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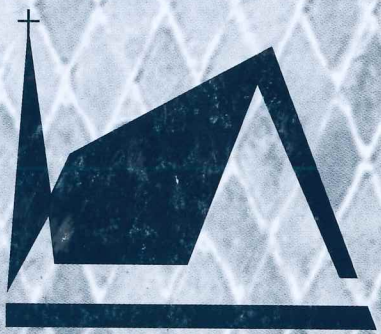

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

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Religious Pluralism and Knowledge of the True God: Fraternal Reflection and Discussion

The Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary

Religious pluralism finds routine expression in the popular confession: "We all believe in the same God." The church, therefore, faces a significant erosion of the biblical confession that only those who have faith in Jesus Christ given through the revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures know the true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and have salvation. The impact of religious pluralism upon the church is visible in the position of the Second Vatican Council on the salvation of adherents of other religions (especially Judaism and Islam):

> Finally, those who have not received the Gospel are related to the People of God in various ways. There is first, that people to which the covenants and promises were made, and from which Christ was born according to the flesh (cf. Rom. 9:4-5): in view of the divine choice, they are a people most dear for the sake of the fathers, for the gifts of God are without repentance (cf. Rom. 11:29-29). But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Moslems: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day. Nor is God remote from those who in the shadows and images seek the unknown god, since he gives to all men life and breath and all things (cf. Acts 17:25-28), and since the Saviour wills all men to be saved (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4). Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation.[1]

This position, which was controversial when it was adopted in 1964, is now widely accepted among Americans, including many Christians. A

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[1]"Lumen Gentium," 16. This quotation is from *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1975), 367. For a more recent expression of this position, see "Reflections on Covenant and Mission," The Consultation of The National Council of Synagogues and The Bishops Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (USCCB), http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/documents/interreligious/ncs_usccb120802.htm.

recent survey of Americans states: "Three quarters of the public say many religions can lead to eternal life."[2] This situation prompts an important question: To what extent do adherents of religions that have perverted the *natural* revelation of God (i.e., His existence and power reflected in creation and placed in conscience) or have even rejected the *special* revelation of God (i.e., His words and deeds recorded in the Holy Scriptures) still have knowledge of the true God?

In contrast to the perspective toward non-Christian religions expressed by Vatican II and reflected in the widely held opinion that various religions have knowledge of the true God, the Holy Scriptures impart a different perspective. The Scriptures distinguish between *knowing about the existence of God* and *knowing who God is* by what He has done through the revelation given to Israel and fulfilled in Christ. The Scriptures teach that God witnesses to Himself in creation and conscience (Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:19-29, 2:15), yet no one comes to know who the true God is through this witness. According to the extensive testimony of the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:18-32, sinful man without the Holy Spirit *always* rejects or perverts this natural revelation of God with the result that idolatry in some form inevitably follows (1:21-24). God placed the revelation of Himself around and even in man, but it was and continues to be rejected: "So they are without excuse; for even though they had known God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and their undiscerning hearts were darkened" (1:20b-21). The natural revelation of the true God, which is accessible to all, makes all accountable to God, but each one who remains in bondage to sin "does not see fit to have a knowledge of God" (1:28), is even a "hater of God" (1:30), and is under God's wrath (1:18). Paul concludes his assessment of man who is in bondage to sin with these poignant quotations of the Old Testament: "No one understands, no one seeks for God" (Romans 3:11, quoting Psalms 14 and 53) and "there is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:18, quoting Psalm 36:1). The multiplicity of religions testifies that the natural revelation of God is accessible to all; their contradictory

[2]"Americans Struggle with Religion's Role at Home and Abroad," Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, The Pew Forum on Religions and Public Life, 20 March 2002, or http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?PageID=386. This report also states: "Even the most strongly committed evangelical Christians are evenly divided (48%-48%) over whether their faith [Christianity] is the only route to eternal life or not."

and largely false contents demonstrate that natural revelation is not sufficient to know who the true God is.

This situation impresses upon us the vital importance of both God's *special revelation* recorded in the Holy Scriptures and *faith in Christ worked by the Holy Spirit* in order to know who the true God is. God revealed Himself in history by appearing, speaking, and acting in order to preserve and redeem His creation. This revelation shows *who God is*: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who elected Israel (Exodus 3:6). He is YHWH, who led Israel out of Egypt into the promised land (Exodus 3:15). This self-same God in the New Testament reveals Himself ultimately in the person of Jesus of Nazareth through whom we know God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (John 1:14-18; Matthew 28:19). Jesus suffered for the sin of the world, died, and rose again (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). If one rejects Jesus and His death for sin, one is rejecting the God who revealed Himself in the Old Testament, since the Son is the revelation of God throughout the history of Israel and the one in whom the faithful of the Old Testament trusted (John 1:18; 5:39, 45-47; 8:56; Romans 4:1-25). We cannot emphasize enough the utmost importance of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ for knowing who God is and worshiping Him rightly according to His salvific deeds. One can know much information about God and still not know who He is. The Holy Spirit, however, works through the Gospel to create faith in Christ (John 3:3-7; 2 Timothy 3:15). Hence, those who once did not know God, now in Christ know who He is.

The question of the extent to which a religion or an individual has knowledge of the true God is addressed in the language and practice of worship: those who truly know God worship Him rightly by calling Him by His name and praising Him according to His salvific works in Christ. For Paul, therefore, the evidence that people of other religions do not now know God is that they do not worship Him rightly: "for even though they [at one time] *had known* God, they did not glorify Him as God or give thanks to Him" (Romans 1:20, emphasis added).[3] Exclusive worship of

[3]Paul's use of the aorist participle γνόντες ("even though they had known") speaks of action prior to that of the verbs in the aorist tense ἐδόξασαν and ηὐχαρίστησαν ("they did not glorify . . . or give thanks"). The apostle is stating that natural revelation imparts some knowledge about God, but, because of man's previous rejection or perversion of this knowledge, he does not know who God is and demonstrates this

God in a polytheistic world is demanded by both the First Commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3), and the Shema, "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:4).[4] In spite of God graciously revealing Himself in the Exodus from Egypt, through Moses, and then through the other prophets, many Israelites showed that they did not truly know Him by worshiping false gods. The majority of Israel, for example, worshiped the golden calf shortly after being brought out of Egypt (Exodus 32), Ahab and Jezebel led Israel (the Northern Kingdom) to worship Baal and the other Canaanite deities despite confrontation and condemnation by Elijah (1 Kings 17-19), and later many in Judah (the Southern Kingdom) engaged in the worship of Baal in spite of the warnings of several prophets (Jeremiah 10-11, especially 11:13). Those who did not really know God engaged in idolatry. Jesus, in His discussion with the Samaritan woman, affirms the inevitable relationship between knowing God and worshiping Him: "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22). He immediately goes on to indicate that the worship of God would no longer center in the temple of Jerusalem and its sacrifices: "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth" (John 4:23).[5] The Book of Revelation testifies that the worship of God in heaven and on earth is now centered on the Lamb who was sacrificed for sin and stands victorious in the midst of the Divine Throne: Jesus Christ (Revelation 5:6-14; 7:17). Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection is the climactic revelation of God (John 1:51; 12:30-33).

The proof, therefore, that one knows God is that one worships Christ (Philippians 2:9-11). Conversely, those who do not worship Christ prove that they do not really know who the true God is or what He has done for the salvation of the world (1 John 2:22-23). The testimony of the Scriptures is clear: man in the bondage of sin repeatedly rejects and perverts both the natural and special revelation of God with the result

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by both his lack of right worship and by his false worship of the creation (Romans 1:25). Paul summarizes the situation quite bluntly: "they do not see fit to have knowledge of God" (1:28).

[4]Another translation of the Shema may express more clearly its call to the exclusive worship of the one true God: "The LORD is our God, the LORD alone."

[5]To "worship the Father in Spirit and truth" signifies worship that is centered in Christ, to whom the Spirit of Truth testifies (John 14:25-26; 15:46; 16:7-15) and in whom the Father is known (John 14:6-11).

that he may know information about God (e.g., anything from the fact that God exists to the full content of the Scriptures) but still not know who God is. Knowing who God is and what He has done comes by the Holy Spirit working faith through the gospel and is evident in the worship of Christ.

The Lutheran Confessions follow this biblical teaching. They acknowledge that there is in fallen man "a dim spark of the knowledge that there is a God, as also of the doctrine of the law" (Solid Declaration II, 9), so that "even the heathen to a certain extent had a knowledge of God from the natural law, although they neither knew Him aright nor glorified [or "honored"] Him aright" (Solid Declaration V, 22). This "dim spark" of knowing the existence of God causes the universality of religion. It does not, however, result in knowing who God is, since it is perverted by sinful man, so that his religion is "false worship and idolatry" (Large Catechism I, 17). The consequences of original sin, which are shared by all men, are "ignorance of God, contempt for God, being destitute of fear and confidence in God" (Apology II, 9; comparing II, 23). Without special revelation and faith in Christ, man does not know the true God: "For formerly, before we had attained to this, we were altogether of the devil, knowing nothing of God and of Christ" (Large Catechism II, 52).

In contrast to this teaching, some assert that the Lutheran Confessions teach that belief in the one true God can exist apart from faith in Christ. The text used as proof of this aberrant opinion is an inaccurate English translation of Luther's conclusion to his discussion of the Creed in the Large Catechism (II, 66).[6] An accurate translation of this text, however,

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[6]The phrase "nur einen wahrhaftigen Gott" in the original German (and "quamquam unum tantum et verum Deum" in the Latin text) is translated properly as "only one true God" in the *Concordia Triglotta*. It is, on the other hand, mistranslated as "only *the* one, true God" in the versions of the Book of Concord edited by Tappert and by Kolb and Wengert: *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 419; and *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 440. The German text has no definite article; and the context makes it clear that those who do not believe in Christ do not believe in or worship *the* true God, since they "remain in eternal wrath and condemnation." Furthermore, the German text has "ob sie gleich nur einen wahrhaftigen Gott glauben," which the Latin renders "quamquam unum tantum et verum Deum esse credant." Luther, then, speaks not of

confesses the biblical teaching that people without Christ do not truly know who God is, even if they believe that there is only one God:

> These three articles of the Creed, therefore, separate and distinguish us Christians from all other people on earth. All who are outside this Christian church, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites — *even though they believe that there is only one true God and worship [him]* — nevertheless they do not know what His attitude is toward them. They cannot be confident of His love and blessing, and therefore they remain in eternal wrath and condemnation. For they do not have the Lord Christ, and, besides, they are not illumined and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Martin Luther is consistent in this position. In explaining the First Commandment, he asserts that "it is the trust and faith of the heart alone that make both God and an idol" (Large Catechism I, 2). His understanding of natural revelation and pagan religions is also expressed in his exposition of Jonah 1:5. There Luther emphasizes the biblical distinction between *knowing about God's existence* and *knowing who God is*:

> Thus reason also plays blindman's buff with God; it consistently gropes in the dark and misses the mark. It calls that God which is not God and fails to call Him God who really is God. Reason would do neither the one nor the other if it were not conscious of the existence of God or if it really knew who and what God is. Therefore it rushes in clumsily and assigns the name God and ascribes divine honor to its own idea of God. Thus reason never finds the true God, but it finds the devil or its own concept of God, ruled by the devil. So there is a vast difference between knowing that there is a God and knowing who or what God is. Nature knows the former—it is inscribed in everybody's heart; the latter is taught only by the Holy Spirit.[7]

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believing *in* someone, but rather of believing *that* something is the case. A correct translation would therefore be: "although they believe that there is only one true God and worship [him]." The meaning is that some people believe that there is only one true God and worship according to this understanding, but still do not know God because they identify Him wrongly.

[7]"Lectures on Jonah: The German Text, 1526," translated by Martin H. Bertram, in *Luther's Works*, American Edition [*LW*], 55 volumes, edited by J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-1986), 19:55.

The rejection of Christ is, for Luther, a rejection of the God revealed in the Old Testament. Luther understood the God who spoke and acted in the Old Testament, including Him who spoke the First Commandment, to be God the Son:

> It follows cogently and incontrovertibly that the God who led the children of Israel from Egypt and through the Red Sea, who guided them in the wilderness by means of the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, who nourished them with bread from heaven, who performed all the miracles recorded by Moses in his books, again, who brought them into the land of Canaan and there gave them kings and priests and everything, is the very same God, and none other than Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of the Virgin Mary, whom we Christians call our Lord and God, whom the Jews crucified, and whom they still blaspheme and curse today, as Isaiah 8 (21) declares: "They will be enraged and will curse their King and their God." Likewise, it is He who gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, saying (Ex. 20:2, 3): "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt . . . You shall have no other gods before Me." Yes, Jesus of Nazareth, who died for us on the cross, is the God who says in the First Commandment: "I am the Lord your God."[8]

All non-Christian religions, therefore, sin against the First Commandment by worshiping someone or something other than Christ. These religions know that God exists, and they may contain other elements of revelation, but they do not know who the true God is. They prove this conclusion by not acknowledging His work of redeeming creation through the crucified and risen Christ, whom they refuse to worship.[9] This refusal is obvious in polytheistic religions such as that of

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[8]"Treatise on the Last Words of David," translated by Martin H. Bertram, *LW* 15: 313-314. Jaroslav Pelikan, in his introduction to this volume, states that the mature Luther wrote this treatise in the summer of 1543 "in order to defend the Christological exegesis of the Old Testament both against Jewish interpreters and against their Christian pupils" (page xi).

[9]This is the long-standing position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. For example, the synodical explanation of Luther's Small Catechism, which is widely used in congregations of the LCMS, includes the following question and answers: "When do people have other gods? A. when they regard or worship any creature or thing as God; B. when they believe in a god who is not the triune God (see Apostles' Creed); C. when they fear, love, or trust in any person or thing as they should fear, love, and

the ancient Greeks or present-day Hinduism and Buddhism, where not even one god who is the creator is worshiped. It is also true of a monotheistic religion such as Islam, which worships only one god. In its origins Islam was explicitly opposed to Christianity and intended to supercede it. The Koran holds Jesus to be a prophet second and subordinate to Mohammed (Sura 112. 1-4; 4. 171). Islam, moreover, rejects Jesus as the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world. Islam, because it explicitly rejects the deity of Christ and His redemptive work, does not know or worship the true God.

The question of whether modern Judaism, like Christianity, knows and worships the true God is more widely debated, because both claim the Old Testament as Scripture.[10] Although many of the roots of modern Judaism are in the Old Testament, the decisive question is whether or not Jesus is the Messiah promised by the prophets and awaited by the faithful of Israel. Modern Judaism is a continuation of that Judaism that refused to acknowledge Jesus as the promised and awaited Messiah.[11] Christianity, however, arises out of that Judaism that did acknowledge Christ to be the promised and awaited Messiah. Christianity, therefore, understands itself to be the continuation of faithful Israel (Romans 9:6-8). According to the New Testament, it was Jesus Himself who declared that Jews who reject Him do not know God: "You know neither me nor my Father; if you knew me, you would know my Father also" (John 8:19).

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trust in God alone; D. when they join in the worship of one who is not the triune God." *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 56.

[10]Modern Judaism, like modern Christianity, is a complex and multi-faceted religion. In addition to the Old Testament, it has roots in the development of Rabbinic Judaism and the "Oral Torah" after the destruction of the Second Temple in A.D. 70, as expressed in the Mishnah (circa second/third century A.D.) and expounded in the Talmud (circa third to sixth century A.D.). See further Jacob Neusner, *The Religious World of Contemporary Judaism: Observations and Convictions* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); and Isidore Epstein, *Judaism: An Historical Presentation* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1959).

[11]Early evidence of the official rejection of Jesus Christ is found in the twelfth benediction of the *Amidah* (Eighteen Benedictions) used in the early liturgy of the synagogue, which was revised between A.D. 85 and 115 to include this curse: "Let the Nazarenes [Christians] and the Minim [heretics] be destroyed in a moment, and let them be blotted out of the Book of Life and not be inscribed together with the righteous." For further discussion see J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, second edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 50-60.

Jesus emphasizes this same point in His next dialogue with some Jews who were rejecting Him: "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but He sent me. . . . If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God" (John 8:42, 46b-47).

Christians, heeding this testimony, should claim no special status for Jews by asserting that they will be saved apart from faith in Christ, as is popularly proclaimed by some.[12] Neither, however, should Christians harbor any hatred toward Jews because of past or current rejection of Christ. The compassionate attitude of the Apostle Paul toward his fellow-Jews, who knew the Old Testament and yet rejected Christ, is a model for Christians of every generation: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness [Christ] that comes from God and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness [Christ]. For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified" (Romans 10:14, RSV).

There are also some Christians who assert that adherents of Islam and modern Judaism know God as the Father, even though they reject the Son.[13] Faith in one God who is the Creator, however, is *not* identical with confessing the First Article of the Creed. To confess God to be the Father arises from the confession that Jesus is His eternal Son. The confession, therefore, that God is the Father necessarily entails that Christ is He through whom all things were made (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16) and that

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[12]Romans 9-11 has often been used as support for the position that the Jews remain God's elect people, even if they reject Christ. See Charles H. Cosgrove, *Elusive Israel: The Puzzle of Election in Romans* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997). The problem arises when "Israel" in Romans 11:26 ("all Israel will be saved") is interpreted as a reference to a Jewish religious or political entity. Romans 9:6-8, however, makes it clear that "Israel" in these chapters consists in all believers (i.e., the church), whether Jew or Gentile. Furthermore, Romans 10:8-11 affirms, with the earlier chapters of this epistle, that salvation is only through faith in Jesus Christ: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (10:9).

[13]Further discussion may be found in Timothy George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Mohammed? Understanding the Difference Between Christianity and Islam* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2002).

the Father gave Him up for the salvation of the world (John 3:16; Romans 3:25). Those who deny these truths cannot be said to believe in God the Father. What the Apostle John said about the heretics of his time applies also to them: "No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:23). It is, therefore, wrong to state that the adherents of Islam or modern Judaism believe in the Father, even though they reject the Son and the Holy Spirit. The unity of the Trinity means that whoever rejects one person, rejects also the other persons and, thus, the true God.

Recognizing the differences between Christianity and other religions is sometimes seen as intolerance. This characterization is simply not true. Quite to the contrary, tolerance supports the freedom of religion that allows us to confess the truth of Christianity over against all other religions. We both respect the right of other citizens to believe and worship differently, and reject attempts by any religion to impose itself on other citizens with the help of the government.[14] As Christians we know that faith comes by hearing the Gospel, not through external force (Romans 10:11-14).

Freedom of religion in the civic realm allows the missionary proclamation of the Gospel. Christians are called to present the Gospel to non-Christians in a truthful and loving way. We should not, therefore, identify the one true God with a god who is a conglomerate of truth and error. To confess that "we all believe in the same God" confuses the faithful and seriously impedes the mission of the church, since it confirms non-Christians in their unbelief. Missionary proclamation is always a preaching of Law and Gospel that calls sinners to repentance, in order that man turn away from false gods and believe in Christ as the true God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Some will take offense at such

[14]Despite widespread acknowledgment of the existence of "God" and the importance of religion to the government of the United States (e.g., the motto "In God We Trust" inscribed on money, the use of "one nation, under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, and the frequent use of "God bless America" in political speeches), the definition of this "God" is relegated to the individual citizens of the nation. Christians confess as the only God, also when referenced in the civic realm, the Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ, even though we know that many other citizens define "God" in different and false ways. Discussion of the challenges posed by "civil religion" may be found in David L. Adams, "The Church in the Public Square in a Pluralistic Society," *Concordia Journal* 28 (2002):364-390.

preaching. This reaction has always been the unavoidable scandal of the Gospel: "We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23-24). In our mission to all nations, we are to keep the words of Jesus central: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Since "there is salvation in no one else" (Acts 4:12), we are to bring this Jesus to lost mankind and by Him bring people to fellowship with the Triune God. It is the mission of the church to proclaim Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation in our religiously pluralistic world, even as it has always been since Pentecost.

To God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – be glory and praise, now and forever. Amen.

The Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas McC. L. Judisch,
Secretary of the Faculty

A special committee of the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary was appointed in March of 2003 to propose a response to a number of queries relating to the natural knowledge of God. The proposals of this committee were discussed and extensively revised in the course of three succeeding meetings of the faculty and numerous less formal interchanges during the months of April and May. The exposition of "Religious Pluralism and Knowledge of the True God" printed here was, in the end, adopted by unanimous vote in the meeting of the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary which convened on 22 May in the year of our Lord 2003. D. McC. L. Judisch, Secretary.

