, progression in content and mood, the problem, the prayer, and the appeal. Fløysvik's scrupulous dissection of and concise commentary on these texts provides the reader with a wealth of very helpful material.

The final section explicates the theological assumptions and implications of the complaint psalms. In particular, Fløysvik seeks to address the cause of God's wrath in these psalms, how the psalmist responded to this wrath in the language of prayer, and what kinds of appeals were used by the psalmist in his attempt to escape from the divine anger under which he suffered. In the conclusion, Fløysvik observes:

> The psalmists do not explain away their suffering either by pretending that it is not real or by seeing it as what one simply has to expect in this world. They do not grant that anything is beyond their God's control. Still, they do not accept the affliction as God's will in a fatalistic manner or in such a way that one has to submit to it as good, just, and inescapable. They also do not assume that God's wrath in their cases is provoked by some unknown sin of which they need to repent. They protest God's work of wrath and pray that he may work according to his character . . . Faith sticks to God's self-revelation in the midst of conflicting evidence. That is the contribution of these psalms (175-176).

In the introduction, Fløysvik notes that he has restricted his study to deal only with the "theological assumptions of the ancient Israelite believers" (14). Thus he does not attempt to view the complaint psalms from a christological perspective, even though, for example, Psalm 22 falls into this category (one may see page 14, note 3). One wonders, however, how adequate a theological assessment can be given of psalms that have been stripped of their christological import. The lack of any attempt to fill out the skeletal framework of the complaint psalms with messianic "flesh and blood" constitutes the only real weakness of this otherwise fine piece of scholarship.

Chad L. Bird
Saint Paul Lutheran Church
Wellston, Oklahoma

***The Fabricated Luther: The Rise and Fall of the Shirer Myth.*** **By Uwe Siemon-Netto, with foreword by Peter L. Berger. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994. 186 Pages.**

This book is an important corrective to the distortion of the story of Confessional Lutheranism during the Third Reich. In spite of the immense number of books dealing with the *Kirchenkampf*, or "church struggle," under

Hitler, the role of Confessional Lutherans has not been properly treated. Rather, historians biased in favor of the theology of Karl Barth, the Barmen Declaration, and the Union churches have seriously distorted it. An impartial history of the Lutheran churches and their leading theologians since 1933 is urgently needed.

Netto left a career in journalism to study theology. In analyzing the unwarranted intrusion of clichés in the understanding of recent history, he follows his teacher, Peter L. Berger, as well as Anton Zijderveld. Several dominant ones that he confronts include the cliché that Martin Luther taught unquestioning civil obedience and quietism and thereby contributed to the rise of Hitler and National Socialism, and the cliché that Marxism in eastern Germany could never be overcome with the reunion of East and West, a notion that has been conclusively disproved.

Chapter 2, "Luther: The Villain," brings the reader *in medias res*. Netto lists writers who have thus distorted Luther: Thomas Mûntzer, Richard Marius, Friedrich Engels, Alexander Abusch, William Temple, William R. Inge, Peter F. Wiener, William L. Shirer, Thomas Mann, Ernst Troeltsch, and Reinhold Niebuhr. For some unknown reason, he omits Karl Barth, and he writes his book as though he were unconscious of the fact that the things he is writing are a refutation of the theology of Barth.

In chapter 3, "Luther: No Villain after All?" Netto draws upon the work of the late Luther scholar, Franz Lau, as well as the writings of the Reformer himself, to overthrow the notion that Luther taught political quietism and unconditional submission to the demands of an evil government. He rightly shows that there were two periods in Luther's writings, and that after the Diet of Augsburg (1530), Luther taught the need of the lower political authorities to resist the emperor if he suppressed the gospel. Netto further strengthens his case by showing how the Gnesio-Lutherans, the strictest interpreters of the Reformer, taught the right to resist the imperial government when it turned against the evangelical estates. Here he cites the work of Oliver Olson on the Magdeburg Confession, the document that also served as the forerunner for the teachings of resistance of Calvin's followers.

> A key paragraph of this Magdeburg Confession states clearly that subjects of authority and even children and servants do not owe obedience to those rulers, parents or employers 'who want to lead them away from true fear of God and honorable living.' For those authorities and parents 'will become an ordinance of the devil instead of God, an ordinance which everyone can and ought to resist with a good conscience' (86).

Netto points out that Bonhoeffer drew inspiration from the precedent of Flacius and the Magdeburg Confession.