Doctrine and Practice: Setting the Boundaries: An Abstract Essay with Practical Implications

David P. Scaer

Without September 11 and the subsequent events, we probably would not be addressing the question of how practice relates to doctrine.[1] If the other denominational clergy were customary fixtures at Memorial Day and Independence Day celebrations, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastors were seen less often or not at all. In former times, the American civil religion had a Christian appearance, but with recent population shifts, this is less so. We wish that fateful September day had not come, but we can only play the hand God deals us. If, after the events following September 11, different players had come on the stage or the script had been altered, the outcome might have been different. The ensuing controversy has taken on a life of its own. Ideally, how practice relates to doctrine should be discussed apart from specific events and persons, but the *ecclesia militans* exists in no vacuum. My task is not to analyze this or that event or to interpret another's words, but to relate practice to doctrine.

Matters can be clarified by defining terms and then, where necessary, making distinctions. A church's creeds, confessions, and official beliefs comprise its doctrine, which, for us, are chiefly documents of The Book of Concord. Practice refers to churchly acts carried out by pastors or other leaders acting in the behalf of our congregations. Included in practice are prayers and liturgies, administering the sacraments and pastoral care, and how and where these things are done. Our Lutheran fathers included some traditions among what we call practices, but allowed that others may differ in regard to place and time.[2] Also excluded from

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[1]This paper was delivered at a Joint Meeting of the Council of Presidents and the seminary faculties on February 28, 2002, in Saint Louis, Missouri.

[2]See, for example, the Apology XV, 50-52. Though it takes issue with the Catholic party requiring universal traditions, it also holds that nothing in the customary rites may be changed without good reason (51). In allowing for freedom in our traditions, a word of caution is in order. Some traditions are mandatory, others enjoy long historical precedent and still others are pure fabrications, as Martin Chemnitz says.

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practice is Christian life (sanctification), which in this world is imperfect.[3] The Augsburg Confession and the Apology discuss doctrine in the first twenty-one articles and practice in the last seven. This division might suggest that doctrine and practice are two different *things*, but as these confessions show, they are really aspects of one *thing* with each reflecting the other and both deriving their content and form from the same underlying reality, God Himself. So we may begin with doctrine or practice, two sides of one coin. Doctrine expresses itself in certain practices and embedded in our practices is what we believe, often before a particular doctrine is formulated. The church was baptizing infants (practice) long before the Reformation provided the best articulation

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This premier Lutheran theologian speaks of eight kinds of tradition in his *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 4 parts, translated by Fred Kramer (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1971), 4:223-307. First, tradition can refer to doctrines delivered by the apostles (4:223-226). These are words spoken by Jesus and preserved by the apostles before their inscripturation. A second meaning is the canonical list of the biblical books (4:227-230). In a third sense, it can apply to the oral teachings of the apostles, apart from the Scriptures (4:231-243). The fourth kind is the interpretation of the Scriptures (244-248). A fifth kind of tradition is the dogmas of the church, among which are citations of the fathers speaking of baptizing infants (4:249-255). In the sixth sense, traditions refer to the consensus of the fathers (4:256-266). For example, we also hold that no dogma that is new in the churches and in conflict with all of antiquity should be accepted (4:258). Included in the seventh kind of tradition are rituals like making the sign of the cross, facing the east in prayer, and the threefold immersion at baptism (4:267-271). In the eighth category are unacceptable traditions as chrism, the primacy of the Roman bishop, and legends about the saints that have no support from the ancient church (4:272-307).

[3]In the Galatians lectures of 1535, Luther speaks of the perfection of doctrine and the imperfection of life. "Doctrine is heaven; life is earth. In life there is sin, error, uncleanness, and misery. . . . But just as there is no error in doctrine, so there is no need for any forgiveness of sins. Therefore there is no comparison at all between doctrine and life. . . . We can be lenient toward errors of life." *Luther's Works*, American Edition [*LW*], 55 volumes, edited by J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia and Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-1986), 27:41-42. Also in "The Freedom of the Christian" in 1520: "I have, to be sure, sharply attacked ungodly doctrines in general, and I have snapped at my opponents, not because of their bad morals, but because of their ungodliness. . . . I have no quarrel with any man concerning his morals but only concerning the word of truth. In all other matters, I will yield to any man whatsoever; but I neither have the power nor the will to deny the Word of God"(*LW* 31:335). Also his Table Talk, "Doctrine and life must be distinguished. Life is bad among us, as it is among the papists, but we don't fight about life and condemn the papists on that account. . . . I fight over the Word and whether our adversaries teach it in its purity."(*LW* 54:110).

(doctrine) for this.[4] From the other side, doctrine drives our practice. An explicit mission to include non-Jews in the church (practice) came only years (Acts 13:1-3) after Jesus had commanded it (Matthew 28:16) (doctrine). This can be reversed. By including the centurion (Matthew 8:5-12) and Canaanite woman (15:22-28) (practice), Jesus anticipated His own command (doctrine). Both doctrine and practice derive their content from the underlying realities of the inner trinitarian life and the salvific events of Christ's life, which include His sending the Spirit. These divine realities are conveyed through, preserved authoritatively, and are accessible to us in the Scriptures (*norma normans*). In point of time both doctrine and practice existed before the Scriptures, but these inspired writings are our only source of doctrine (Epitome, Paragraph 1). New Testament creedal formulations, which evolved into our Apostles' Creed (doctrine), drew their content from the same underlying trinitarian and salvific realities as did baptism (practice).[5] The Confession's and the Apology's articles on practice (22-28) are as profoundly doctrinal as the purely doctrinal ones, in some cases more so. The doctrine of creation finds its best exposition in Article 23, The Marriage of Priests. Similarly the doctrine of the atonement, which is at the center of Christian faith, finds its best confessional exposition in the Apology's article on the Mass (24; Article 26, Monastic Vows, condemns the Catholics for giving vows the same value as baptism [Augsburg 26,15] and for denying justification by faith [Augsburg 26,15; Apology 26,11-17]). Since practice and doctrine draw from the same substance, they are inseparably related: two sides of one coin.

Doctrinal formulations arose not only as a response to misformulations, as with Arius, (for example, the Nicene Creed), but also because certain practices like indulgences were judged to contradict the foundation of faith, which then may not have been fully formulated. This controversy

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[4]Chemnitz calls baptizing infants a tradition that is necessary. *Examination*, 4:249.

[5]A valuable contribution has been made in *Closed Communion in Contemporary Context*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relation of the Lutheran Church—Canada, January, 1998 (Manitoba: Lutheran Church—Canada, 2000), 7. However, a distinction must be made between tradition that takes the form of various rites and ceremonies on one hand, and the practice of the church catholic on the other hand. Practice, however, is based on what the church professes. Thus, practice is derived from the word of God, either by explicit command or implication from other clear statements of Scripture. Properly understood, practice is not just what we do, but what is required because of what we believe.

(practice) allowed both Roman and Lutheran parties to articulate their positions on justification (doctrine).[6] Let us take this into New Testament terms. Paul can argue from either doctrine or practice. In Romans he argues first from the universality of sin and grace (chapters 1-3) (doctrine) and concludes by asking for monetary support for his mission to Spain (15:23-28) (practice). What is probably the New Testament's first articulation of justification (doctrine) was a response to certain Christians requiring Jewish practices as necessary for salvation (Galatians 2:16). People often did the right or the wrong things (practice) long before theological explanations for doing or not doing them were given (doctrine).

In beginning our theology with the cause (doctrine) and moving to the effect (practice), we follow the examples of Paul in Romans and the Augsburg Confession and the Apology.[7] Practice flows from our doctrine and reflects it. Sin necessitates salvation and so precedes Christology (who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven [Nicene Creed]), which, in turn, precedes faith and then good works. Justification is the cause and sanctification the effect: We love, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). This biblical order is logical, but it can give the impression that core beliefs can be isolated from practices and so we might conclude that our practice can really be *something different* from what we believe. We might further assume we can be freer with our practices than with our doctrinal formulations. But since both doctrine and practice derive their content and form from the same *reality*, which is the trinitarian God in His saving acts, then the strictures required for one are also required for the other.

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[6]See, for example, the 1531, 1580, and 1584 editions of Augsburg Confession XV: "Also rejected are those who teach that canonical satisfactions are necessary to remit eternal punishments." Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, editors, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 47.

[7]Seminary curricula are organized around the model that doctrine comes first, followed by practice. A student is introduced first to biblical studies and dogmatics and then offered what are called the practical courses of preaching, liturgy, pastoral care, and administration. The reason for this arrangement is that theoretical courses provide the content of what he is going to say and do. As traditional as this method is in most seminaries, it is derived from this Rationalistic division of theology in which ethics or practice is a separate discipline. See David P. Scaer, "A Critique of the Fourfold Pattern," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 63 (October 1999): 269-280.

Schleiermacher is notorious for reversing the traditional dogmatical order and beginning with the life of the Christian community (practice; ethics) as the norm of church doctrine. What Christians are observed doing (practice) was key in determining doctrine. Problematic is that he drew from Lutheran and Reformed communities (practice) and the results were an amalgamation of often contradictory beliefs, as is now typical in consciously ecumenically constructed documents.[8] (He even wanted to include Socinians [Unitarians] in the Christian definition.) In spite of Schleiermacher's negatives, in both our secular and religious lives, we experience the effects before we know (determine) the causes. We observe and do *things* (practice) before we understand the *things* in themselves (doctrine). Many Christians do the right things (practice) without having been given or being able to provide a rationale for doing them (doctrine). Before the terms for justification were set forth in Reformation (Augsburg and Apology IV), Christians were being justified by grace through faith. Those baptized as infants encounter the fundamentals of salvation through church practice, which is later articulated for them in the catechism (doctrine).

If Paul argues from doctrine to practice, he also argues from doctrine to doctrine, and from practice to doctrine. For the resurrection he does both and then some (1 Corinthians 15). First he argues from his own preaching, the Scriptures and then from the apostolic witnesses (1-8). He also argues from Christ's resurrection, the lesser doctrine to the greater (12-13)—or is it the other way around? Amazingly, he argues from the Corinthians' vicarious baptisms for the dead (practice). Their denial of the resurrection logically contradicted their practice, erroneous as it was.[9] Since no mention of this is made again, Paul, by letter or visit, applied his doctrine of justification by faith to rectify matters; nevertheless, this aberrant practice contained the kernel of truth that baptism promised resurrection (doctrine) (Romans 6:4).

What is true of Paul is also true of the New Testament in general: doctrine and practice do not exist in autonomous spheres. Abraham's

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[8]For example, the *Leuenberg Concord* and, more recently, *A Formula of Agreement*, adopted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America (RCA), and the United Church of Christ (UCC).

[9]1 Corinthians 15:29 "Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?"

sacrificing Isaac (practice) was the evidence or the extension of what he believed about God (*fides qua et* quae: doctrine) (James 2:21-25). God's indiscriminate love for His enemies (doctrine) is seen in providing for them as He does for His sons (practice) (Matthew 5:43-45). Since we confess that the sacraments are visible word (Apology XIII, 6), we might call our practice visible doctrine. Doctrine defines why a thing (practice) is the way it is. Practice is what we do. Though tradition has many uses, including doctrine (1 Corinthians 15:1-3), tradition is narrowly used here as how we do what we do. Practice includes receiving Holy Communion. Tradition is how we receive it: standing, kneeling, sitting, or lying down (John 13:23-25; compare Matthew 14:19). A freedom may be allowed in tradition that is not allowed in practice; however, traditions also have doctrinal significance and even here boundaries exist.[10] In refusing to carry out the ordinary civic duty of worshiping the emperor (practice), early Christians confessed that only Jesus was Lord (doctrine). There was a reason (doctrine) for what they did or did not do (practice). We know ourselves and others know us not only by what we say (doctrine), but by what we do (practice). Practice and doctrine derive their form and content from the trinitarian and christological mysteries that are faith's object and foundation.

The New York Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine (Episcopal) hosts a Shinto shrine at the entrance of the nave. Our churches cannot do this (practice). Practices contradicting doctrine are unacceptable. Since both doctrine and practice flow from the same fundamental reality, we can no more be lenient with one than with other. We cannot allow for ourselves a freedom in practice that we would never allow for ourselves in doctrine. Take, for example, the practice of baptism. Trinitarian faith is a given for us, but we could never baptize or perhaps recognize a baptism "in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who is the Mother of us all"—nor could we baptize with sand.[11] These practices contradict the foundation of faith, especially as it is expressed in the Lord's Prayer,

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[10]A change in ordinary practices may signal a change in belief. In March 1615 Lutherans came to the Berlin cathedral church to discover that the crucifix and religious ornaments had been removed and the walls white washed. The people suspected that the Elector of Brandenburg had carried through with his threat of introducing the Calvinistic religion of his family and they were right. For a full account, see Bodo Nischan, *Prince, People and Confession* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 185-203.

[11]See *Lutheran Forum* 33 (Easter/Spring 1999): 8, 25.

"Our Father . . . ." A church that baptizes only those above the age of discretion (Baptists) has a different anthropology, harmatology, soteriology, and sacramentology—just for starters—than a church that baptizes infants (Lutheran, Catholic, Anglican, and Reformed). Churches that practice emergency baptisms have a different view of this sacrament than a church that does not (Reformed). A church without an altar (many Reformed churches) conveys a different message than one with one. The cliché, "what you are doing speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you are saying," has something to do with how practice corresponds to our doctrine.

Rationalists, who had little use for Satan or traditional Christianity, heralded their new faith by omitting the exorcisms, the renunciation, and the creed from the rite of baptism.[12] Even a negligible omission in practice can signal a larger change in doctrine. The Protestant Episcopal Church excluded the Athanasian Creed from its edition of the *Book of Common Prayer*. At the United States' founding, many of its clergy were Deists who believed that Christianity, Judaism, and Islam were equal paths to heaven.[13] In the age of Rationalistic tolerance, this creed's first verse was intolerable: "Whoever wishes to be saved must, above all else, hold the true Christian faith. Whoever does not keep it whole and inviolate will without doubt perish for eternity."[14] It had to be shelved.

We end our discussion with Jesus. From what He ordinarily did (practice), He expected others to conclude who He was (doctrine). In answer to the Baptist's query, He might have answered "I am the Christ" (doctrine), but instead He pointed to His practice: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up and the poor have good news [the gospel] preached to them (Matthew 11:2-6). This connection is also central to the Fourth Gospel. From His works, Jesus expected His opponents to believe in

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[12]Julius August Ludwig Wegscheider, *Institutiones Theologia Christianae Dopgmaticae*, third edition (Halle: Gebauer, 1817), 366-367.

[13]For an example of this Deist belief, see Gottfried Lessings, *Nathan der Weise*.

[14]Theodore G. Tappert, translator and editor, in collaboration with Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, Arthur C. Piepkorn, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 19 translates the Latin original. Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord* translates the German (24). "Whoever wants to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic faith. Whoever does not keep it whole and inviolate will doubtless perish."

what would later be articulated in the Trinitarian doctrine: "If I am not doing the works of My Father, then do not believe Me; but if I do them, *even though you do not believe Me, believe the works,* that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me and I am in the Father" (John 10:37-38). He considered what He did (practice) more convincing about who He was than what He said (doctrine). In His death (practice), He who alone knows the Father reveals Him to us. From His lowliness (doctrine), He calls all who labor and are heavy laden (Matthew 11:27-30), for example, the poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3) (practice). What Jesus was, *filius dei . . . homo factus est* (doctrine), is seen in what He did, *crucifixus* (practice). He did this *pro nobis* (doctrine). So also what we believe (doctrine) must be seen in what we do (practice). We can hardly require anything less of ourselves, lest what we do contradict what we believe.

Confessing in the Public Square

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

Already at this retreat we have heard it stated unequivocally that there is "tension and deep division in our Synod."[1] In other forums, some have gone so far as to say that the "very existence of our synodical union" is at stake. It is certainly true that we face significant challenges. It may also be the case that the Synod as we have known it may not survive the current crisis, but nobody really wants this to happen. But the fact remains that we do face significant challenges within our fellowship. Nobody denies this. Within this context I have been asked to speak on the topic "Positives and Risks when Confessing in the Public Square."

"Positives and Risks" – an intriguing title. Since the gospel is always a skandalon, every confession of Christ is a risk, a stumbling block to unbelievers. We cannot push this stumbling block to the side of the road. Yet at the same time, such risky business is always attended by the promise that the word of God does what He intends it to do. So we are left with a Lutheran paradox – the positive risks of faithful confession and practice.

What lies at the root of our differences? Is there a fundamental rift of doctrine? Practice? Or is it simply a matter of how we deal with one another? President Herbert Mueller has rightly called us to brotherly conversation, but admitted that he was not quite sure how to do this. I am bound to agree. What I hope to bring to our discussions is a bit of historical context. Consider, for example, the following strong statement.

> Things are going from bad to worse. One of our students declined to accept a vicarage assignment in the East, because he knows what is going on there and told me that he could not with a clear conscience work under pastors who are no longer conservative Lutherans. *The Lutheran Witness* consistently ignores those things which make union with other Lutheran bodies impossible, but almost every issue contains items which must make our laymen

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[1]This paper was delivered at a Joint Meeting of the Council of Presidents and the seminary faculties on March 1, 2002, in Saint Louis, Missouri.

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> believe that there is nothing in the way of union. I am very happy that I am as old as I am, but I do feel terrible when I think of my children and grandchildren.[2]

Now there is evidence of difference, divergence, and division—yet it sounds remarkably contemporary. Perhaps we have heard or have even stated similar sentiments. Strikingly, the words were uttered more than fifty years ago in 1948. What we continue to experience in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) in the early twenty-first century are the unresolved tensions of the last half of the twentieth century. Perhaps they really began at the start of that century. No church is ever without tension. Before we can come to a brotherly resolution, we will have to admit that our differences have been around for a long time. Indeed, the lifelong experience of some of us has been that of a divided Synod.

The Public Square and Today's Missouri

How do we take the positive risk of faithful public confession? We have heard about the nature of the culture in which we speak the gospel from Dr. Dwayne Mau. A recent e-mail from President Gerald Kieschnick noted how Christians have been overcome by the relativism of our times.

> As shepherds of God's people (and as shepherds in waiting of those yet to join your flocks), you have to stay strong, for your work has been cut out for you. The other day I was reading parts of a new study by George Barna, the noted analyst of cultural trends and the Christian church. Barna, scanning the horizon of American society, does not see a rosy picture out there, especially for pastors striving to convince people of the absolute truth and moral rightness of Jesus Christ and His teachings.

"According to George Barna," President Kieschnick continues, "three out of four Americans believe that moral truth is relative (the figure runs even higher among teenagers)." Even among Evangelical teenagers the number is distressingly high. Gene Edward Veith notes that somewhere around two-thirds of Evangelical teens believe that truth is relative. Dr. Kieschnick continues:

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[2]G. Chr. Barth to Harold Romoser, June 4, 1948, archives of Concordia Theological Seminary, Barth Papers, The Statement of the 44, 1948.

> These days, people "are much more likely to allow their feelings to guide their moral decision-making than the Bible or external moral codes." The consequence of this is that many Christians believe that such things as abortion, homosexual sex, cohabitation without marriage and pornography are morally acceptable. In the absence of absolutes, says Barna, the watchword of the day remains, increasingly, "If it feels good, do it." Needless to say, this is a difficult mentality with which you as pastors must deal. [2]

In the United States, generally, there is a wide divergence of doctrine and practice among Lutherans that makes a unified public witness impossible at present. Again, in his February 2002 letter to pastors, President Kieschnick, commenting on discussions between the WELS, ELCA, and LCMS, noted the following:

> This obvious lack of fellowship among our church bodies pointed out the need for ongoing conversations among us. Working toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies is, as you know, a paramount objective of Article III of our Synodical Constitution. As your president, I look forward to engaging in such conversations in the future as opportunities allow. In any such talks, our church body's position of course shall remain that fellowship must be based on complete agreement in doctrine and practice, which we certainly have not reached as yet with either ELCA [Evangelical Lutheran Church] or the WELS [Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod].[3]

Significant differences in doctrine and practice continue to divide the LCMS, the ELCA, and the WELS, making union unlikely in the near future, though continued discussion is appropriate. However, those discussions will likely bear little fruit until the differences are understood historically. Ignorance about our past confounds our witness in the public square at present. So we ask, "Quo vadis Missouri? Where are we going? Who is Missouri and where can she be found? Who speaks for us?"

Some claim that the doctrinal unanimity of the LCMS is jealously eyed by many in the broader denominational setting. Such sentiments,

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[2]Gerald B. Kieschnick, "Letter to Pastors, no. 3," February 27, 2002. http://www.lcms.org/president/Newsletters/2002/February2002.asp

[3]Gerald B. Kieschnick, "Letter to Pastors, no. 3."

however, minimize or even overlook the very real differences that have interwoven themselves into our synodical life. Further, they tend to marginalize those who seek to maintain the vigorous public confession and practice of the founders. Finally, they ignore the dynamic character of the LCMS's history and the observable breakdown of doctrinal and practical unity within the last half century. We may not want to face the fact that we are a different church than we were one hundred years ago, but, if we do not, what made us distinctive will be forgotten in less than the next one hundred years.

Consider the powerful public confession offered by the founders of the LCMS. It is all too common today to abstract the founders of the LCMS from their context. This has frequently neutered the powerful apologetic that undergirded their reasons for founding the Synod. Without knowledge of this history some have misunderstood their purpose for having a Missouri Synod in the first place. Easy and unproven truisms take the place of what our fathers really thought. For example, the founders saw the Synod as an advisory body. However, what they meant by this is used for purposes they never intended. The founders of Missouri firmly believed that the Synod would succeed as an advisory body chiefly because there was a shared commitment to doctrine *and* practice, and that this doctrine and practice had a very concrete form. Advisory did not mean an open license in regard to practice, as the first constitution makes this clear.

> Conditions under which a congregation may join Synod and remain a member: 1) Acceptance of Holy Scripture, both the Old and the New Testament, as the written word of God and as the only rule and norm of faith and life; 2) Acceptance of all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (these are the three Ecumenical Symbols, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, the Large and the Small Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord) as the pure and unadulterated explanation and presentation of the word of God; 3) Separation from all commixture of church or faith, as, for example, serving of mixed congregations by a servant of the church; taking part in the service and sacraments of heretical or mixed congregations; taking part in any heretical tract distribution and mission projects, etc.

The constitution was not offering suggestions, but laying down how Lutherans who joined the Synod related to one another.

But now things get even more interesting. Members of the synod had to agree to certain liturgies and hymnals.

> 4) The exclusive use of doctrinally pure church books and schoolbooks. (Agenda, hymnals, readers, etc.) If it is impossible in some congregations to replace immediately the unorthodox hymnals and the like with orthodox ones, then the pastor of such a congregation can become a member of Synod only if he promises to use the unorthodox hymnal only under open protest and to strive in all seriousness for the introduction of an orthodox hymnal.

And finally, "5) Proper (not temporary) calling of the pastors..." Pastors were to have permanent calls and not serve at the whims of their congregations. There are more, but that should suffice for now.

One of the myths surrounding the founding of the Missouri Synod is that it was a thoroughly German church body that was out of touch with American Christianity and culture. Nothing could be farther from the truth. One need only read Wyneken to see his profound concern over the lax doctrine and practice of the old Lutheran Synod of the West specifically and the General Synod generally. One of the ways that he generated support for his mission of establishing orthodox Lutheran churches was to point to the bankruptcy of the revivalism that had caught on with Lutherans who were already in America. He was so effective that August Crämer and Wilhelm Sihler left their synods (Michigan and Ohio, respectively) because Reformed doctrines and practices had made a firm foothold in their synods. The experiences of these founders made their way into the Synod's first constitution. Wyneken, Crämer, and Sihler knew exactly what was happening in the other Lutherans synods and they wanted no part of it. They had a clear understanding of the situation facing Lutheranism in the United States. And where was the rub in 1847? It was not specifically doctrine, but doctrine practiced liturgically. In the face of the General Synod's use of Finney's "New Measures" (the "contemporary worship" of nineteenth-century America) the framers of Missouri expressed a position that saw the intimate connection between doctrine and practice. The Synod was aware that Article VII of the Augsburg Confession does not demand absolute liturgical uniformity, still the Synod deemed "such a uniformity wholesome and useful." They offered two reasons for liturgical uniformity: 1) "because a total difference in outward ceremonies would cause those who are weak in the unity of doctrine to stumble"; and

2) "because in dropping heretofore preserved usages the Church is to avoid the appearance of and desire for innovations." What was at stake in all of this? To engage in practices that did not mirror the Synod's doctrinal position would confuse its witness in the public square. Missiological atrophy would be the result. Synod's mission was driven by a clearly articulated doctrinal position, which was immediately recognized in how it worshiped. What the Synod believed was seen in what the Synod practiced. The message rightly practiced drove the mission. Uniformity of doctrine and practice was the critical reason for the formation of the Missouri Synod in the first place—a reason I pray we can recapture soon for the sake of our mission. "Furthermore Synod deems it necessary for the purification of the Lutheran Church in America, that the emptiness and the poverty in the externals of the service be opposed, which, having been introduced here by the false spirit of the Reformed, is now rampant." The conclusion is striking. The constitution states:

> All pastors and congregations that wish to be recognized as orthodox by Synod are prohibited from adopting or retaining any ceremony which might weaken the confession of the truth or condone or strengthen a heresy, especially if heretics insist upon the continuation or the abolishing of such ceremonies. . . . Synod as a whole is to supervise how each individual pastor cares for the souls in his charge. Synod, therefore, has the right of inquiry and judgment. Especially is Synod to investigate whether its pastors have permitted themselves to be misled into applying the so-called "New Measures" which have become prevalent here, or whether they care for their souls according to the sound Scriptural manner of the orthodox Church.[4]

Synod's practice was a public profession of its doctrinal commitments. But these doctrinal and practical commitments were not at odds with the Synod's mission—they were the engine that drove it.

Let us be clear that it was those who were most concerned over the intrusions of Reformed practice who were also most vigorous in their missionary activities. The oft-cited divide between pure doctrine and missions simply does not stand in the face of the early Missourians. Nor

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[4]All constitution quotations are from "Our First Synodical Constitution," translated by Roy Suelflow, *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 16 (April 1943): 1-18.

does it today, as the vigorous missionary activities of the Fort Wayne Seminary throughout the world clearly attest.

Mission zeal was not an excuse for doctrinal indifference. Walther strongly stated his opinion on the matter, perhaps in terms we find stunning or arrogant today: "The Lutheran church is therefore not only *a real* but *the true* visible church of God on earth."[5] For Walther, the Lutheran church is the church catholic. Any mixture of the unqualified church with the qualified visible church will necessarily compromise the catholicity of the pure church. The implications for church fellowship are clear in his mind. "An orthodox Christian should and must therefore earnestly flee associations and rather never receive Communion or rather die than partake of a Zwinglian Communion."[6]

ELCA Meltdown

In the face of the ELCA's recent fellowship agreements, Walther's strong statement takes on a new urgency. Simply put, it is now the opportunity for all and the reality for many in the ELCA to be participants in Reformed and Zwinglian communions. ELCA critics are fully aware of how their church has compromised its Lutheran confession. Rev. Dr. Michael McDaniel, a former ELCA bishop, has written: "The year 1997 was especially tumultuous. It was in that year that the Philadelphia Convention of the ELCA sold our birthright for a mess of pottage by entering into unbelievably shocking relationships with Calvinistic and Zwinglian organizations."[7] Another ELCA pastor, Dr. Louis Smith, stated the matter just as bluntly:

> The issue of the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar concerns nothing less than the Incarnation and the movement of the Gospel. When, at Marburg, in response to Luther's insistence on the Word of Institution, Oecolampadius called Luther to turn away from the humanity of Christ and lift his eyes to the divinity, Luther's rejoinder was that the only God he knew was the Incarnate God. And he wanted to know no other, since only the

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[5]C. F. W. Walther, "Communion Fellowship," in *Essays for the Church*, 2 volumes (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 1:203-204.

[6]Walther, "Communion Fellowship," 211.

[7]Michael C. D. McDaniel, "ELCA Journeys: Personal Reflections on the Last Forty Years," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 65 (April 2001): 105.

> Incarnate God could save. . . . Lutherans owe it to the whole Church to confess publicly and not to try figure out an acceptable language that will allow the offense of Christ's crucified for us Flesh and Blood to be overcome by a linguistic trick rather than by faith alone.[8]

Newspaper columnist Uwe Simon-Netto has wondered whether we are on the verge of a "Protestant Collapse."[9] His report makes use of Dr. Paul Hinlicky's commentary on a survey by the Barna Group. In what is perhaps the understatement of the new millennium, it states that there is "very considerable diversity within the Christian community regarding core beliefs." Continuing, it claimed that "a mere 21 percent of America's Lutherans, 20 percent of the Episcopalians, 18 percent of Methodists, and 22 percent of Presbyterians affirm the basic Protestant tenet that by good works man does not earn his way to heaven." Hinklicky's conclusion? "If this figure holds up it signals a complete breakdown of catechetical instruction." This much is most certainly true.

Further, the report noted that "only 33 percent of the Catholics, Lutherans and Methodists, and only 28 percent of the Episcopalians, agreed with the statement that Christ was without sin." He said that these numbers indicate "an epochal change in popular theology. This would suggest a loss of faith in the Divinity of Christ." Hinlicky's colleague, Episcopalian Gerald McDermott, added, "Christ would then be no more than the Dalai Lama, an admirable kind of a guy."

At the January 2001 confessional symposium at Concordia Theological Seminary Bishop McDaniel spoke on the transformation of his church and its predecessor bodies over the years. His reflections are a clarion call to all confessional Lutherans:

> You are surely aware that the ELCA has been taken over by the very people our parents warned us not to play with when we were little. It is only now that the majority of our members are beginning, slowly and reluctantly, to realize that the persons writing our literature and directing our programs are hijackers, and that this church, once so dear, so wonderful, so shining with grace and glory,

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[8]Louis A. Smith, "Can the ELCA Represent Lutheranism? Flirting with Rome, Geneva, Canterbury and Herrnhut," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 66 (April 2002): 113.

[9]http://www.holytrinitynewrochelle.org/barna.html.

is way off course. As more and more people awaken to this fact, there are increasing distresses and demands that the leaders faithfully lead.

The reopening of fundamental moral questions, especially in areas of sexuality, constitutes a direct attack on Christian morality and invalidates the efforts of Christian people faithfully to keep the Commandments of God. . . . The capitulation of church leadership to the relativism of the late twentieth century has scandalized the church.

To put human sexual gratification above the commandments of God and the clear teaching of Scripture is simply unthinkable; yet, without an ELCA leader to say a clear "no," there is a continuing push for the ordination of homosexuals and the blessings of homosexual liaisons as if they were marriages. Furthermore, as long the ELCA health insurance program covers abortions, a percentage of each Sunday's offering presented before the altar of the Lord is going to finance murder.

Brothers and sisters of Missouri, thank you for your faithfulness to the word. In the January 2001 issue of the *Lutheran Witness*, President Barry wrote, "one of the fantastic blessings God has given to our church body is faithfulness to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions." May that always be true of the LCMS, and may it come true in all this lost and weary world.[10]

Rev. Smith spoke to the 2002 symposium on the topic of whether the ELCA can faithfully represent the Lutheran Confession in its present form. He thought it could, but the real question was whether it would. Specifically commenting on whether the ELCA can represent the Lutheran Confession of the biblical faith of the church catholic, Smith admitted "the outlook is bleak." It is not due to a lack of resources, he argues, but a lack of will. "It is not at all clear that the synodical or Churchwide leadership wants to do the job." What is at the root of this lack of will? Smith answers:

We have determined the commonalities and identified the disjunctions. The wrestling match on those points needs to be undertaken. I think that there is a reluctance to enter that match

[10]McDaniel, "ELCA Journeys," 105, 107-108.

> because after the epoch of "consensus ecumenism," we are afraid that to disagree is to quarrel. But as G. K. Chesterton once said, "we quarrel because we have forgotten how to argue." But we could learn again; to test differences against commonly agreed upon standards and call one another to scratch on that basis.[11]

But perhaps this is exactly Missouri's problem, both in terms of its entering into dialogue within itself and with others. Are we ready to turn to "commonly agreed upon standards"? If so, what would they be? Scripture and the Confessions? Of course, but what else? What about the catholic texts of the church, most specifically the Lutheran theological tradition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? What about Walther's *Kirche und Amt,* the Thirteen Theses, the *Brief Statement, A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*? Is a synodical resolution enough? In 2001 the Synod in convention affirmed *Kirche und Amt* as its doctrinal position—and the next day it compromised that document by extending the 1989 Wichita resolution on lay ministry. This is the unresolved issue that remains before us.

LCMS Meltdown?

A myriad of labels abound to describe one's theological and practical posture in today's Missouri.[12] One hears, for example, of "bronze agers," "hyper-Euro-Lutherans," "confessionalists," "moderates," "liberals," "Taliban," "dissenters" and other such unhelpful designations. They offer nothing substantively to the pressing theological issues that confront us at present. However, they do show the ongoing question of what it means to be a Lutheran.

A century and a half ago, Philip Schaff offered a typology for American Lutheranism. In his *America: A Sketch of Its Political, Social, and Religious Character* he bluntly stated that it was "no easy matter to describe the character and internal condition of the Lutheran confession." Schaff identified three general streams of Lutheranism in the United States: the New, the Old, and the Moderate. The New Lutherans, noted Schaff,

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[11]Smith, "Can the ELCA Represent Lutheranism?" 119.

[12]Lawrence R. Rast Jr., "Catholicity in Missouri Orthodoxy," *Lutheran Catholicity: The Pieper Lectures, Volume 5,* edited by John A. Maxfield (Saint Louis: Concordia Historical Institute and The Luther Academy, 2001), 58-61. This section is summarized from that document.

comprise "an amalgamation of Lutheranism with American Puritanic and Methodistic elements," whose liturgical practice mirrors their doctrinal perspective, for in worship they "incline to the Puritanic system of free prayer . . . neglect of the church festivals, and of all symbolical rites and ceremonies; or they allow at most only a restricted use of liturgies."[13]

At the other end of the spectrum are the Old Lutherans, who, noted Schaff, are "exclusive, and narrow-minded, and unable or unwilling to appreciate properly other churches and nationalities than their own," in large part because of their adherence to the Formula of Concord. Liturgically, the Old Lutherans "have a more or less complete liturgical altar-service, even with the crucifixes and candles burning in day-time."[14] Of course, he speaks primarily of the Missouri Synod at this point.

Finally, there is a mediating group Schaff calls the Moderates. These Moderates strike "a middle course" between the extremes of New and Old Lutheranism. They hold the substance of the Lutheran confession, while allowing sufficient freedom for adaptation to and meaningful engagement of America's unique culture and circumstances. The task of these Lutherans, believed Schaff, is "to mediate" between the extremes of New and Old Lutheranism, as well as between America and Germany, "and thus to facilitate a consolidation of the Lutheran Church in America."

Schaff's three types of Lutherans exist within the LCMS today. New Lutherans argue for a thoroughly accommodated Lutheranism. Old Lutherans—often easily dismissed as exclusivistic and tradition bound—see the Formula of Concord as the legitimate exposition of the Augsburg Confession. Many, perhaps most, reside in the place of Schaff's mediating group, sometimes leaning toward the Old, sometimes toward the New.

Everyone's hope is that we will be able to find the unity that will energize our mission. Repeatedly passing resolutions at synodical conventions has not achieved that unity. Political solutions will not bring about the desired unity, so how we will do this remains unclear. What we need is time-consuming study and careful thought on the issues–but

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[13]Schaff, *America: A Sketch of Its Political, Social, and Religious Character* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), 150, 153, 158.
[14]Schaff, *America*, 150, 152, 158.

it must be well informed. We must sit at the feet of our founders. Critical studies of the history of Synod are an absolute necessity. Naturally we interpret the past in the terms of our present, but our interpretations prove in some cases to be absolutely wrong. Facile commonplaces about the "what the Synod has always thought" will not suffice. To be useful, however, such histories will also have to seek as much as possible to present the fullness of Missouri's story. Narrow histories, driven by theological and political agendas, will not answer the pressing need.

What I think we will find, however, as we consider and embrace the perspective of the founders of Missouri is that they were fully committed to faithful and authentic confession of the biblical witness. Faithfully confessing in the public sphere was at the forefront of their purpose. But it was to be done in such a way as to leave no question in the minds of the hearers over the exclusive claims of the Christian faith rightly confessed by the Lutheran Church, namely that salvation is to be found in Jesus Christ and Him alone. What we must understand is that doctrine and mission were inseparably linked in the periods of Missouri's greatest growth. Only when Synod became uncertain about its message did its mission falter.

The fallacy that has found increasing verbalization is that doctrine and mission are two different things, at times juxtaposed against one another. Nothing could have been further from the minds of the founders. The history of Missouri shows that the founding Missourians realized that their doctrinal and practical unity was the basis for their mission. *Because* they believed these things, they spoke of them. This is the basic lesson we need to relearn in the present. Their doctrinal and practical consensus was the engine that powered their remarkable mission efforts.

Death and Martyrdom: An Important Aspect of Early Christian Eschatology

William C. Weinrich

Under the emperor Commodus, toward the end of the second century, a wealthy Roman by the name of Apollonius was arrested on the charge that he was a Christian. The extant account of his martyrdom reports that when Apollonius was brought before the court, the proconsul, Perennis, inquired of Apollonius: "Apollonius, are you a Christian?" To this question Apollonius responded: "Yes, I am a Christian, and for that reason I worship and fear the God who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them."[1] This response of Apollonius, which at first appears so self-evident and natural, in fact implicitly contains a thorough theology of martrydom not uncommon in the early church. Indeed, it is my conviction that this early theology of martyrdom provides us with a helpful entree to a reflection on the nature and meaning of death, most especially of the death of the Christian. At a time when in our own culture the reality of death is increasingly trivialized and made simply a matter of one's own choice, and at a time when the activistic generation of the 1960's is entering into its "golden" years, the question "what does it mean to die" comes more and more to center stage and, I suspect, will be a major focus of the church's proclamation in the next quarter century.

We begin with a few simple observations. Martyrdom consists of the death imposed on one who wills to remain constant in his confession of faith, rather than to deny that confession. Martyrdom entails death; only that one who dies for the faith is called a "martyr."[2] However, and this is a second observation, the death imposed on the martyr is the result of a judgment to death. And a third observation: the judgment to death

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[1]All citations from the *Acts of the Martyrs* are from Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972). *Martyrdom of Apollonius* 2 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 91). The martyrdom of Apollonius may be dated about A.D. 180.

[2]By the end of the second century a distinction was clearly drawn between those who were "martyrs" and those who were "confessors." The "martyr" had confessed and been put to death for the confession; the "confessor" had confessed but had not suffered death. See *The Letter of the Lyons Martyrs*: "They were indeed martyrs, whom Christ has deigned to take up in their hour of confession, putting his seal on their witness by death" (Eusebius, *History of the Church* 5.2.3; Musurillo, *Acts*, 83).

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imposed on the martyr is due to the refusal of the martyr to confess and to sacrifice to false gods. Confession of faith, rejection of idolatry, and judgment to death—these are the irreducible components of every martyrdom. It is precisely with these aspects of martyrdom in view that the witness of Apollonius before the Roman magistrate raises interesting questions. As Apollonius faced the penalty of death, one might suppose that the confession he would make would be an explicit confession in the hope of the resurrection from the dead. One might assume that a confession of the second article, something like "I believe in Jesus the Christ who was raised from dead," would be more appropriately relevant to the context of persecution and martyrdom. However, the confession of Apollonius was that of the first article of the creed; it was a confession that the true God is the creator of all things. This feature is not unique to the witness of Apollonius. It is characteristic of many acts of the martyrs that come from the first three centuries of the church's history.[3] Such a confession in the Creator that is confessed in the context of one's own death reminds us that the reality of death raises the question of what it means to be a creature who lives and who can die. It raises the question of what it means for God to be our creator.

An ancient and a modern heresy that the church again must combat is the view that death is natural. Such a view regards death as the last act of life, and as such, death is something over which we dispose. Such a view could not be further from biblical understanding. The Bible begins, not with a living man as though man lived self-evidently, but the Bible begins with the Creator, who speaks into existence man, who is made to exist by being made to live. Life is, therefore, a gift. Life, therefore, is not, so to speak, 'natural' to us. It comes to us from the outside, from God, so that even that which most "belongs" to us, namely our life, is itself not our own proper possession. Precisely in our being made alive, our relationship with God is both begun and revealed: He is our creator, and we are His creatures. To live is to be created. For this reason, Irenaeus could write that "the glory of God is a living man," for in the life of man, the living God who makes by making alive is manifested. This "making alive," however, also reveals a will to make alive. It is God's will that man live. While this is implicit in the creation story itself, it is made

[3]For example, the *Martyrdom of Justin* 2.5 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 43); *Martyrdom of Carpus* 10 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 23); *Martyrdom of Pionius* 8 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 147); *Acts of Cyprian* 1 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 169); *Martyrdom of Fructuosus* 2 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 179).

explicit in the *Wisdom of Solomon*: "God created man for incorruption (ἐπ' ἀφθαρσίᾳ), and made him in the image of His own eternity" (2:23). When, therefore, the early church spoke of God's creating, it spoke of God creating *ex nihilo*, "from nothing," and by that phrase the church meant that God creates purely by His will and command. A living man is the direct expression of the will and command of God.