In chapter 4, we find "Luther vindicated" by reference to Carl Goerdeler, a notable leader in the resistance movement. Goerdeler sturdily resisted the Nazis while mayor of Leipzig. Later, he resigned to protest their removal of the

monument to Felix Mendelssohn from the front of the famous concert hall, the *Gewandhaus* (110). Goerdeler, who advocated nonviolent resistance, did not favor a bloody uprising against Hitler, but worked instead to unseat him by peaceful means: by political opposition within Germany and by international pressure from without. He made several trips abroad to enlist the aid of Roosevelt, Churchill, and other foreign leaders in overthrowing Hitler and stopping the Nazi outrages, such as persecution of the Jews. Unfortunately, these world leaders were not interested in working with the German opponents of Hitler and actually foiled the resistance movement in order to advance other interests.

In this context, Netto uncovers the racism inherent in the Germanophobia of Vansittart, Churchill, and Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. In a section on "cliché thinking in the White House," Netto tells how the Roosevelts regarded the Germans as incurable "militarists," and how the president, "craving for Stalin's approval and friendship," could not see the close similarity between Hitlerite Germany and the Soviet Union. Roosevelt "thought Stalin behaved like a Christian gentlemen" (135). Therein, the American president refused to listen to the seasoned advice of Louis B. Lochner, Allen W. Dulles, and A. P. Young, who represented the position of Goerdeler. The leaders of the German resistance were shunned, and, in the end, men such as Bonhoeffer and Goerdeler were executed by the Nazis.

In chapter 5, Netto establishes that Luther was vindicated by "Leipzig 1989." It was a Lutheran political ethos that guided the nonviolent resistance movement, going out from Leipzig and leading to the peaceful overthrow of the communist regime in each Germany. He relates interesting anecdotes about the resistance movement, the prayer vigils, and other actions by Lutherans. The overthrow of communism, led by Lutherans, explodes the cliché that Lutherans are quietists who teach only submission to an evil regime.

Chapter 6 is an epilog, pleading for Lutherans to return to the two-realm teaching of Luther and thereby to rejuvenate the political and social scene of our day. Netto finds it tragic that some Lutherans have adopted political and social activism, which is self-defeating. He asserts that the political principles taught by Luther and his followers hold the true solution and stresses that the kairos for Lutheran teaching has arrived. In view of the disillusionment in America with theocratic notions during the Viet Nam War, one can only agree with Netto, and wonder why American Lutherans generally have not pressed their point, but have followed a wrong agenda.

There are several places where I take issue with the author. In citing Luther, Netto follows the translation by Alfred von Rohr Sauer of Psalm 101 in the American Edition, which refers to the spiritual government as "vertical" and the secular government as "horizontal." These words were not used by Luther, and their use might mislead one into thinking of the secular power as autonomous from God. Since God works also in the secular power, the horizontal versus

vertical paradigm is not appropriate here. The reference is from American Edition of Luther's Works, 13:197.

The dualistic paradigm of finite/infinite by Netto is questionable: "The spiritual realm is infinite. It is the realm of the *Deus revelatus,* the God who revealed himself in Christ..." (66); after all, it was in the flesh of the incarnate Son that the hidden God chose to reveal Himself. See also the correlated statement, "The secular realm is finite. It is the realm of the *Deus absconditus,* the hidden God..." Unacceptable! After all, the spiritual realm is present in material things, word and sacrament. As I have insisted in my *Adventures in Law and Gospel,* the means of grace are neither finite nor infinite. The pairing of finite/infinite, which is characteristic of Reformed thought, was used neither by Lau, whom he is citing, nor in Luther's exposition of Psalm 101, as referred to by Netto (AE 13:197; one may compare WA 51:13; 21). When Netto calls the spiritual realm "infinite," he jeopardizes the doctrine of the two realms.

Netto errs when he writes that Luther "took the revolutionary step of liberating the church and the state from the medieval chains binding them together" (71). The term "state" in this sense was unknown to Luther, and the concept of separation of church and state belongs to a later period. I also disagree when Netto follows Carter Lindberg's claim: "Luther's fundamental doctrinal commitment to justification by grace alone informed his rejection of all expressions of the *corpus Christianum*..." (page 690 in Lindberg, erroneously cited as page 691 by Netto, note 50). Few scholars would accept the proposition that Luther rejected the mediaeval concept of one unified Christian body, the *corpus Christianum,* and taught the separation of church and state; the burden of proof rests here with Lindberg and Netto. It seems that what they really intend to say is that Luther rejected all expressions of theocracy, which, of course, is correct. Moreover, Luther's three estates – the secular power, the spiritual authority, and the family – overlapped at times in the same individual.