This conjunction of man's life and God's will introduces us to a significant element in biblical thinking and the theology of martyrdom, namely, that man's life entails his obedience to God. Or, perhaps we may say the same thing in this way: man's faith that God is his creator manifests itself in man's obedience to God's will. Typical of the biblical thematic is the fact that even before the fall the command of God is present: you may eat of all the trees of the garden, but in the day that you eat of the tree in the midst of the garden, you shall die (Genesis 2:15 and following; 3:1-5). Obedience to this command was to be the form of man's freedom from death, and in obedience to this command man would manifest his faith that God was his creator, that is, that his life came from God alone. This is clear from the words of the Tempter, who gave words that were in opposition to the words of God: "you will not die, if you eat of the tree" (Genesis 3:4-5). Satan does not merely invite man to disobedience against an abstract commandment; he rather invites man to regard the source of his life to lie elsewhere than in God. In effect, Satan establishes a will that is contrary to the will of God and gives itself voice by a contrary claim concerning the source of man's life. For this reason sin, whose chief aspect is disobedience, leads to death. Sin is itself fundamentally the refusal to believe that our life comes from God and exists in God. Sin leads man to regard something else or someone else other than God to be the source of his life. And so, man the sinner necessarily becomes the seeker after idols, other gods, who are incapable of making alive because they themselves are creatures who possess no life in themselves but receive their own existence and life from God, the Creator. For this reason, the worship of false gods manifests the dominion of death. The conjunction of disobedience, idolatry, and death occurs in the following passage of the *Wisdom of Solomon*: "Do not invite death by the error of your life [disobedience], nor bring on destruction by the works of your hands [idolatry]" (1:12).[4]

[4]This part of the discussion owes much to Gustav Wingren, *Creation and Law*, translated by Ross Mackenzie (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 43-82.

However, the death that comes through sin and idolatry is not simply a logical result of sin and idolatry. Death comes *to me*, and so death itself is also external to me and comes from another. This is simply to say that death is a power, and its power is personal, that is, the power of death exists in its capacity to lie and to deceive. Death makes the claim that it is final and that those who dispose over death have a rightful claim to our allegiance. Paul can, therefore, call death the "last enemy" (1 Corinthians 15:26). It is an enemy that must not be simply assuaged; it is an enemy that must be destroyed, for behind death is Satan, the "prince of this world." Death then presents man once more with the temptation to sin, for it invites man to doubt that God remains the good creator of our life even in the midst of death, and so it invites man to bend the knee to those who would kill us.

But death is a power also in another sense. It is a power because behind death there is the God who judges the disobedience of man. The power of death also lies in the fact that it is the judgment of that true God, who is the Creator, who makes by making alive, and who can, therefore, also kill by taking life away. Regarded in this manner, death is, paradoxically if you will, a revelation, to those who can see it, that the God who judges with death is none other than that God who is the creator of all things.[5] Such a judgment to death can neither be avoided nor ameliorated, for the judgment of death puts an end to my life precisely because it is a judgment over the entirety of my life. And because it is a judgment over the entirety of my life, death involves the loss of all things that have been received and possessed throughout the duration of my life: we have brought nothing into this world, and we will certainly take nothing out of it. However, it is exactly here that we must recall once more that the God who judges to death, is none other than the creator of all things, whose will is to make by making alive. In the judgment to death that God gives to man lies hidden the will of God to make alive, for in the death of man God condemns and destroys that which has separated man from God and which has elicited man's death. That is to say, in death God puts an end to sin and to the false autonomy

[5]It is suggestive in this context that the Bible can depict the judgment of God as a return to that chaos out of which God created the world. See, for example, Jeremiah 4:23-26 (verse 23: *tohu wabohu*); 5:20-25.

of man that exists in sin.[6] Death makes laughable the claim that the life of man is possessed by the things of the world or by the princes of the earth, and for this reason death reveals idolatry for what it in fact is, a false worship arising from and issuing into death because the gods worshiped in idolatry are no gods at all. Death, then, precisely as *God's* judgment, is the work of His will to make alive and to re-establish His status as *our* God, to whom alone we give honor and praise. Our death, as the judgment of God the Creator, invites and demands our confession that the One who wills our death is none other than the creator of all things, who makes by making alive. The context of death becomes then the occasion for faith and right worship; it becomes the occasion for the confession that God is the creator of all things.

It is evident that the theology of martyrdom in the early church was conceived in the context of such a creation faith. Not surprisingly, the narratives of early martyrdoms are stories of conflict, and in such stories there is no neutral ground. Here one is either to sacrifice to the gods or one is not to sacrifice; one is either to confess or one is to deny; one is either to live or one is to die. Vilmos Vajta reminds us that, for Luther, the First Commandment establishes the fundamental claim of all true worship, "I am your God."[7] This is also true of early Christian stories of persecution and martyrdom. However, there are two questions that are raised by this claim: Who is this God who makes such a claim upon us, and how does one make precisely this God one's own god? Within the acts of the martyrs the first of these questions receives this form: who has the power to give and to take away life? In the acts of the martyrs, the answer is that the one who has the power to give life and to take life away is God, the creator of all things, who makes the dead to live. And, how does one make precisely this God to be one's own god? In the acts of the martyrs the answer to this question is: one makes this God to be one's own god by dying in the confession that one is a Christian, "I am a Christian."

The character of martyrdom as a conflict between God and the false gods is evident from the interrogations of the martyr by the Roman officials and by the responses that the martyrs give. In the *Martyrdom of*

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[6]Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 76.

[7]Vilmos Vajta, *Die Theologie des Gottesdeinstes bei Luther* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1952), 3-10.

Polycarp we are told that, after Polycarp had been brought into the arena, the governor said to him: "Swear [to the gods] and I will let you go. Curse Christ." To this Polycarp answered: "For eighty-six years I have been his servant and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme against my king and savior?"[8] In the *Martyrdom of Apollonius* the proconsul, Perennis, exhorts Apollonius to sacrifice to the gods and to the image of the emperor Commodus. When Apollonius refuses, Perennis says: "I shall grant you a day's time, that you may take some thought about your life." Upon the continuing steadfastness of Apollonius, Perennis urges: "I advise you to change your mind and to venerate and worship the gods which we all venerate and worship, and to continue to live amongst us." Apollonius responds: "It is the God of the heavens whom I worship, and him alone do I venerate, who breathed into all men a living soul and daily pours life into all."[9] To mention but one more example, in the *Martyrdom of Pionius*, the presbyter, Pionius, and others are arrested and reminded of "the emperor's edict commanding us to sacrifice to the gods." To this Pionius responds: "We are aware of the commandment of God ordering us to worship him alone," to which Sabina and Asclepiades add: "We obey the living God." To this the official, one Polemon, responds: "It would be wise for you to obey and offer sacrifice like everyone else, so that you may not be punished."[10]

It is clear from these interchanges that the question in play is this: "Who has the power to give and to take away life?" For their part the Roman magistrates believe that they do; they have the authority to stay execution and to release from prison and they have the authority to effect execution upon the Christian. And in this context of persecution and martyrdom the fact that the question "who has the power to give and to take away life" allows no neutral stance becomes clear. Faith is directed either toward the gods, or it is directed toward God the Creator. The question of life or death is nothing other than the question concerning who is the true God. By refusing to offer sacrifice to the gods, the martyr, in effect, rejects the claim of the magistrates that they possess the power to give life and confesses, rather, that it is God the Creator and He alone

[8]*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 9 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 9).
[9]*Martyrdom of Apollonius* 10-13 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 93, 95).
[10]*Martyrdom of Pionius* 2.2-4; 4.1 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 139).

who possesses this power.[11] The life that the magistrate offers in exchange for sacrifice to the gods is, in fact, a verdict of death, for such gods are no gods, having no life in them. Thus, when Perennis asks Apollonius to sacrifice to the gods so that he might continue to live, Apollonius responds: "I am a pious man, and I may not worship idols made with hands. Therefore, I do not bow before gold or silver, bronze or iron, or before false gods made of stone or wood, who can neither see nor hear: for these are but the work of craftsmen, workers in gold and bronze; they are the carving of men and have no life of their own."[12] Similarly, when Carpus is commanded to sacrifice to the gods, he responds: "May the gods be destroyed who have not made heaven and earth." And upon further pressure to sacrifice, he says: "The living do not offer sacrifice to the dead."[13]

Idolatry is a form that the dominion of death assumes, and to worship idols is to die. Therefore, when the martyr willingly receives the judgment of death from the hands of the earthly power and takes this judgment upon himself, he confesses that the one, true, and only God is God the Creator, who alone makes all things and who will also make him alive from the dead. And this confession is not only the confession of the mouth; it is precisely a confession made in the confessor's death. In their death itself, the martyr acknowledges that God is the creator, who creates by making alive, and therefore, in their death itself, the martyr makes a witness against false gods who have no life in themselves and thus cannot make alive. In the act of martyrdom itself the real and proper relationship between God and the world is revealed. The martyr's death witnesses to the fact that the only source of man's life and hope is God Himself. Martyrdom reveals the living God. That is, martyrdom reveals the living God to those to whom it is given to see it. In the *Martyrdom of Fructuosus*, it is reported that after his martyrdom, the heavens were opened, revealing the bishop with his deacons "rising crowned up to heaven, with the stakes to which they had been bound still intact." The Roman consul, Aemilianus, was summoned to see this as well: "Come

[11]From time to time in the Acts of the Martyrs, the martyr will remind the human judge that his authority is itself derived from God in whose hands alone all power exists. The judge is a servant of God, and for that reason how the judge disposes of his authority will become an issue at his own judgment in the last day.

[12]*Martyrdom of Apollonius* 14 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 95).

[13]*Martyrdom of Carpus* 10-12 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 23, 25).

and see how those whom you have condemned to death today have been restored to heaven and to their hopes." However we are told, "when Aemilianus came, he was not worthy to behold them."[14]

Gustav Wingren reminds us that in the New Testament the theme of imitating Christ in his suffering and death is connected with suffering under earthly masters. He refers to 1 Peter 2:21 and following, where the reviling of Christ before His judges is depicted as that which the Christian should be prepared to suffer in his body: "For to this have you been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." Wingren relates this Petrine passage to Romans 13:4, which speaks of the civil authority as the instrument of God's wrath upon the evildoer. God uses human punishment as the instrument of His wrath.[15]

It is true that the theme of God's wrath is rarely evident in accounts of early Christian martyrdom, except for the occasional threat that the persecutor will receive God's wrath on the last day. Nonetheless, the fact remains that true Christian martyrdom is obedience to God's will that the martyr die, and that this will is executed through the instrument of the persecuting powers. The wrath and fatal power of the authorities are, therefore, the form in which the will of God is effected. Certainly in the acts of the martyrs, martyrdom is not regarded simply as a tyrannical evil which catches the martyr unawares and brings him unwillingly to judgment and death. Martyrdom is an expression of the divine intent, and only that martyrdom that is willed by God is regarded as a true martyrdom. This is, in fact, the central theme of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* which narrates the story of Polycarp's martyrdom in contrast to the story of a certain Quintus. Quintus, perhaps an early Montanist, had given himself up and had encouraged others also to give themselves up for martyrdom. However, when he saw the wild animals, Quintus "turned cowardly."[16] Polycarp, however, had left the city of Smyrna at the first signs of persecution and had retired to the countryside. Shortly thereafter, Polycarp had a vision in which he saw his pillow consumed

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[14]*Martyrdom of Fructuosus* 5 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 183). That the death of the martyr itself is a witness to the living God is the reason why the title of "martyr" was given only to the one who died for his confession. The title did not refer to the verbal testimony made before the magistrate; it referred solely to the death of the martyr.

[15]Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 54 and following; 79 and following.

[16]*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 4 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 5).

by fire, and he knew that he was to be burned alive.[17] Because God wills the martyrdom of Polycarp, the narrative of Polycarp's martyrdom reports of his constant steadfastness in his confession, even to the extent that he refuses to be bound to the stake at which he was to be burned, since God will grant him to remain unflinching in the fire.[18] What God wills, God sees to the end. The martyr who faithfully submits to his death, reveals the will of God that he submit to the death of martyrdom.

It is, therefore, the will of God that the martyr die. And by assenting to that will through submission to the judgment of the earthly authorities, the martyr's will to die becomes the expression of God's will that he die. In this way the obedience of the martyr to God's will that he die is the form of the martyr's rejection of false gods and, as such, is the obedience of faith in that God who, as creator, puts to death so that He might again create by making alive. It is in submission to his own martyrdom that the martyr witnesses to the real and proper relationship between God and man, namely, that it is God alone who gives life and man who receives it. In this faithful obedience and in this obedient faith the victory of Christ's resurrection over death is manifested. That the dominion of death is broken in the martyr is manifested in the fact that the judgment of death was not capable of deterring the martyr from going into martyrdom. By remaining steadfast in the confession of the true God, the martyr witnesses, therefore, to the victory of Christ's resurrection from the dead. That in the death of Christ, death was itself defeated, is shown in the martyr by his refusal to apostasize. The martyrological equivalent to the statement "in the cross Jesus conquered death" is the statement "in persecution and martyrdom the martyr proclaims and confesses Christ, even in his death." This is the theme especially of the *Letter of the Lyons Martyrs*, which tells us that the confession of the martyrs and their steadfastness in the midst of torture was nothing other than a demonstration that "the sufferings of the present age are not to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed to us."[19] Although he was speaking of all men and not specifically concerning the martyr, Irenaeus,

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[17]*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 5 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 5, 7).

[18]*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 13 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 13).

[19]*Letter of the Lyons Martyrs* (Eusebius, *History of the Church* 5.1.6; Musurillo, *Acts*, 63).

in his typically pithy fashion, puts the point like this: "being in subjection to God is continuance in immortality."[20]

We must now, in conclusion, make explicit two points that have been implicit throughout the discussion. First of all, martyrdom is the right worship of a true sacrifice offered to God. As we have seen, martyrdom is the refusal to acknowledge false gods by sacrificing to them, and this by way not only of open confession, but by way of one's own death. However, the demand of the earthly authorities that a sacrifice be given is, in fact, paradoxically carried out. The martyr allows the authorities to slay him and so, in that way, to sacrifice him up to the true God. And as a death fully embraced by faith in the one true God, martyrdom is a sacrifice of self fully acceptable to God. Not surprisingly, early Christian martyrs are often discussed in sacrificial terms. Ignatius of Antioch speaks of his own martyrdom in such categories: "Then I shall be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world no longer sees my body. Pray Christ on my behalf that through these instruments of God [namely the beasts] I might be found a sacrifice."[21] In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the martyr-bishop is reported to have prayed a prayer almost certainly based on the eucharistic prayer of the church at Smyrna. In this prayer, Polycarp also speaks in terms of sacrifice: "May I be received this day among [the martyrs] before your face as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as you, the God of truth who cannot deceive, have prepared, revealed, and fulfilled beforehand. Therefore, I praise you, I bless you, and I glorify you above all things, through that eternal and celestial high priest, Jesus Christ, your beloved child, through whom is glory to you with him and the Holy Spirit now and for all ages to come. Amen."[22] Martyrdom is an expression of that right worship of love toward the Lord God with all your soul, body, and mind. It is the worship of faith in that God who is the true God. In view of this, it is perhaps not surprising that the remains of martyrs early on were associated with altars and the dates of their martyrdoms became occasions for liturgical festivals. Likewise, the stories of martyrdom are replete with liturgical hymns and the language of praise. We may simply note as illustration the wholesale interweave of martyrological and liturgical themes in the Revelation of Saint John.

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[20]Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.38.3.
[21]Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Romans* 4.2.
[22]*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 14.2-3 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 13, 15).

The second point to be made in conclusion concerns the confession, "I am a Christian." The report of this confession made before courts and magistrates is a constant feature of early Christian martyr stories. A good illustration of this is in the *Letter of the Lyons Martyrs*. We are told that Sanctus, a deacon from Vienne, would simply answer every question put to him with the words, "I am a Christian." Rather than state his name, his birthplace, his nationality or anything else, Sanctus would simply repeat this confession again and again, and "the pagan crowd heard not another word from him."[23] Clearly for Sanctus, his personal identity was not essentially determined by family, place, or ethnicity. His identity was determined by his relation to God, and this relation was signified by the confession, "I am a Christian." However, in martyr stories this confession is spoken in a particular context in which the naming of one's God is demanded, in which sacrifice to false gods is demanded, and in which steadfast faithfulness to that God who creates by making alive results in one's death. In this context, what it means to be a Christian is given a specific and definite content, and that content is this: to be a Christian means to reject the false pretense of the world's powers; to be a Christian means to confess the true God who has created all things and who makes anew by giving life to the dead through the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and to be a Christian means to remain steadfast in that confession and hope even unto death. "Be faithful unto death, and I shall give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). It is in faithful martyrdom that we receive a clear answer to questions asked earlier: Who is the god who claims to be our God?; and how does one make this God to be one's own god? The answer, once more, is this: according to the theology of Christian martyrdom, the god who lays claim on our allegiance is none other than that God who wills our life and gives to us all that is necessary to sustain it; He is none other than that God who, because of our lack of faith in His will to make us alive, judges us with death; and He is none other than that God who, in judging us to death, is exercising His will to create anew from nothing by making the dead to live. And how does one make this God to be one's own god? According to the theology of Christian martyrdom, the answer is this: one makes God, the Creator, to be one's own god by dying to the world, so that one might live to Christ.

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[23]*Letter of the Lyons Martyrs* (Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 5.1.20; Musurillo, *Acts*, 69).

The fact is, this theology of martyrdom is pervasive in the New Testament, even when not explicitly speaking of martyrs. The death of the martyr is the visible and public expression of Christian death, and for that reason the martyr was regarded as a saint, that is, one in whom was made manifest the reality of Christ and His church. We conclude with but one example from the New Testament that incorporates many of the aspects of this theology which we have discussed:

> Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the presence of God who gives life to all things and of Christ Jesus who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord, Jesus Christ. And this will be made manifest at the proper time by the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:12-16)

Divine Providence, History, and Progress in Saint Augustine's *City of God*

John A. Maxfield

Midnight on December 31, 1999 came and went without the worldwide disruption of computer systems foretold by seers of the Y2K phenomenon. Fears of the unknown future after Y2K quickly subsided, but they reveal yet again the chronic fascination, even in modern secular cultures, with apocalyptic visions of the uncontrollable demise of civilizations whose enduring stability remains precarious. In the latter decades of the twentieth century secular visions of the apocalyptic destruction of modern civilization have ranged from the threat of nuclear annihilation (especially during the confrontational years in relations between the Soviet Union and the United States in the first term of President Ronald Reagan) to the prospect of economic collapse (foretold in some circles as the inevitable result of the economic policies of President Bill Clinton). As such visions fail to be realized, it seems chronic in our culture's condition that, far from being laid to rest, they are instead modified or replaced by new fads. These play on the uncertainties of the future and thus aid in the sale of popular books or the raising of funds by various interest groups heavily invested in the political processes of modern democracies.

Such are the secular versions of apocalyptic visions that are so prominent especially in the varieties of non-conformist Christianity historically and of conservative evangelical Christianity today. They reveal that Christian fascination with biblical apocalyptic prophecy holds no monopoly on the way fears regarding the uncertain future can be either exploited or used constructively in the promotion of an agenda or in the cementing of the social and ideological identity of a group. And although such fears are perhaps exploited most effectively in times of turmoil or crisis, even in present prosperity the ability for a scenario such as the imminent collapse of technological systems (as in the Y2K phenomenon) to captivate the minds and influence the patterns of economic behavior of a populace testifies to the enduring strength of apocalyptic visions of the future, whether secular or religious.

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Marjorie Reeves has written persuasively about the influence of prophecy in history, arguing that "Human beings in general can no more ignore their future than they can lose their past. Thus a theme common to all periods of history is that of attitudes towards the future."[1] Taking her cue, this essay will examine the occasion and the content of Saint Augustine's *magnum opus*, the *City of God*, in the light of Augustine's view of biblical revelation and its relation to his attitude toward the future of his world as it was guided, he believed so strongly, by the providence of God. Our view of Augustine may indeed show that his world is not so different from our own. Augustine's confidence in God even in the face of the crisis of his world speaks volumes to our own day, full of preoccupations with and manipulations of human fear in the face of the uncertain future. The sack of Rome by the Visigoth chieftain, Alaric, in A.D. 410 had a significance for Augustine's world that far outweighed the fairly inconsequential material reality of the sack itself. In the aftermath of that event, in provincial towns far away from the city of Rome itself, Augustine preached to Christians who were uncertain of themselves—so Peter Brown describes them at the beginning of his poetic description of this chapter in Augustine's pastoral life.[2] "They had boasted of the 'Christian Era,' and now it had coincided with unparalleled disasters."[3] As recently as 404 Augustine had been one of the boasters, so confident was he that in his day the prophetic scriptures were being fulfilled in the conversion of the world:

> Lately, kings are coming to Rome. A great thing, brothers, in what manner it was fulfilled. When it was spoken, when it was written, nothing of these things was. It is extraordinary! Pay attention and see; rejoice! May they be curious who do not want to give attention to it; for these things we want them to be curious. . . . Let them discover that so many things which they see of late were predicted beforehand. . . . Every age [of individual] has been called to salvation. Every age has already come—every dignity, every level of wealth and human capacity. Soon let them all be inside. Presently a few remain outside and still argue; let them wake up at

[1]Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), vii.

[2]Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1967), 313-329.

[3]Brown, *Augustine*, 313.

some time or another to the rumbling of the world: the whole world clamors![4]

That whole world clamoring in 404 for pagans to convert to Christianity became, in the aftermath of Alaric's sack of Rome, the clamoring of pagans that Christianity and Rome's forsaking of its gods were to blame for the fall of the "Eternal City." Far from being dead after a generation of Christianization, despite the coercive measures against it under the emperor Honorius beginning in 399, paganism remained alive and well in the early part of the fifth century, as Augustine's rhetorical engagement with paganism in his sermons of the period reveal.[5] Peter Brown depicts the cultured pagan aristocrat that would have been the target of Augustine's masterful parlaying of classical literature and philosophy so evident in the *City of God*. This is "a whole culture running hard to stand still . . . a strange phenomenon: the preservation of a whole way of life in the present, by transfusing it with the inviolable safety of an adored past."[6] Augustine directs his polemic against them not so much by engaging their current practice as by a thorough critique of the history of pagan culture, all the while demonstrating his mastery of the literature of these "fanatical antiquarians."[7]

One of these, Volusianus, had, through Augustine's friend Flavius Marcellinus, made the charge against Christianity quite specifically: in a letter to the Bishop of Hippo, Marcellinus communicated Volusianus's

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[4] Saint Augustine, *Sermo Sancti Augustini cum pagani ingrederentur* (Dolbeau Sermon 25/Mayence 61), edited by Francois Dolbeau. "Nouveaux sermons de Saint Augustin pour la conversion des paiens et des donatistes" (I), *Revue des etudes augustiniennes* 37 (1991):75-76.

[5] See especially Dolbeau sermons 25 and 26 in Dolbeau, "Nouveaux sermons" (I), *Revue des etudes augustiniennes* 37:37-77, and (IV), *Recherches augustiniennes* 26 (1992):69-141. English translation in Saint Augustine, *Sermons III/11: Newly Discovered Sermons,* translated and annotated by Edmund Hill, edited by John E. Rotelle. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1997), 366-386 (Dolbeau 25) and 180-237 (Dolbeau 26). See also Brown, *Augustine,* 299-312, and Herbert Bloch, "The Pagan Revival in the West at the End of the Fourth Century," *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century,* edited by Arnoldo Momigliano (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 193-218.

[6] Brown, *Augustine,* 301.

[7] Brown, *Augustine,* 305. See also Arnoldo Momigliano, "Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century A. D," in *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity,* 99.

conviction that it was manifest "that very great calamities have befallen the commonwealth under the government of emperors observing, for the most part, the Christian religion."[8] In his response, Augustine reveals the accusation as a calumny. How often in the past, "long before the name of Christ had shone abroad on the earth," had Roman authors like Sallust proclaimed the doom of Rome, holding responsible the emperors and their faults, the corruptive wantonness of the army, "the evils which were brought in by wickedness uplifted by prosperity."[9] Augustine would ask someone else, the Spanish priest Orosius, to write a history that would expose the grim and violent picture of the pagan past. The result was *Orosius's Seven Books of Histories against the Pagans*, a work firmly grounded in a tradition of Christian historiography which Theodor Mommsen refers to as that of the "Christian progressivists."[10] In the *City of God* Augustine would answer the accusations of a resurgent paganism with an entirely different presentation, indeed one that would give a view of God's providential dealings with human societies quite at odds with that of Orosius and the tradition he followed. Mommsen has argued convincingly that the refutation of paganism was not Augustine's only concern in writing his great work.[11] To arm a Christian readership with an effective apologetic against pagan attacks was, perhaps, a secondary purpose.[12] Augustine had a more fundamental interest to refute this "progressivist" tradition, which viewed Rome as the "Eternal City," and, more importantly, interpreted in a materialistic, this-worldly sense the

[8]*Letters of Saint Augustine* 136.2; Saint Augustine, *The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustin, with a Sketch of his Life and Work.* A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, volume 1, edited by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 473. In the *Retractiones* (2.43.1) Augustine recalled how the pagans had attempted "to attribute that overthrow of Rome to the Christian religions, and began to blaspheme the true God with even more than their customary acrimony and bitterness." Quoted in Theodor E. Mommsen, "Orosius and Augustine," in Theodore E. Mommsen, *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, edited by Eugene F. Rice Jr. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1959), 328.

[9]*Letters of Saint Augustine* 138.3; Augustine, *Confessions and Letters*, 486.

[10]Theodor E. Mommsen, "St. Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress: The Background of the City of God," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951):343.

[11]Mommsen, "Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress," 368-369.

[12]Gerard O'Daly argues cogently that Augustine anticipated a Christian and not a pagan audience. *Augustine's* City of God: *A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 36-37.

progress of Christian Rome with a shallow optimism that "was of necessity badly shaken by the turn of events," namely the sack of Rome.[13]

The progressivists were the theological descendants of Eusebius of Caesarea, who viewed Constantine in Messianic terms, who discussed the *pax Augusta* in theological terms, and who viewed the empire as having an important place in salvation history.[14] These views were grounded in the apocalyptic literature of the Bible and were widespread during the fourth century, as is evident in several biblical commentaries of the period. Mommsen cites Jerome and Sulpicious Severus from the West and Eusebius and Chrysostom from the East as four commentators who identified Rome with the fourth monarchy in the apocalyptic prophecy of Daniel.[15] Characteristic of this view of Rome in biblical prophecy was the teaching of Cyril of Jerusalem in his *Catechetical Lectures* that "the Antichrist is to come when the time of the Roman empire has been fulfilled and the end of the world is drawing near."[16] So closely was the destiny of Christian Rome tied to the future of the church that Rome's demise could be viewed only as signaling the very end of time.

Robert Markus, in his study of Augustine's views on history and society that for three decades has been considered all but definitive, describes how Augustine himself had once espoused a similar viewpoint. In the period of his confrontation with Manichaeism, he had spoken of an *imperium Christianum*.[17] More frequently and for a longer time, at least through the opening years of the fifth century, Augustine spoke of *tempora christiana*. We have already seen a striking example in the newly discovered sermon of 404 cited above of Augustine's euphoric triumphalism as divine prophecy was being fulfilled through the conversion of the nations. Markus notes that such views were especially prominent in Augustine's writings in the years after the repression of paganism under the emperor Honorius. "It is about this time that [Augustine] refers repeatedly to the fulfilment of the prophecies

[13]Mommsen, "Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress," 369.

[14]R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), 49-50.

[15]Mommsen, "Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress," 349.

[16]Mommsen, "Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress," 349.

[17]Markus, *Saeculum*, 37, citing Augustine, *Contra Faustum* XXII.60.

temporibus christianis: ecce nunc fit—now, under our very eyes, the nations are coming to Christ from the ends of the earth."[18]

But, according to Markus, sometime during the decade following 404 Augustine abandoned this concept of *tempora christiana*. Markus identifies the change as related to the mature development of Augustine's view of canonical prophecy and its divine inspiration, as reflected in his commentary *De Genesis ad litteram*, Book XII, completed by 414.[19] "As a result of this development in his thinking," concludes Markus, "Augustine had come to see 'sacred history' as confined to the history to be found within the scriptural canon, and he came to deny this status to any other interpretations of historical events."[20] Throughout the *City of God*, he notes, the phrase *tempora christiana* is used to refer only to pagan charges against Christians in the Theodosian establishment, with the one exception being the use of the phrase in the title of Book XVIII.17 where the phrase refers not to any specific events or time viewed as a fulfillment of prophecy, but rather to the whole period since the incarnation.[21]

In the aftermath of 410, euphoria over *tempora christiana* as a fulfillment of prophecy not only opened the way for pagan attacks like that of Volusianus; it also could be spiritually dangerous for Christians influenced by the Eusebian doctrine of progress. Augustine saw the danger lurking among his hearers; in a sermon of the time he warns against "those blasphemers who chase and long after things earthly and place their hopes in things earthly. When they have lost them, whether they will or not, what shall they hold and where shall they abide? Nothing within, nothing without; an empty coffer, an emptier conscience."[22]

Against such a view of progress as worldly, material, and inviting speculation that "all will be well" during these Christian times, Augustine presented his view of history, especially in Books XI through XII of the *City of God* which totally abandoned such optimism about "things earthly." He dismissed as speculation all arguments from

[18]Markus, *Saeculum*, 33.
[19]Markus, *Saeculum*, 43.
[20]Markus, *Saeculum*, 43.
[21]Markus, *Saeculum*, 38.
[22]Sermon 105.13, quoted in Mommsen, "Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress," 369.

canonical prophecy that Rome, as the Christian empire, had ended all persecution of the church and that the church would endure in peace until the appearance of the Antichrist in the very end times.[23] Such had been the conviction of Orosius, who is clearly the object of Augustine's critique in Book XVIII: "I do not imagine that we should rashly assert or believe the theory that some have entertained or still do entertain: that the Church is not going to suffer any more persecutions until the time of Antichrist. . . ."[24] For Augustine, the church always remains in a precarious position as she relates to the *civitas terrena*, which Rome remains, despite the Christianization of the empire.[25]

The question at this point is how Augustine viewed this *civitas terrena* in relation to the *civitas dei*, and how he incorporated both in his understanding of the historical process. The first thing to note is that Augustine viewed history as universal, for the providential God of history in whom Augustine believed was the God of all history, not only that of the church of the Old and New Testaments. Augustine was certainly not the first to view history in universal terms; that honor might be said to belong to Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*, but the concept goes back to the Hebrew prophets.[26]

Related to the concept of history as universal is that of history as a divine, rather than a human, production.[27] Augustine demonstrates his incorporation of these concepts in his theology of history when he addresses, especially in the first five books of the *City of God*, the subject of divine providence and the progress of Roman history. That he arrived at this understanding of history as a universally applied divine

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[23]Markus, *Saeculum*, 54.

[24]Saint Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, translated by Henry Bettenson (1972; reprint, with an introduction by John O'Meara, New York: Penguin, 1984), 835. Hereafter cited as Bettenson. The Latin text is in Saint Augustine, *La Cité de Dieu*. Bibliothêque Augustinienne. *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin*, volumes 33-37. Cinquième Série. Texte de la 4e Edition de B. Bombart et A. Kalb. Introduction et notes par G. Bardy. Traduction Française de G. Combes (Desclee de Brouwer, 1960), 670. Hereafter cited as CG followed by Book and chapter number, with volume and page number of this edition in parenthesis. Here, CG XVIII.52 (36, 670). See also Mommsen, "Orosius and Augustine," 347.

[25]Markus, *Saeculum*, 57.

[26]F. W. Loetscher, "Augustine's *City of God*," *Theology Today* 1 (1944-45):318.

[27]Gerald A. Press, *The Development of the Idea of History in Antiquity* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982), 118.

production from the biblical revelation itself is best shown from his own words:

> For could we rely on a better chronicler of the past than one who also foretold the future as we now see it happening before our eyes? In fact, the very disagreement of historians with one another affords us good reason for trusting, in preference to the rest, the authority who does not clash with the inspired record which we possess. Moreover, the citizens of the irreligious city, who have spread all over the world, read authors of the profoundest erudition, and see no reason for rejecting the authority of any of them; but they find them differing from one another in their treatment of events most remote from the memory of the present age, and they cannot discover whom they ought particularly to trust. In contrast, we can place our reliance on the inspired history belonging to our religion and consequently have no hesitation in treating as utterly false anything which fails to conform to it. . . .[28]

Gordon Clark reasons correctly when he writes that "to cast the results of historical research into the framework of a providential view, one must come to history with Christian ideals already in mind, and this requires revelation as a methodological principle."[29] Robert Markus, even while developing the argument that Augustine had narrowed his concept of "sacred history" down to that in the scriptural canon by the time the *City of God* was written, nevertheless acknowledges that Augustine "was never without a deep sense of God's ever-present activity in each and every moment of time, as in every part of space."[30] All history, even the antithetical evil actions of fallen man, moves under that providence of God which puts "such creatures to good use, and thus enrich[es] the course of the world history by the kind of antithesis which gives beauty to a poem. . . . The opposition of such contraries gives an added beauty to speech; and in the same way there is beauty in the composition of the world's history arising from the antithesis of contraries—a kind of eloquence in events, instead of in words."[31]

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[28]Bettenson, 815, CG XVIII.40 (36, 622).

[29]Gordon H. Clark, *Historiography: Secular and Religious* (Nutley, New Jersey: The Craig Press, 1967), 245.

[30]Markus, *Saeculum*, 16.

[31]Bettenson, 449, CG XI.18 (35, 86). See also *Letters of Saint Augustine* 138.1.5: ". . . the unchangeable Governor as He is the unchangeable Creator of mutable things,

Augustine has been criticized for being too limited in his actual treatment of the history of civilization. One author concludes that Augustine's goal of a universal history is not matched by the material actually present.[32] This view fails to grasp the centrality of revelation in Augustine's theology of history. Because he deals with a revealed schema, the details of any particular history, even that of the covenant people of God in the Old Testament, are not essential.[33] What is essential is the macrocosmic reality that God has revealed, which Augustine lays out clearly in the final book of the *City of God*, unveiling the *finis* of the *civitas dei* from its very creation in the beginning:

> Now if the epochs of history are reckoned as "days," following the apparent temporal scheme of Scripture, this Sabbath period will emerge more clearly as the seventh of those epochs. The first "day" is the first period, from Adam to the Flood; the second from the Flood to Abraham. Those correspond not by equality in the passage of time, but in respect of the number of generations, for there are found to be ten generations in each of those periods.
>
> From that time, in the scheme of the evangelist Matthew, there are three epochs, which take us down to the coming of Christ; one from Abraham to David, a second from David to the Exile in Babylon, and the third extending to the coming of Christ in the flesh. Thus we have a total of five periods. We are now in the sixth epoch, but that cannot be measured by the number of generations, because it is said, "It is not for you to know the dates: the Father has decided those by his own authority" [Acts 1:7]. After this present age God will rest, as it were, on the seventh day, and he will cause us, who are the seventh day, to find our rest in him.[34]

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ordering all events in His providence until the beauty of the completed course of time, the component parts of which are the dispensations adapted to each successive age, shall be finished, like the grand melody of some ineffably wise master of song . . ." Augustine, *Confessions and Letters*, 482. See also H. I. Marrou, *Time and Timeliness*, translated by Violet Nevile (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), 71-73.

[32]Loetscher, "Augustine's *City of God*," 319.

[33]Clark, *Historiography*, 237; Karl Lowith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 172.

[34]Bettenson, 1091, CG XXII.30 (37, 716). Note the parallel to the *Confessions*, Book 1.1: "You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." Saint Augustine, *Confessions*,

There is a true linear progress, then, in the course of human history, but it is not the material progress in earthly time envisioned by the Eusebian progressivists; it is, rather, a progress aimed at eternity.[35] Nor is it the idolatrous progress of the Enlightenment, a progress of the earthly city toward its rational perfection, but the progress of "the Body of Christ, growing toward its full stature and perfection."[36] All this is a direct repudiation of the pagan cyclical theory of history, and such is the object of the entire Book XII of the *City of God*. The basis of Augustine's theology of history is the incarnation of God in Christ, an event that happened, and could happen, only once.[37] Any view of history which denied progress to and from the incarnation received Augustine's firm rebuttal. Again, it is not a progress of any material nature or earthly society but rather the progressive revelation of the truth of God to mankind, through prophecies of the Messiah and their fulfillment in the incarnation of God in Jesus, which is the focus of Augustine's theology of history.[38]

Given a methodological principle by revelation that provides a linear model of the progress of history centered in the incarnation of God in Christ, Augustine shapes his whole approach to divine providence working in history around the image of two cities, the *civitas dei* (a phrase adapted from the Psalms; sometimes Augustine writes *civitas caelestum*) and its intertwined existence in the *saeculum* with the *civitas terrena*. The two cities are defined by the objects of their love:

> We see then that the two cities were created by two kinds of love: the earthly city was created by self-love reaching the point of contempt for God, the Heavenly City by the love of God carried as far as contempt of self. In fact, the earthly city glories in itself, the Heavenly City glories in the Lord.[39]

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translated and with an introduction and notes by Henry Chadwick. Oxford World's Classics (Oxford and New York: Oxford University, 1992), 3.

[35]Marrou, *Time and Timeliness*, 33.

[36]Marrou, *Time and Timeliness*, 37.

[37]Clark, *Historiography*, 234. See also Lowith, *Meaning in History*, 318, and Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (New York: Oxford, 1940; Galaxy Books, 1957), 480.

[38]Mommsen, "Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress," 372.

[39]Bettenson, 593, CG XIV.28 (35, 464).

Later, Augustine further defines these two cities in terms of their eternal destinies: "By two cities I mean two societies of human beings, one of which is predestined to reign with God for all eternity, the other doomed to undergo eternal punishment with the Devil."[40] Yet Augustine makes it abundantly clear that these two societies cannot be defined simply as the visible church versus those outside the church. While he repeatedly identifies the *civitas dei* with the church, Augustine nevertheless defines the society of the church in hidden rather than visible terms:

> [The pilgrim City of Christ the King] must bear in mind that among these very enemies are hidden her future citizens; and when confronted with them she must not think it a fruitless task to bear with their hostility until she finds them confessing the faith. In the same way, while the City of God is on pilgrimage in this world, she has in her midst some who are united with her in participation in the sacraments, but who will not join with her in the eternal destiny of the saints.[41]

Interpreters of Augustine have unfortunately made havoc of this clear definition of the *civitas dei* as the church hidden or invisible, so central in Augustine's ecclesiology as it developed in opposition to the Donatists. Robert Markus, in particular, has interpreted Augustine's development of his ideas on history and society in terms of secularization. His own concise summary provides a window into his rationale:

> At the risk of representing Augustine as a precursor of modern "secularist" theology, it is not out of place to describe his mature thought in this sphere as a synthesis of three themes: first, the secularisation of history, in the sense that all history outside the scriptural canon was seen as homogeneous and, in terms of ultimate significance, ambivalent (Chapters 1 and 2); second, the secularisation of the Roman Empire (Chapters 2 and 3) and of the state and social institutions in general, in the sense that they had no immediate relation to ultimate purposes (Chapters 3 and 4); third, the secularisation of the Church in the sense that its social existence was conceived in sharp antithesis to an "otherworldly" Church such as was envisaged by a theology of the Donatist type (Chapter 5).

[40]Bettenson, 595, CG XV.1 (36, 34).
[41]Bettenson, 45, CG I.35 (33, 298).

> These three strands together constitute what we may call a theology of the *saeculum*. The *saeculum* for Augustine was the sphere of temporal realities in which the two "cities" share an interest. In Augustine's language, the *saeculum* is the whole stretch of time in which the two cities are "inextricably intertwined"; it is the sphere of human living, history, society and its institutions, characterised by the fact that in it the ultimate eschatological oppositions, though present, are not discernible . . .[42]

While much of Markus's argument has been received enthusiastically by scholars and is reflected in the present essay, he has been accused of anachronism precisely as he anticipated in the quote above. John Milbank, in a penetrating critique and "demolition of modern, secular social theory," as he puts it, accuses Markus of playing down "Augustine's explicit identification of the visible, institutional Church with the 'city of God on pilgrimage through this world.'"[43] Michael Hollerich, in a recent essay evaluating Milbank's critique in relation to Markus's evaluation of Augustine, makes explicit the charge of anachronism, using Markus's own words: "The world for which Augustine's attack on the sacral interpretation of the empire was really intended was our own: 'His "secularization" [*sic*—Markus spelled it with the British "secularisation"] of the realm of politics implies a pluralistic, religiously neutral civil community.'"[44] The same applies to Markus's view of the church in Augustine's theology, a view characteristic of "the modern liberal reading of Augustine [which] therefore seeks to define Augustine's greatest accomplishment as *arriving at an individualist conception of both church and state.*"[45] Again quoting Markus directly, Hollerich notes how the author of *Saeculum* drew a sharper distinction

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[42]Markus, *Saeculum*, 133.

[43]John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 402.

[44]Michael J. Hollerich, "John Milbank, Augustine, and the 'Secular'," in Mark Vessey, Karla Pollmann, and Allan D. Fitzgerald, editors, *History, Apocalypse, and the Secular Imagination: New Essays on Augustine's City of God*, Proceedings of a colloquium held at Green College, The University of British Columbia, 18-20 September 1997 (Bowling Green, Ohio: Philosophy Documentation Center, 1999), 313, quoting Markus, *Saeculum*, 173.