Unfortunately, this book follows the practice of relegating the notes to a clump at the end of each chapter, which makes the book difficult to read; once regarded as an economy, the modern computer can now place the notes at the bottom of each page easily and inexpensively. The book should have been provided with indices, or at least an index of names, which would enhance the usability of the book.

The widespread practice, followed here also, of referring to the "American Edition" translation of Luther as LW or "Luther's Works," deserves criticism. For hundreds of years, Luther's works have been cited by the place of publication or the name of the editor (Jena edition, Walch edition, Saint Louis edition, Lenker, Philadelphia, Clemen or Bonn edition). Not even the magisterial set published by Böhlau is cited as "LW" but as WA, Weimarer Ausgabe. These translated works should therefore be referred to more modestly as "AE" (since a Philadelphia and a Saint Louis edition already exist), if only to remind ourselves that they do not present the original text, but only translations.

*The Fabricated Luther*, which first appeared in German, is an important book, and Concordia Publishing House is to be commended for its publication. The book is a powerful vindication of Luther's doctrine of the two realms and Lutheran political ethics. It deserves to be read by all clergy and lay people who are concerned with correcting the misrepresentations of Luther and the Lutheran church, not the least being the false statements about Luther given at the holocaust museum in Washington. Netto's book is recommended for use in college and seminary courses in history and theological ethics. The time has come for the real Luther to be heard.

Lowell C. Green
State University of New York
Buffalo, New York

***Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method.* By Sidney Greidanus. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999. 373 Pages. Paper. $22.00.**

The standard formula for gaining prominence in homiletical circles these days is to invent or advance a new sermonic form. With true respect to Craddock, Lowry, Jensen, Buttrick, and others, one name has come to the fore by another route. Sidney Greidanus, of Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, may have become the most helpful current homiletician in North America simply by being thorough, thoughtful, and practical.

Thorough research characterized Greidanus' last book, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*. Readers of the present work will again find no stone unturned and his discoveries developed into another tightly-organized volume, which follows its thesis and does what it sets out to do. "The primary aim of this book," Greidanus writes, "is to provide seminary students and preachers with a responsible, contemporary method for preaching Christ from the Old Testament. A secondary, but no less important, aim is to challenge Old Testament scholars to broaden their focus and to understand the Old Testament not only in its own historical context but also in the context of the New Testament" (xii).

That challenge is indeed raised when Greidanus argues that the Old Testament is, by character, "Christian" (44), and is to be understood from the reality of Christ (183 and following). "The whole Old Testament," in fact, "bears witness to Jesus" (56), and "we are faithful preachers only when we do justice to this dimension in our interpretation and preaching of the Old Testament" (62). Obviously, then, he staunchly upholds predictive prophecy against destructive criticism, particularly with his lengthy defense of the traditional, christological interpretation of the "seed of the woman" (245-248).

Greidanus' primary aim, though, is to enable actual preaching of Christ, specifically Christ incarnate (54), from the Old Testament. His contemporary method is undergirded by an excellent historical survey, including Origen's

allegorizing, Antioch's typology, and what he calls Luther's christological and Calvin's theocentric approaches to Old Testament preaching. Greidanus then proposes his own "redemptive-historical christocentric method," "somewhere between" Luther and Calvin (227). The method seeks to honor both the text's own historical context and its place in the full canon and redemptive history. Taking its cues from New Testament uses of the Old, the method offers seven "roads" to preaching Christ from the Old Testament: the ways of redemptive-historical progression, of promise-fulfillment, of typology, of analogy, of longitudinal themes, of New Testament references, and of contrast.

These seven options, it seems, should offer the preacher a legitimate move from virtually any Old Testament text to proclaiming Christ, in whom alone, Greidanus reminds, is eternal life (12). Incidentally, as he demonstrates the possibilities in the last two chapters, Greidanus spells out the ten-step homiletical process he recommends for all texts. Not a bad bonus.

The book, then, is well researched and the material is effectively presented. This is a book readers can use.

Carl C. Fickenscher II

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
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