[45]Hollerich, "John Milbank, Augustine, and the 'Secular'," 318, emphasis in the original.

between the *civitas dei* and the church on its earthly pilgrimage in Augustine's theology than is warranted by the texts:

> And this City is not the Church, though it will exist within the Church as well as outside it. The path of its pilgrimage is hidden, its working anonymous. . . . The Church is not this Kingdom, even in its germ and chrysalis." Milbank charges that this suggests that institutional adherence only held some sort of secondary status in Augustine's mind. That would be a grave underestimation of the critical importance Augustine attached to the actual public life of the church. The Donatist controversy is revealing on this score. Even though Donatism was the catalyst which stimulated Augustine's most profound reflections on the church as a mixed body, his obsessive campaign to re-establish sacramental communion and to end the schism makes little sense unless we take him at his word and understand that the unity of the church was not a peripheral by-product of redemption but its very substance.[46]

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[46]Hollerich, "John Milbank, Augustine, and the 'Secular'," 321, quoting Markus, *Saeculum*, 180-181. The long ellipsis in Hollerich's quotation of Markus omits key statements which would actually strengthen the case of his (and Milbank's) objections to Markus's argument:

> The path of its pilgrimage is hidden, its working anonymous: only at the last will they appear for what they were. Christ's presence in the world cannot be simply identified with the Church.
>
> We are in the presence here of the paradoxical relationship of the Church's mission to the salvation of the world. This relation lies in the mystery of the divine purpose: "God our saviour desires all men to be saved . . ." (I Tim. 2:4): the object of Christ's redemptive work is the world. The Church, Augustine had said, is the world—the world redeemed and reconciled. Yet, it is also, in some sense, not identical with the world but in the world. Even a "worldly" Church is in some way "set apart," recognisable [*sic*] as an institution among others, as something distinct in the world—as "visible," in the traditional vocabulary of theology. Are we then to say that salvation is somehow confined to the empirically circumscribed thing which we can recognise [*sic*]in the world as "Church"? Although Augustine was, as a matter of fact, inclined to answer in the affirmative, though with some important qualifications, few theologians, even of the Roman communion, would now accept such a solution. If then we refuse, on the one hand, thus to confine salvation to a visible grouping and, on the other hand, jettison the visibility of the Church as a distinct entity in the world, there is a wide gap between the visible Church and the Kingdom in which the redeemed world is to be consummated. What is the visible Church in relation to this Kingdom, on the one hand, and in relation to the world on the

Augustine spoke of the church as hidden in the sense that not all to be saved *were yet* incorporated into her communion, but were presently even her enemies, on the one hand, while on the other, there were some within her communion who were in hidden reality tares along with the wheat and thus "will not join with her in the eternal destiny of the saints." But Markus's conception of a secular church, in effect, separates visible sacramental communion from Augustine's definition of the church. In the end, Hollerich endorses Milbank's critique of modern social theory and its "valuable corrective to Markus's classic study. The corrective does not invalidate the still persuasive account Markus has given of Augustine's disenchantment with a Christian legitimation of the Roman Empire. It does, however, reject that account's time-bound assumptions about 'the secular,' and the de-emphasis of Augustine's churchmanship associated with it."[47]

The nub is Augustine's careful delineation of the intertwined experience of the two cities in the *saeculum*, which reads clearly enough in the text of the *City of God*, but which has been rendered obscure by Augustine's (over-)interpreters down through the ages. The obscuring of the Augustinian tradition began in the Middle Ages by the identification of the two cities as one in the concept of Christendom, in particular by Otto de Freising (c. 1114-1158):

> He had modeled his *Chronicon* on the Augustinian schema as a history of two cities, but when he reached Book V and began to deal with the rise of the Christian Empire he suddenly realized that "since everyone including, with only a few exceptions, the Emperors themselves, had become devout Catholics, it seems to me that I have

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other?

The Church proclaims the inauguration of God's Kingdom by Jesus, it is not identical with it. The Church is not this Kingdom, even in its germ or chrysalis. For there is no continuous development, no growth or maturation of the Church into the Kingdom.

[47]Hollerich, "John Milbank, Augustine, and the 'Secular'," 326. For a theologically astute and accurate interpretation of Augustine's ecclesiology in relation to his theology of history, see Marrou, *Time and Timeliness*. The original French title is more descriptive of the work: *Théologie de l'histoire*. The book is a more detailed examination of themes treated originally in Henri-Irenee Marrou, *L'ambivalence du temps de l'histoire chez saint Augustin*. Conference Albert-le-Grand, 1950 (Montréal: Institut d'Etudes Médievales, 1950).

written, not a history of two cities but, to all intents and purposes, that of only one which I shall call the Church . . ."[48]

Also, Augustine's rejection of the materialistic concept of progress in Christian civilization promoted by the Eusebian "progressivists," including Orosius, was lost to the Middle Ages, which inherited not an Augustinian but an Orosian philosophy of history that viewed God's providential involvement in events under the esssentially pagan principle, adopted by the progressivists, of *do ut des*, "I give that you may give."[49] The response of the secularizers like Robert Markus was an over-correction. As Augustine introduces the second part of his *City of God*, he foretells how he will describe the distinguished but intermingled cities in terms of "the rise, the development and the destined ends of the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly, the cities which we find, as I have said, interwoven, as it were, in this present transitory world, and mingled with one another."[50] Later, in Book XVIII, he summarizes his work thus far and acknowledges "that my pen has been devoted solely to the progress of the City of God. And yet this City did not proceed on its course in this world in isolation; in fact, as we well know, just as both the cities started together, as they exist together among mankind, so in human history they have together experienced in their progress the vicissitudes of time."[51]

Such progress, of both the *civitas terrena* and the *civitas dei*, Augustine always describes as developing under the providence of God. In Books I–V, Augustine asserts the sovereignty of God in human history, his object in these books the society of the old Roman republic, which to the pagan antiquarians of his day was a glorious society. To which Augustine responds in his preface, "I have taken upon myself the task of defending the [most] glorious City of God [*gloriosissimam civitatem Dei*] against those who prefer their own gods to the Founder of that City."[52] Book I then opens with a discussion of the events during the sack of Rome when pagans who fled to the shelter of Christian basilicas were spared barbarian atrocities for the sake of the name of Christ, "and now

[48]Marrou, *Time and Timeliness*, 21.
[49]Mommsen, "Orosius and Augustine," 343-348.
[50]Bettenson, 430, CG XI.1 (35, 34).
[51]Bettenson, 761, CG XVIII.1 (36, 480-2).
[52]Bettenson, 5, CG I.Preface (33, 190).

these Romans assail Christ's name."[53] Augustine's response sets in motion the discussion of divine providence that will occupy him throughout the first five books of the *City of God*:

> In this way many escaped who now complain of this Christian era [*Christianis temporibus*], and hold Christ responsible for the disasters which their city endured. But they do not make Christ responsible for the benefits they received out of respect for Christ, to which they owed their lives. They attribute their deliverance to their own destiny; whereas if they had any right judgement they ought rather to attribute the harsh cruelty they suffered at the hands of their enemies to the providence of God. For God's providence constantly uses war to correct and chasten the corrupt morals of mankind, as it also uses such afflictions to train men in a righteous and laudable way of life, removing to a better state those whose life is approved, or else keeping them in this world for further service.[54]

Thus Augustine addresses the pagans who reject the providence of the one true God. In asserting this providence he prepares the way for a discussion of a God who gives gifts to some and scourges others not simply to reward the moral and punish the evil (*do ut des*), but to draw all to the desire of the one true good, that rest in God without which man is always restless. Whether he is speaking of the gifts of God or his scourges, Augustine always relates these to God's providence. When he speaks of the good, he is certain to denote their source in the Divine Goodness. But that Goodness is always working providentially for the eternal good of His creation and not merely for the temporal good. Thus, in regard to God's good gifts, Augustine notes that:

> if God did not grant it to some petitioners with manifest generosity, we should not suppose that these temporal blessings were his concern, while if he bestowed prosperity on all just for the asking we might think that God was to be served merely for the sake of those rewards, and any service of him would prove us not godly but rather greedy and covetous.[55]

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[53]Bettenson, 6, CG I.1 (33, 192).
[54]Bettenson, 6, CG I.1 (33, 194).
[55]Bettenson, 14, CG I.8 (33, 212).

Similarly, when God scourges evil men through the course of history, His providential purpose is not simply as retributive punishment, but as a chastening of all to the end that some might be led to repentance and eternal life. For the evil in man that God seeks to heal is the perversion of His love, so that earthly peace is sought, but eternal peace ignored. God's chastening, then, as it affects both the good and evil, is righteous: "Good and bad are chastised together, not because both alike live evil lives, but because both alike, though not in the same degree, love this temporal life."[56]

One can see in this passage that Augustine was addressing not only pagan critics, but also Christians who were placing too much value in earthly life. The text illustrates that Augustine was indeed responding both to pagan critics and a Christian community too preoccupied with fears concerning the future of Rome. In the *saeculum*, as the City of God and the earthly city exist inseparably, there is a God who is in control over all things, who shapes events for the ultimate good of both those with perverted self-love and those with rightly ordered love for God. This theme of Book I sets the foundation for the entire *City of God.* Not only are the charges of pagans against these Christian times answered by the assertion of a universal divine providence, but the Eusebian idea of the material progress of a Christian society is refuted on the grounds that God's providence works among the good and the evil. His providence is not for the temporal and material blessings of the good and the judgement of the evil, but for the eternal beatitude of all who, when scourged by the hidden workings of providence, turn to seek the ultimate good of "love for God carried as far as contempt of self," healed of their preoccupation with earthly things.

Augustine further develops this theme in Book II when he recounts the history of pagan society as it existed in the day of the old Republic, now idealized in the minds of pagan antiquarians. Here Augustine develops the progress of the *civitas terrena* as it existed apart from the *civitas dei.* Throughout this book as well, Augustine proclaims the providence of God also in the earthly city of pagan Rome. He begins by a rehearsal of the calamities that befell the Roman state long before the advent of Christ (chapter 3) and proceeds to question the power of gods who failed to act against the increasing moral corruption of the Republic (chapter 23). His

[56]Bettenson, 16, CG I.9 (33, 218-20).

rhetoric was calculated, no doubt, to appeal to lovers of Sallust, whose moral history of the Republic was considered the definitive history at this time.[57] Also, Augustine's diagnosis of events would have been striking: the gods of pagan Rome are nothing but *daemones* who act only insofar as God allows:

> I do not ascribe the bloodstained good luck of Marius to Marica, whoever she was, but rather to the inscrutable providence of God whose purpose is to shut the mouths of our opponents and to free from error those who are not swayed by the prejudice and who carefully observe the facts. For the face is that even if the demons have some power in these matters, their power is limited to the extent allowed them by the inscrutable decision of the Omnipotent, whose purpose is that we should not set too much store by earthly felicity, which is often granted to such scoundrels as Marius, and yet should not regard it as an evil, since we observe that many devout and upright worshippers of the one true God are also richly blest, in spite of the demons.[58]

This theme, applied to various episodes of Roman history, occupies the whole of Books II and III. Book IV addresses the subject of the involvement of pagan deities in the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms, concluding with the same assertion of God's sovereignty over all history in the interest of drawing men to the proper love of things unseen. Significantly, this applies also to the history of God's covenant people Israel:

> It is therefore this God, the author and giver of felicity, who, being the one true God, gives earthly dominion both to good men and to evil. . . . The reason why God gives worldly dominions both to the good and the evil is this: to prevent any of his worshippers who are still infants in respect of moral progress from yearning for such gifts from him as if they were of any importance.
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> This is the sacrament, the hidden meaning, of the Old Testament, where the New Testament lay concealed. In the Old Testament the promises and gifts are of earthly things; but even then men of spiritual perception realized, although they did not yet proclaim the

[57]Brown, *Augustine*, 311.
[58]Bettenson, 78, CG II.23 (33, 384-6).

> fact for all to hear, that by those temporal goods eternity was signified; they understood also what were the gifts of God which constituted true felicity.[59]

Having proclaimed and described in some detail the providence of God in both the earthly city and the city of God in Books I through IV, Augustine turns in Book V to a discussion of divine foreknowledge and human will. Throughout the discussion Augustine holds in tandem the complete foreknowledge of God and the total responsibility of the human will for its choices. Human choices fall within the order of causes that propel history forward.[60] Affirming both human choice and divine foreknowledge is central to Augustine's understanding of the dilemma of man in his fallen human nature. Thus toward the end of Book V Augustine notes the critical difference between God's providential dealings with the earthly city and the heavenly. To the men of virtue in the *civitas terrena* God has not withheld a reward: "When such men do anything good, their sole motive is the hope of receiving glory from their fellow-men; and the Lord refers to them when he says, 'I tell you in truth, they have received their reward in full.'"[61] Yet even these temporal blessings are given ultimately for the benefit of the *civitas dei*:

> Very different is the reward of the saints. Here below they endure obloquy for the City of God, which is hateful to the lovers of this world. That City is eternal; no one is born there, because no one dies. . . . In that City the sun does not rise "on the good and on the evil"; the "sun of righteousness" spreads its like only on the good; there the public treasury needs no great efforts for its enrichment at the cost of private property; for there the common stock is the treasury of truth.
>
> But more than this; the Roman Empire was not extended and did not attain to glory in men's eyes simply for this, that men of this stamp should be accorded this kind of reward. It had this further purpose, that the citizens of that Eternal City, in the days of their pilgrimage, should fix their eyes steadily and soberly on those examples and observe what love they should have toward the City on high, in

[59]Bettenson, 176-177; CG IV.33 (33, 634).
[60]Book V. 9; Bettenson, 192.
[61]Bettenson, 204; CG V.15 (33, 710).

> view of life eternal, if the earthly city had received such devotion from her citizens, in their hope of glory in the sight of men.[62]

Such passages show most clearly the double purpose of Augustine in writing the *City of God*. More than an apologetic of Christianity against pagan criticism in the midst of the crisis of his world, Augustine's *City of God* is also his testament to the church describing the relationship of this hidden, spiritual kingdom to the earthly society with which it is intertwined throughout the *saeculum* until the coming of her Lord.

Books I–V lay the foundation; the remaining five books of the first part of Augustine's *magnum opus* are devoted "to the task of refuting and instructing those who maintain that the pagan gods, which the Christian religion does away with, are to be worshipped, not with a view to this present life, but with a view to the life which is to come after death."[63] The remaining twelve books build on these foundational chapters to define in detail Augustine's theology of history as it expounds the origin, progress, and ends of the *civitas dei*, culminating in the apocalyptic vision of its future glory as Augustine has expounded it from the canonical Apocalypse, the Revelation to Saint John.[64]

Harry Maier has written a compelling essay describing Augustine's *City of God* as a revelation. "Throughout the work," Maier notes, "Augustine appeals to God to reveal to him the true meaning of biblical texts or historical events or even how to structure the complex tale of two cities he sets out to tell."[65] In the final paragraph of his essay Maier concludes:

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[62]Bettenson, 205; CG V.16 (33, 712-4).

[63]Bettenson, 226; CG VI.1 (34, 44).

[64]Paul B. Harvey ("Approaching the Apocalypse: Augustine, Tyconius, and John's Revelation," in *History, Apocalypse, and the Secular Imagination: New Essays on Augustine's* City of God, 148 and elsewhere) has recently presented a compelling argument for the importance of Augustine's reading of Tyconius for his own confidence, only after A. D. 400, in interpreting the Book of Revelation, concluding: "Augustine's sermon M12, when read in the light of later Augustinian works, offers evidence for the simple hypothesis that Tyconius's writings taught Augustine how to approach John's Apocalypse. We need read only *City of God* 20 to appreciate how far Augustine was prepared to follow Tyconius." For the importance of the Book of Revelation in the *City of God*, see also Harry O. Maier, "The End of the City and the City Without End: The *City of God* as Revelation," in *History, Apocalypse, and the Secular Imagination: New Essays on Augustine's* City of God.

[65]Maier, "The End of the City," 153.

> The City of God is a Revelation. It is an unveiling offered by a seer confident of the end of the story where all, if unimaginable, is nonetheless paradoxically made clear. It is a narrative meaningless without its final three books, themselves unimaginable without the final chapters of the Apocalypse.[66]

While I would be more cautious than to use the term "revelation" to describe Augustine's great and arduous work (for the Bishop of Hippo had developed by this time a very precise understanding of revelation which was limited to the received scriptural canon of the church), it is clear that his appeals for God's assistance were answered through what can be described as divinely assisted preachment. Augustine viewed himself as *dispensor verbi Dei*, as dispenser of the word of God, and the *City of God* should always be viewed in that light. Like his sermons in the aftermath of the sack of Rome, Augustine's *City of God* speaks to Christians who were uncertain of themselves, as their world seemed to be falling apart. Yet the word of God that their bishop dispensed in their midst held the key to their uncertain future. Though no longer with that spirit of triumphalism that he just a few years earlier had expressed as Christian Rome seemed to be absorbing the pagan masses, Augustine continued to be convinced that now, before his very eyes, the prophecies of sacred Scripture were being fulfilled. The Revelation to Saint John revealed that God's providential care of the church was expressed also through the crises of this world's history, all for the progress of the City of God as it made its pilgrimage in this world to the eternal rest of the next.

"The medieval concept of prophecy," writes Marjorie Reeves, "presupposed a divine providence working out its will in history, a set of given clues as to that meaning implanted in history, and a gift of illumination to chosen men called to discern those clues and from them to prophesy to their generation."[67] Far from being an anticipation of a modern, secular vision of the two cities, Augustine's theology of the *saeculum* and of God's providential dealings in history was an inspiration for the prophetic medieval world view, though with crucial distinctions. For Augustine, the prophetic key to the future was unveiled strictly through the canonical text, and the gift of illumination was that of

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[66]Maier, "The End of the City," 164.

[67]Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy*, vii.

scriptural exegesis, not mystical experience. For Augustine, there would always in the *saeculum* be two cities, their histories intertwined, and an important calling of the church was to seek the peace of the earthly city while on her pilgrimage to heavenly rest. For Augustine—and this speaks to the church in every generation, also to our own with its peculiar apocalyptic visions, secular and religious, of civilization's demise—fears of the unknown future can subside because the future is not unknown.

> After the present age God will rest, as it were, on the seventh day, and he will cause us, who are the seventh day, to find our rest in him. . . . [T]he seventh day will be our Sabbath, whose end will not be an evening, but the Lord's Day, an eighth day, as it were, which is to last for ever, a day consecrated by the resurrection of Christ, foreshadowing the eternal rest not only of the spirit but of the body also. There we shall be still and see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise. Behold what will be, in the end, without end! For what is our end but to reach that kingdom which has no end?[68]

[68]Bettenson, 1091; CG XXII.30 (37, 716-8).

Theological Observer

Lithuanian Aspirations and LWF Ambitions: In Honor of Bishop Jonas Kalvanas (1949-2003)

The sudden death of Bishop Jonas Kalvanas on April 25 is a great loss for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania (ELCL), as well as for confessional Lutherans worldwide. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod will remember Bishop Kalvanas for his courageous leadership that led to a declaration of fellowship between the LCMS and ELCL, when at the July 2001 Synodical Convention in Saint Louis, delegates adopted Resolution 3-04 "To Declare Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania." The ease with which the resolution overwhelmingly passed can be attributed in large measure to Bishop Kalvanas' ecclesial leadership at the ELCL meeting in Taurage, Lithuania on July 29, 2000, which declared fellowship with the LCMS, despite overt lobbying by visitors from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The German North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church (*Nordelbische*) and the Lutheran Section of the Lippe Territorial Church (*Lippische Landeskirche*) were particularly opposed to fellowship with the LCMS. Women occupy nearly all the top offices of the North Elbian Church, including Maria Jepsen (Hamburg) who was the first female bishop of a German Lutheran church. Barbel Wartenberg-Potter (Holstein-Lubeck) and Margot Kassmann (Hanover) also aggresively led the LWF caucus. Despite relentless pressure from the LWF, Bishop Kalvanas refused to ordain women. The ELCL resolution to declare fellowship with the LCMS included these statements:

> The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania possesses and strives toward the preservation of the right and pure preaching and teaching of the apostolic Word of God, and the right administration of the Sacraments as they were instituted by our Lord Himself. This was the goal of the confessors of the Augsburg Confession (AC VII) and the Formula of Concord (FC X, 31). However, we are now faced with false doctrine which endangers the biblical and confessional identity of our Lutheran Church in Lithuania.
>
> Rejecting this false doctrine, we confess the complete authority of the Bible and its teaching as it is rightly and unchangingly stated in the Book of Concord. Therefore we can have full fellowship with those Churches who share with us the same faith and teaching, and which do not ordain or promote the ordination of women, which do not stand for homosexual behavior, which do not make compromise on the matter of justification, and which confess that in the Holy Supper each communicant is given and receives under the bread and wine the true body and blood of our Lord.

Hundreds of Lithuanian's attended the bishop's funeral at Martynas Mazvydas Church in Taurage. People stood shoulder to shoulder in the aisles and balcony. Hundreds more stood outside the church. When the three-hour service ended, the crowd of mourners standing in the rain had tripled in size. The casket was carried out of the church in a solemn procession of family members, pastors, bishops,

dignitaries, brass band, and choir. Mourners with flowers lined the streets on the way to the cemetery. Hundreds followed to the cemetery for the three-hour burial service. All in all, it was a deeply moving demonstration of respect and love by the Lithuanian people for their pastor and bishop.

Bishop Kalvanas was only fifty-four years old and is survived by his wife Tatjana, a son, and two daughters. His open personality, kindness, and sense of humor endeared him to most people, even as it caused some to underestimate him. Rev. Darius Petkunas, parish pastor and theological professor in the theology department of Klaipeda University, described his bishop as a "strong personality who was nevertheless able to unite the pastors, congregations and Church Consistory." When the Lithuanian Church was emerging from the Soviet persecution in the early 1990s, it went through a period of strife and division. The church was united under Bishop Kalvanas, who was consecrated in 1995. For Bishop Kalvanas, church unity came from theological unity. He personally valued the study of theology, especially the Lutheran Confessions. The Latin he learned in connection with his previous vocation as a medical doctor served him well. He placed a high value on theological education for his pastors. He sent four men to study at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTS). In September of 2000 he brought most of his church's pastors with him to Fort Wayne for three weeks of intensive courses. In 1999 he approached CTS President Dean Wenthe with a request for the full-time deployment of Dr. Charles Evanson to Lithaunia. Since that time Dr. Evanson has served as a professor in the Department of Theology at the University of Klaipeda, where most Lithuanian pastors and school teachers are educated. Kalvanas also established monthly pastoral meetings at which the clergy study theology with Dr. Evanson. In August of 2002 CTS, the ELCL, and the Lutheran Heritage Foundation co-sponsored a four-day international theological conference in Klaipeda which brought together speakers and participants from Lutheran churches in Russia, Central Asia, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, Germany, and the United States. The theme of the conference was "Lutheran Identity in the 21st Century." A second Klaipeda Conference is scheduled for August 18-21, 2003 under the theme, "Lutheran Catechesis." Bishop Kalvanas had been scheduled as one of the speakers.

Hopefully the next bishop will possess qualities similar to Bishop Kalvanas. Fortunately, the ELCL has men who are committed to sound, biblical, confessional theology and practice. They have received a thorough and rigorous theological education, and have significant practical experience in the parish and the church at large. According to the ELCL church constitution, a synod must be held within one year after the death of the bishop to elect his successor. It also stipulates that the bishop must be a man who has formal theological education and has been ordained and served in the pastoral ministry for ten years. Such men are available. It is thus a scandal that before the body of Bishop Kalvanas was reverently committed to his grave, visitors from LWF churches were already shamelessly lobbying for a change in the constitution and a postponement of the election of a new bishop. Such interference by foreigners could lead to dissension

in the ELCL. Such patronizing demands mirror the attitude often displayed in the political realm by "Old Europe" over against the "New Europe"—"The little children must be told what to think, believe and do." The LWF churches in Europe seem perplexed that churches in the former Soviet Union (and elsewhere around the world) find the theology of the LCMS and other confessional Lutherans appealing. In an attempt to understand this phenomenon, they resort to some very fanciful explanations. For example, an address at the Evangelical Commission for Middle and Eastern Europe, which met in Brandenburg in April of 2002, put forth this thesis: "The Theology of the LCMS comes, to a large extent, in answer to the present day needs of the people of the former Soviet Union, because it has a 'Soviet' Character."[1] The address notes that under the Soviet system, values and ideals were clearly designated—what was good and bad and evil, true and false was clearly defined. Even if all citizens did not agree with the alleged Soviet identity, it was the point of orientation. With the fall of the Soviet Union the state was no longer able to sufficiently offer a national identity. Therefore, many are turning to religious and spiritual movements to shape their self-identity. Religions that offer complete and predetermined answers in what is good and right and wrong remain more appealing to those coming out of the Soviet world. The report then posits:

> Here lies the unmistakable strength of the LCMS theology. It asserts clear and unambiguous answers and corresponds therefore in a certain fashion to the Soviet ideology. An independently thinking people was out of the question in the Soviet time. The Soviet government did the thinking for the people .... The people rarely learned to think for themselves .... Here lies the strength of the LCMS theology. Here one doesn't need to think. Here is offered a complete system with a full claim to truth, which one can insert into himself .... The Soviet Union ideology had the proclivity for explaining all the fundamental things on the basis of the indisputable authorities and writings: Marx, Lenin and so forth .... The LCMS does this in the same way, in that it subscribes itself uncritically to Luther and the Lutheran Confessions and looks at these as a completely infallible foundation.[2]

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[1]"These: Die Theologie der LCMS kommt in großem Masse den gegenwärtigen Bedürfnissen der Menschen in der ehemaligen Sowjetunion entgegen, weil sie 'sowjetischen' Charakter hat."

[2]"Hier liegt die eindeutige Stärke der LCMS Theologie. Sie gibt klare und eindeutige Antworten vor—und enstpricht daher in gewisser Weise der sowjetischen Ideologie. Eigenständiges Denken der Menschen war in sowjetischer Zeit nicht gefragt. Die Sowjetregierung hat für die Menschen gedacht .... Die Menschen haben selten gelernt, selbständig zu denken .... Darin liegt die Stärke der LCMS-Theology. Hier braucht man nicht zu denkern. Hier wird ein Komplettsystem mit einem unfassenden Wahrheitsanspruch präsentiert, worauf man sich einlassen kann.... Die sowjetische Ideologie hatte die Neigung, all grundlegenden Dinge auf unstrittige Autoritäten und

The Lutherans in Lithuania are worthy of more respect than this. The patronizing rhetoric expressed in the Brandenburg Address is more reflective of the verbal nominalism of Soviet propaganda than the true state of the Lithuanian people. Lithuanians are quite capable of thinking for themselves. When they chose a theological course instead of a sociological-based ideology, they are labeled narrow. Many Lithuanian pastors including the late Bishop Kalvanas have been repeatedly frustrated by the one track intolerant gender agenda of many European Lutherans. One Lithuanian pastor reflecting on a "conversation" he had with a LWF visitor who attended the funeral services noted: "He never once asked me what we wanted, he simply told me what we should do."

Despite hemorrhaging membership losses in the liberal churches of Western Europe and Scandinavia, the leadership of the established Lutheran churches continues to force their agenda on churches who have no desire for it. Bordering Lithuania to the north is Latvia. Archbishop Janis Vanags expressed a common sentiment found among these churches: "For churches which have lived under persecution, liberalism has nothing to offer because it has nothing to die for." The struggling, emerging Lutherans often find strings attached to the financial help they are offered from their brothers in the West. Individual pastors and congregations are courted and tempted with financial rewards to change their doctrine and practice.

Bishop Kalvanas spent his last Sunday on earth preaching to his congregation and feeding them the body and blood of the risen Lord Jesus. This is what Pastor Kalvanas was doing on Easter Sunday. Five days later he joined the angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven with whom he will give thanks and praise to the Holy Trinity for ever and ever.

> "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above, and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." (Daniel 12:2-3)

Timothy C. J. Quill

Revisiting the *Missio Dei* Concept: Commemorating Willingen, July 5-17, 1952

Last July saw the fiftieth anniversary of the World Missionary Conference meeting held in Willingen in July 5-17, 1952. On August 18-21, 2002, Willingen, a small town in the German state of Hesse, was chosen once again to stage a fiftieth anniversary congress in commemoration of this historic event. Important

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deren Schriften zurückzuführen: Marx, Lenin usw. Die LCMS tut dies in gleicher Weise, indem sie sich unkritisch auf Luther und die lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften bezieht und diese als völlig unfehlbare Grundlagen ansieht."

dignitaries and theologians were invited to this congress to present papers on the theme that made the Willingen Conference famous: the mission of God.[1]

Does Willingen deserve such a worthy recognition? Although World Missionary Conferences convene at regular intervals, Willingen 1952 may indeed be hailed as the watershed event for promoting a conceptual change in missions itself. It introduced a concept that—as basic as it may sound—had been lost: the mission of the Triune God is the starting point for any reflection on missions. To this end, it expressed its purpose and conviction that "the missionary movement of which we are a part has its source in the Triune God himself" and it provided a definition to match it: "Mission has its source in the Triune God. Out of the depth of his love to us, the Father has sent forth his own beloved son to reconcile all things to himself that we and all men might through the Holy Spirit be made one in Him with the Father in that perfect love which is the very nature of God."[2]

In the years that followed, Willingen actually seemed to accomplish what it sought to do: to usher in a theological shift in the conceptualization of missions and offer a broad enough base for all to follow. Overall, morale was low in the post-world war period. The church had little theological hope to stand on in view of human calamities and shortcomings all around. More specifically, selfish expansionist models had ruled the day, greatly eroding the little integrity of missions that still remained. Many mission fields such as China were resounding with an unequivocal and forceful cry "missionary go home." Heated debates attacked the strategy of German missiologists, who had capitalized on the secular *Volkstum* principle of the Third Reich, merging First Article structures into their church planting efforts. Elsewhere, theologians were suspicious of the conservative Anglo-American revivalist mission, concluding that it was nothing more than the romanticism of self-expressive piety coupled with idealistic notions of world domination by Christianity within one generation. This does not even take into account the colonial ("Vasco da Gama epoch") entrapments that missions were still struggling with and attempting to overcome. Indeed, missions were viewed as mere human endeavors fraught with error that needed to be infused with a good dose of a deeper reflection into the nature of God, His

[1]Various topics such as these were presented: "Understanding and Misunderstanding of the *Missio Dei* in European Churches and Missiology," (Tormod Engelsviken, Norway), "*Missio Dei* in Practice: The Struggle for Liberation, Dignity and Justice in African Societies," (Klaus Nürnberger, South Africa), "The History and Importance of World Mission Conferences in the 20th Century," (Wolfgang Guenther, Director of the Missionsseminar, Hermannsburg, Germany), "*Missio Dei*—Its Unfolding and Limitations in the Korean Context," (S. Chai, South Korea), "*Missio Dei*—Poor as Mediators of the Kingdom of God and Subjects of the Church," (Paulo Suess, Brazil), and "*Missio Dei* Today—Identity of Christian Mission," (Theo Sundermeier, Professor of Ecumenical and Religious Studies, Heidelberg).

[2]In the sectional "The Missionary Calling of the Church," *International Review of Missions* 41 (1952): 562.

purpose, and mission to the world. Then, perhaps, one could better align one's motives and derive justification for doing missions.

Against this backdrop of defective mission motives, Willingen did actually strike a blow for purity into the mission endeavor: Our mission must reflect God's mission. Before and after 1952, leading missiologists and theologians such as Walter Freitag, Karl Hartenstein, and Karl Barth had done much to contribute to this thought. The mission of the Triune God was encapsulated in the byword, *missio Dei* (Latin for defining God's own mission).[3] The mission of God embodies the work and person of Jesus Christ. He stood for the exclusive claim over salvation against all belief systems of other religions. This was paired with the concept of salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*), which promoted a specific mediation of salvation that is bound to the church's preaching and witnessing activity and that sets itself apart from other providential activities and struggles at overcoming political and social oppressions. Furthermore, they also added an eschatological motif that instilled a strong sense for the "otherness" of Christ's kingdom in this world and that its completion was still outstanding at a time to come. These and other related themes found their expression in numerous publications. The seminal work of Georg Vicedom in 1958, *The Mission of God*, is one of them.[4]

Unfortunately, the situation has again changed for the worse. Some may attribute it to the event in New Delhi in 1961 when the World Missionary Conference was placed under the auspices of the World Council of Churches.[5] Thereby, it is often argued, genuine and impartial missionary reflection had to give way to a deliberate ecumenical and conciliar agenda. This became most evident at the 1973 conference in Bangkok, an emotionally charged meeting, which replaced much of the traditional soteriology (including conversion) with inner worldly agendas, of which Peter Beyerhaus had been so critical a few years before in his brief contribution, *Missions: Which Way? Humanization or Redemption*.[6]

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[3]For a detailed history of the concept "missio Dei," see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 389-393 and H. H. Rosin, *Missio Dei: An Examination of the Origin, Contents and Function of the Term in Protestant Missiological Discussion* (Leiden: Inter-university Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research, 1972).

[4]Georg Vicedom, *The Mission of God: An Introduction to a Theology of Mission*, translated by Gilbert A. Thiele and Dennis Hilgendorf (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965). Another notable contribution was Johannes Blauw, *Missionary Nature of the Church: Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* (London: Lutterworth, 1962); originally published as *Gottes Werk in dieser Welt: Grundzüge einer biblischen Theologie der Mission* (München: no publisher, 1961).

[5]As a result of this fusion, the oversight body of the World Missionary Conferences, the International Missionary Council (IMC), was changed to the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism (CWME).

[6]Peter Beyerhaus, *Missions: Which Way? Humanization or Redemption*, translated by Margaret Clarkson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971). Beyerhaus also authored the famous Frankfurt Declaration of 1970.

In fear of seeing two-thirds of the world's population denied the right to eternal salvation and based on Beyerhaus' scathing criticisms, the evangelicals consolidated and formed their own movement in July 16-25, 1974 in Lausanne, Switzerland, and tried to salvage, by way of their famous manifesto, the *Lausanne Covenant*, traditional values such as the uniqueness of Christ, conversion, and the sinful nature of mankind. Sadly, though, the Trinitarian framework Willingen espoused so much had little bearing on this movement then or in any later documents.[7] Instead, within it the church and the promotion of its numerical growth took central stage.

As far as the other main movements go, such as the Roman Catholic movement, the Conciliar-Ecumenical, the Lutheran World Federation, and that of the Orthodox Churches, the *missio Dei* concept was enthusiastically embraced.[8] Unfortunately, much of its original content was replaced with particular ideas and agendas so that unanimity in terms of theology will hardly be reached. The plea of the late Lesslie Newbigin that "the mission of the church is to be understood, can only be rightly understood, in terms of the trinitarian model," was heard but interpreted in many different ways.[9] Much has to do with the *filioque*, inter-religious dialogue, the role and ministry of Christ, the church versus the world, and soteriology. When, for example, the World Missionary Conference in Melbourne, 1980—convening under the theme, "Thy Kingdom Come,"—portrayed Christ predominantly as an example in order to justify their war against corporations and governments that bring poverty, injustice, and oppression, the Eastern Orthodox churches (consistently Trinitarian) countered "that Christ is sent into the world not as a teacher, example, etc., but as a bearer of this divine life that aims at drawing the world into the way of existence that is to be found in the Trinity."[10]

With the theological impasse more evident than ever, Lutheranism is well advised to heed the famous plea of Willingen and arrange its missiological reasoning on a Trinitarian base and framework. To be sure, the purity of motives and strategies will not prevail for long in the face of human depravity and imperfection. Inadvertently, other motives and strategies will replace those, inferior ones by far. Careful study of scriptural, creedal, and confessional

[7]This must be said especially in view of its other significant document "The Manila Manifesto" of 1989, in James Scherer and Stephen Bevans, editors, *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization, 1. Basic Statements 1974-1991* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 292-305.

[8]One may see the LWF missiological presentation, *Together in God's Mission: LWF Contribution to the Understanding of Mission*, number 26 (Hannover/Neuendettelsau, 1988).

[9]Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; and Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989), 118.

[10]"Go Forth in Peace: Orthodox Perspectives on Mission," Scherer, 205. Therein also, "Your Kingdom Come," 30.

thought—of which Luther's Explanation to the Creed may be singled out—offer the best resources for a sound discussion on the existing confusion of what missions really is. In view of a structure of God's mission, the Board of Directors of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has called for a proper distinction to be made "between missionary work that includes the preaching and teaching of the Word and administration of the Sacraments carried out by missionaries who are ordained pastors and other work carried out by other workers in the mission field."[11] This and other pleas would certainly assist in adding clarification to the mission of the Triune God and the exact nature and mediation of His salvific work in this world.

K. Detlev Schulz

Looking Behind the Veil

I recently enjoyed attending yet another set of symposia at the institution I call my alma mater. Many of the presentations found an appreciative hearing among those interested in Confessional Lutheran theology. However, I found one often-repeated assertion at the exegetical symposium, whose focus was worship, to be misleading. Several times the presenters mentioned that in the tabernacle constructed by Israel in the desert a curtain or veil separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. While this is a common assumption and many Bible translations make it appear as if there was a curtain and many Bible handbooks and commentaries state as much, it simply is not the case. The *paroketh* that demarcated the Most Holy Place is mentioned twenty-four times in the Old Testament (in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers). The Hebrew text never presents it as a curtain behind which were the Most Holy Place and the Ark. Instead, it is clearly stated that the *paroketh* is עַל־אֲרֹן הָעֵדֻת, "above the Ark of the Testimony" (Exodus 30:6), making it a canopy, not a curtain. Moreover, many English translations call the *paroketh* a "screen" at Exodus 35:12, 40:21. However, המסך can also be understood as a covering (2 Samuel 17:9). This is made especially clear at Numbers 4:5 when instructions are given for dismantling the tabernacle to move it. The Levites are to take down the *paroketh* that is an overshadowing (המסך) of the ark and drape it (סכך same root!) over the ark. (The same verb is used of the cherubim's wings *overshadowing* the mercy seat.) While most translations speak of the high priest going "inside" or "behind" the *paroketh* (which would imply that the Hebrew text uses the preposition אחר), the Hebrew actually says he is to go מִבֵּית לַפָּרֹכֶת "inside to the *paroketh*" (Leviticus 16:2,12,15; Numbers 18:17)

Moreover, if the *paroketh* was a curtain, some interesting problems arise for the reader of the Pentateuch: When the glory of the Lord appeared to the Israelites, fire came out from before the Lord (who dwelt above the cherubim on the Ark;

[11]A resolution passed at its latest meeting in Chicago, Illinois, August 15-18, 2002. "Minutes," 99. Over the past few years, the LCMS Board for Mission Services (BFMS) has deliberated on a mission document of its own, the so-called "Theological Preface."

Exodus 25:22; Numbers 7:89) to light the sacrifice on the altar, the *paroketh* should have been set ablaze if it were a curtain between the ark and the altar (Leviticus 9:23-24). Once again, when fire came from the Lord and killed Nadab and Abihu who were at the incense altar in the Holy Place, it should have also burned up the *paroketh* (and perhaps burned down the entire tabernacle as a consequence) if it had been a curtain. When the assembly of Israel gathered at the entrance to the tabernacle they could see the glory of the Lord (for example, Numbers 16:19), which they could not do if the *paroketh* was a curtain. So how did the learned professors make the mistake of referring to the *paroketh* as a curtain that separated the Holy and Most Holy Places rather than as a canopy over the ark that demarcated the Most Holy Place? They simply made the same mistake I have made on occasion: they relied on the English translations and common tradition instead of reading the actual inspired text in its original language. Both the translations and tradition are influenced by the later temple in Jesus day, which did have a curtain (Luke 23:45). It is interesting to note that the temple built by Solomon had neither a canopy nor a curtain to demarcate the Most Holy Place, but a wall with doors in it (1 Kings 6:31-32).

However, my point is not about architecture of tabernacles and temples. Instead, it is about the importance for all pastors of maintaining proficiency in Hebrew and Greek so that they are not dependent upon translations, which, at times, can be misleading. Translations not only bring the truth of God's word to us, but also, unfortunately, can be a veil between the gospel and God's people due to translators' errors or unwarranted assumptions. For the sake of the gospel we pastors must maintain our grasp of the languages, and we must never rely on a translation or translations, lest we allow some translator's error to become a veil that obscures the light of Christ, shining so brilliantly in the pages of the Scriptures. As shepherds of God's people we need to feed the sheep with the gospel as it is in the Scriptures themselves, not simply as it is presented in some translation of Scripture. Therefore, I remind myself constantly to read the biblical text in original languages before I teach, even when I think I know what it says from the English translations with which I am so familiar. For the sake of the gospel and the benefit of God's church we all need to be committed to looking behind the veil.

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Book Reviews

***The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal.* By W. Lee Humphreys. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001. 284 pages.**

How one reads any text necessarily affects how one reads any persons described therein. Genre guides interpretation. How Humphreys reads the Genesis narrative—as fact or fiction, or a splash here and a dash there of both—largely determines how he reads its central character: God. Our author reads Genesis as a closed literary world, that is, none of the events or characters necessarily exist as Genesis describes them. They are verbal constructions. The characters named Adam, Abraham, Joseph, and God in this story may or may not be more than mere words. Moreover, Humphreys reads Genesis not as one text inextricably bound—literally, literarily, and theologically—to a larger canon, but as a book without a sequel.

Who God is, what He does, what He says, are, therefore, interpreted as one might interpret the main character in, say, a Dickens novel. What Humphreys argues is that God begins where He wants to be—in control, predictable, methodical, and powerful. Similarly, at the end (chapters 37-50), He is on the road to recovery, struggling to recreate Himself in His old image. It is the in-between parts of the story where God is learning the ropes, "in process of becoming." The problem is that over and over again, from disobedient Adam to irascible Jacob, humans frustrate God's plans when He tries to engage them on their own turf. They try to build a tower that will trespass His homeland, old sterile women giggle at Him, His pet patriarchs lie about their wives or get drunk or nearly best Him at wrestling. Finally, after His bout with Jacob, God learns His lesson, swallows hard, and retreats to heaven to lick His wounds. Thereafter, He tries to recapture something like His Genesis-1 approach—majestically aloof but still in control behind the scenes. In all this, the Divine character develops, becomes complicated, multi-faceted, multi-faced. In short, the post-Genesis-1 God tries to slip back into His original suit, but it never quite fits the same anymore.

There is, of course, nothing unusual or unorthodox about a narrative appraisal of a biblical text. Indeed, reading Genesis not as a narrative but as the fourth volume of Pieper's dogmatics is going to produce some less than satisfactory results. Problems invade, breed, and multiply, however, when one's definition of narrative assumes that narrative equals fiction. It does not. One may have all the literary fun his heart desires with a fictional narrative by a Dostoevsky or a Grisham. But an historical narrative (an inspired and inerrant one at that!) about real people and a real God cannot be read rightly in the fashion of Humphreys. In addition, to interpret the Genesis of the canon as a book divorced from the rest of the Old Testament and New Testament witness is like trying to paint a lady's portrait when all you can see is her left foot. The odds are not good that the lady will see herself in the artist's finished work.

Perhaps the simile is too negative. Or maybe not. Humphreys does, indeed, provide valuable insights at times, writes cleverly and engagingly, avoids robotic summaries, and does not leave the reader snoring by overusing those infamous four letters—J, E, D, P. That being said, however, his basic approach is fatally flawed. Were his appraisal really true—and the redeemed world is thankful it is not—then this god would be unworthy of capitalization.

Chad L. Bird

***New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Variant Readings Arranged in Horizontal Lines Against Codex Vaticanus. Matthew.* Edited by Reuben Swanson. Sheffield, United Kingdom and Pasadena, California: Sheffield Academic Press and William Carey International University Press, 1995. 304 pages. Paper.**

New Testament textual criticism blossomed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as most New Testament scholars of that era took great interest in its theory and practice, but then waned as many exegetes directed their energies towards higher critical methodologies. By the time of the publication of the Nestle-Aland 26th edition of *Novum Testamentum Graece* in 1979, textual criticism was widely viewed as a discipline that needed to be practiced only by a select few, like Kurt Aland and Bruce Metzger, because little more could be said on the topic that had reached its zenith, unless some major new manuscripts were discovered.

The past two decades, however, have shown that the discipline is far from dead. Interest is evident from the number of new publications and practitioners in the field. For example, the Institute for New Testament Textual Research (Muenster, Germany) announced its multi-volume *Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior* at the 1997 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature to an overflow crowd of several hundred scholars. The goal of this project is to put more and clearer information concerning textual variants in the hands of exegetes than could possibly be packed into the critical apparatus found in the Nestle-Aland 26th and 27th editions.

Reuben Swanson's *New Testament Greek Manuscripts* series is further evidence of the resurging interest in this discipline, but he travels a significantly different path in his work than the one chartered by the new *Editio Critica Maior*. This volume on the text of Matthew, following the same format found in his volumes on Mark, Luke, and John, offers the reading of Codex Vaticanus and horizontally lists the readings from about forty-five other significant Greek manuscripts in complete form below. For example, a very quick glance at Matthew 28:19 reveals the significant difference in manuscript D where the Great Commission begins with πορευέσθαι νῦν ("Go now," an imperative) instead of πορευθέντες οὖν ("Therefore, when you go," a participle) as in the other major manuscripts. Evidence of orthographical variants, scribal errors, and the like is given in footnotes. The advantage of using Vaticanus as the baseline is that one begins

with a very fine manuscript of most of the New Testament that was actually heard and read in the church, unlike the eclectic modern editions of the Greek New Testament that are a careful "cut and paste" compilation from the vast array of manuscripts. Much can be observed and learned by going through the process of examining the evidence, rather than beginning with the end product (a modern critical text like that in Nestle-Aland 27th). This does not mean that Swanson uncritically favors the readings of Vaticanus throughout Matthew; he merely puts it forth as a good starting point and presents exegetes with the evidence of other manuscripts in order that they come to their own conclusions. This book is a presentation of textual evidence and not a text critical commentary.

Swanson, a seasoned textual critic and ELCA pastor with considerable parish and university experience, lists several advantages of his resource in the introduction. Primary among these are the immediate accessibility of the various manuscript readings and the ability to follow the reading of a particular major manuscript tradition through the Gospel of Matthew. Specialists and astute students of textual criticism alike will find a wealth of information presented in a format that is, unlike much detail in this discipline, relatively simple and clear.

Charles A. Gieschen

***The Archaeology of Early Christianity: A History.* By William H. C. Frend. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. 412 pages. Paper. 1998.**

If one is looking for a volume that introduces the theory and practice of archaeology or a volume that introduces the history of early Christianity, this is not the book to read. This volume, by the highly respected and prolific historian William H. C. Frend, is a history of archaeological activity that focused on early Christian sites. It assumes that the reader is aware of the basic theory and practice of archaeology, as well as the basic history of early Christianity through its first centuries. It also assumes that the reader knows that the study of early Christianity is not solely a literary endeavor and is convinced that archaeology is a vital part of the evidence that must be sifted, if possible, in such historical research. A reader who does not meet these assumptions will probably be frustrated and bewildered by this book. For the reader who meets these assumptions, however, this volume offers an abundance of information that will certainly enrich his knowledge of both archaeology and early Christianity.

Frend traces archaeology at an amazing number of Christian sites from Constantine to the modern period. Because evidence of early and medieval exploration is very sketchy and is addressed in the first few pages, the actual focus of this volume is archaeology done on Christian sites in the eighteeth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Frend's treatment of these three centuries is basically chronological, focusing on the key people and countries engaged in archaeology. His chronological account gives ample attention to various types of archaeological finds: buildings (especially churches), burial sites, literary manuscripts, inscriptions, and much more. His narrative also takes the reader

across the wide geographic distribution of early Christianity (from parts of Europe to Asia Minor through the northern half of Africa), including many obscure areas that are unfamiliar territory to most readers. One weakness in Frend's geographic coverage is Israel, Syria, and Jordan, possibly because it is given ample coverage in books on New Testament archaeology. Very little is said of this earliest cradle of Christianity that has yielded important finds in the past few decades concerning the birth of Christianity and early Christian pilgrim sites.

There are three themes that continually resurface in Frend's analysis. First, one becomes acutely aware of the sins of past generations in "mining" archaeological sites with very limited interests, usually the uncovering of an ancient building or the discovering of spectacular artifacts for collectors, without carefully documenting the site and *all the evidence* in order that the destroyed site could be reassessed by later generations of archaeologists. Second, Frend repeatedly highlights the interplay between national politics and archaeology, from Napoleon's conquest of Egypt to the end of imperialistic archaeology with the advent of the World Wars, to the contemporary race to record several important sites before they are flooded due to the construction of dams. Third, the importance of archaeological evidence for understanding early Christianity is continually underscored, especially for assessing sectarian or heretical groups like the Donatists, who had a limited existence and whose literature has been largely lost or destroyed. Partly because of the limited literary evidence, there tends to be a significant focus on archaeological evidence of these groups in this volume.

Frend is a masterful teller of history who captivates interested and informed readers with his vivid accounts of people and events. He continually moves back and forth from the past few centuries of archaeological activity at Christian sites to glimpses of the early centuries of actual Christian life revealed by these finds. Although there are a few good maps and some interesting photographs, a volume dealing with such a myriad of archaeological sites that span several centuries would benefit from more visual aids. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that this volume will be an important resource for every scholar and serious student of early Christianity.

Charles A. Gieschen

***Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture.* By Christopher R. Seitz. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001. 228 pages.**

In this series of essays, Seitz endeavors to re-direct the church back to the two biblical testaments as unified Christian Scripture, univocally testifying to the Triune God revealed in the crucified Christ. That is no mean task, and perhaps Seitz has bit off more than he can chew, but one cannot but applaud his zeal. He writes primarily against the backdrop of the Anglican communion's ongoing challenge to hear any word as really divine, as well as historical criticism's de-sacralization of the Scriptures. The end result of Scripture's waning authority has been the "disfiguring" of both God and the writings he inspired. Typology and

allegory—termed by Seitz as "figural exegesis"—have been "figured out," banished along with other "antiquated" items such as the Rule of Faith.

In the second half of his work, Seitz provides several examples of how the church should engage in figural interpretation, reading the New Testament in light of the Old and vice versa. Here he addresses topics such as the ending of John's gospel, Jesus' possession of the divine name, mission in the Old Testament, and the First Article of the Creed. Following the trail well-blazed by Brevard Childs, Seitz emphasizes the canonical shape of the Scriptures as of ongoing hermeneutical significance for the church. In his conclusion, he sounds this warning: "[The] teaching, life, cross, and resurrection [of Christ] are confessed as accorded and 'typed' or 'figured in' Israel's canonical scripture. Pull any of these stable pillars apart, and the entire edifice is threatened. The Scriptures will be figured out, with the effect of the loss of collaborating convictions regarding election, providence . . . , and the two-fold character of scriptural witness, from a figurally united Old and New Testament Christian Bible" (196).

Despite the book's admirable features, this reader found himself, at times, not quite satisfied. The essays follow no clearly logical, progressive order. The critique of Anglicanism's disinterest in the Scriptures—and the impact of historical criticism in general—seemed unnecessarily long. Many of those pages could have been better served by more essays on the positive features of figural interpretation. Moreover, some of the essays Seitz did include, good though they were *per se*, did little to exemplify what the church has historically understood as figural interpretation (for example, "Booked Up," 91-101).

Figured Out is one more example of what Seitz himself noted as "a genuinely illuminating reappraisal of typology and allegory" (vii) in the church today. One can only hope such reappraisal continues and expands. Both typology and allegory, rightly understood and rightly applied, have a rich and salutary history in Lutheran preaching, catechesis, and hymnody. Together they testify to the many and various ways God spoke to his people of old by the prophets, and still speaks by those same prophets today.

Chad L. Bird

***Love Taking Shape: Sermons on the Christian Life.* By Gilbert Meilaender. Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans, 2002. 143 Pages.**

In this book we meet Gilbert Meilaender the preacher. Twenty four homilies are presented, falling under five categories: Lent, the Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, the seasons of life, and Eschatology. The fact that many of these sermons are more didactic than they are kergymatic may be excused, considering Meilaender's long and distinguished career in the classroom. But then these sermons are not intended as sample sermons for other preachers, but as public meditations on how the Christian life is shaped by love. They are offered with due respect for those who week after week must step into the pulpit with

something fresh to say. "Some things," Meilaender observes, "should be preached and others taught . . . the two tasks are not the same. I have little doubt that, of the two, preaching is the more difficult" (xi).

Conscientious Lutheran preachers will be enriched for their difficult task by these meditations. While none are overtly textual, all of them are thoroughly biblical. Here we see that Christian ethics is not legalism, but rather the product of love that flows from faith. The law presented here is unrelenting in its demands; the gospel unlimited in its gifts. Thus the Christian life is Christ's own life taking shape among His own. For example, the reason Christians speak up on behalf of the unborn is ". . . not because they are such lovable little things, not because their potential is great—but in order to be in this world the epiphany of the God who came to us as Mary's child."

This book is to be recommended both to those who preach and those who hear them preach. The preaching and the hearing will be all the better for it.

Harold L. Senkbeil

***Shepherd the Church: Essays in Pastoral Theology Honoring Bishop Roger D. Pittelko.* Edited by Frederic W. Baue, John W. Fenton, Eric C. Forss, Frank J. Pies, and John T. Pless. Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2002. 307 Pages.**

My intention in this review is to encourage as wide a readership of this handsome volume as I can. I hope that it will find its way into the hands of Lutheran pastors in all synods. With that in mind, let me get my minor gripes out of the way first. I have but two and they both deal with form, rather than content. First, there are several misspellings and other typos in the volume. A book of this one's overall quality should warrant a better job of proofreading than this. In some instances it is as simple as finding an "is" where an "it" should appear, or vice versa—perhaps someone depended too heavily on a computer spelling checker.

My second complaint is less directed specifically to this book than it is to the modern printing industry. I am a chronic note reader. I think that I have learned more from following notes to their sources than from anything else. For that reason I like my notes to be "footnotes" where they are readily accessible to the reader. But in accord with the vast bulk of modern printing, this volume has the notes as "endnotes," which means no end of frustration for me as I try to follow up the arguments.

Now that I have gotten that off my chest, let me get on to why one should read this volume. The eighteen major essays are organized under three categories: "Liturgy and the Parish," The Pastoral Office and the Care of Souls," and "Evangelical-Lutheran Missions." Of course, the categories are not neat boxes and so there is some overlap. This is only to be expected in a volume that gathers together the contributions of eighteen different authors. If variety is the spice of

life, perhaps this volume is the spice of theological life. In any event, the reader will find here a variety of nuanced commentary on Holy Communion ranging from the concept of "Eucharistic Sacrifice" to sacramental practice and piety, and the "Eucharist and Eschatology." There are several essays that deal with the rites that adorn the Divine Service, reaching from the matter of hymnody to matters of the public reading of the gospel and the ritual elements of liturgy in the city. There is even a brand new hymn. The reader will also be challenged to think on weighty matters concerning the call to the Office of the Holy Ministry and the vocation of the universal priesthood. Every one of these matters is a piece of the serious conversation and even controversy that is going on in American Lutheran life at the onset of the twenty-first century.

When it comes to matters that are at issue in current American church life, can there be anything more at issue than what is know as the "Church Growth Movement"? I doubt it. So read the essays by Baue and Vogel and learn why this movement is not a value neutral method that can be accommodated to any theology, but, quite otherwise, a modern theological movement that is carefully plugged into the heresy of all modern heresies, the sovereignty of the autonomous self. Whether it is the heresy of so-called "decision theology," which presumes to decide "for Jesus" (Just what kind of a *Lord* is it who sits around waiting for would-be servants to decide?), or whether it is the ultra-modernist GLBT (gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, trans-gendered) agenda, which presumes to decide about who we might be sexually (the given-ness of our plumbing must yield to our self-will) the enemy is the supposed autonomous self that, in our theological tradition, is known as the "Old Adam." He is thoroughly enshrined in the Church Growth Movement. Baue and Vogel will help you identify him, expose him, and ward him off. What is presumed to be the attractiveness of Church Growth to laity receives an antidote in John Pless's "Reflections on the Life of the Royal Priesthood."

Most of the other essays will help the reader put Old Adam in his proper place (under law and gospel, which will kill him and raise a new person in his stead) and suggest what might be put in the place of his Church Growth technique. In this regard, I want to single out Jobst Schöne's essay on confession and absolution. The loss of "the third sacrament" in our church life is, I have come to believe, devastating and largely responsible for our vulnerability to the religious novel and bizarre that harass us these days. How does one move to overcome the loss? Here is a "beautiful" contribution to the recovery.

Let me single out one last essay for its uniqueness. It comes from Bruce Adams in Australia and deals with the life and martyr's witness of Robert Barnes; "Unser Robertus" Luther once called him. Barnes and other Reformation era Lutherans in Great Britain need to be better known among us, but the literature is scant and far less than well known. Adam's essay will begin to correct that and following his notes will carry the reader further along the road.

Throughout the history of the church, there have been theological movements that have been identified with academic place-names: the Wittenberg theology of the sixteenth century; the Erlangen or Lundensian or Tübingen or Wauwautosa theologies of the century just past. Might we now be confronted with and offered a "Fort Wayne theology," of which the present volume might be a representation? True, not all the contributors to the volume are presently connected to that seminary; nor are all graduates thereof. Still, it seems to me that this volume may be taken as representing such a "school" of theological thinking. What might be its characteristics? I would offer the following:

1. It is exegetical. Thorough encounter with, respect for, and exposition of Holy Scripture *and its dogmatic content* are always in evidence.
2. It is thoroughly confessional, but never mere repristination. The classic Lutheran slogans—the proper distinction between law and gospel, the sola, a magisterial ministry, and others—are living theological tools rather than mere historic bench marks.
3. It is genuinely catholic. The heritage of the catholic creeds and the patristic witness are an integral part of the method.
4. It is authentically ecclesial. The actual practice of actual parishes is the goal of this theology. It lives to inform and enliven the work of faithful pastors and the life of Christ's flock.

I hope that I am right in this guess. So, while the reader is enjoying his or her way through the volume, as worthy of its honoree as he is of it, I hope that they will test the thesis and see if they agree.

Louis A. Smith
Waynesboro, Virginia

***Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide.* Edited by Troels Engberg-Pedersen. Louisville, London, and Leiden: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001. x + 355 pages. Paper. $39.95.**

In which context is Paul interpreted best? While former generations of critical scholars usually pointed either to Judaism or Hellenism, the contributors to this book—David Aune (Notre Dame), Wayne Meeks (Yale), Margaret Mitchell (Chicago), among others—pursue a different approach: Judaism and Christianity are seen as variations of, or subcultures within, the complex Hellenistic culture of the eastern Mediterranean. Thus, Paul's theology appears as a creative patchwork that, within this cultural macro-paradigm, reassembles and reinterprets whatever seemed best to him to convey certain ideas or solve certain problems he encountered in his congregations.

The first three main essays of the book, which grew out of a 1997 conference in Copenhagen organized by the editor, explore the changing historiographical content and the multifaceted historical nature of Judaism and Hellenism. The next

four essays focus on Pauline Christianity as a whole over against Hellenistic (pagan and Jewish) schools, and on Paul's strategies—as seen in his letters to the Corinthians—to construct Christian identity in view of the similarities to the surrounding cultures. The last four essays treat concrete exegetical problems in Paul's Corinthian epistles.

Besides providing information on ancient thought and the history of critical exegesis, the essays point to the fact that good theology always takes place in dialogue with culture, also by employing elements of any given culture to make itself understood to contemporary people. Yet how much *independent* "meaning" should these elements convey? According to Paul, none (Acts 26:22-23; Galatians 1:11-12). Most contributors, however, are methodologically blindfolded to the categorical difference between God's word and man's culture. For them, Paul is simply a part of culture (2-4), the Holy Spirit is a skeptic (61), Christology and eschatology are myths (96, 193), the Lord's Supper has to be interpreted as symbolic (98), heaven is a place (193), the church as a "community of interpretation" needs religious experts (184, 102), and the gospel is easily comprehended by well-meaning pagans (80). After all, the cross is a symbol of transformation (14-15)!

The (post-)modernist implications of this exegesis are described by the editor in a recent essay along the lines of "Paul the Hellenist" (*JSNT* 86 [2002]: 113, compare *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 62 (January 1998): 28-29, 36-37). Sound scriptural exegesis that locates Spirit and meaning in the text of Scripture, not in self-chosen extrabiblical contexts (see *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 41 (July 1977): 53) is the answer Christian theology will give.

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***The Fingerprints of God: Tracking the Divine Suspect through a History of Images.* By Robert Farrar Capon. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000. 163 pages. $15.00.**

Many readers may already be familiar with the writings of Robert Farrar Capon, an Episcopal priest and a poetic and prolific author. If so, they will enjoy this exacerbating excursion into biblical and contemporary images. If you are a new reader of Capon, this book is certainly worth putting on your list for summer reading. From baseball and beach parties to Julian of Norwich and the Jesus Seminar, Capon dashes over the literary, scriptural, and theological landscape with paradoxical aplomb.

As he introduces his second last chapter, Capon explains his approach to writing: "For me, writing a book has always been an exercise in juggling images. My custom is to accumulate a deskful of them in the course of my preaching, lecturing, and random rumination and then try to turn them into something

presentable. But metaphors sitting in the mind do not a book make; they're just a basket of wash that not even I (let alone anyone else) can see as a coherent whole. Long ago, therefore, I developed an image for what I do as an author. When I write, I see myself as hanging theological laundry on a clothesline: until I can find the right rope to pin my wash to, no book is possible. . . . This book is an attempt to deal with some three or four years' worth of theological shirts, socks, and underwear that have been daring me to get them hung out intelligibly" (123). Whether he presents fresh linens or dirty laundry is at the heart of this review. The images have been collected.

Several of the "footprints" detected by Capon are worth noting. For example, he writes: "The Bible is held together by *icons*, by word-pictures like Light, Word, Water, Marriage, the Garden, the Tree, the Blood of Abel, the Paschal Lamb, the Blood on the Doorposts, the Rock in the Wilderness, the Bread from Heaven, and finally the City. . . . It's these icons, these sacraments of the real presence of the Word himself, that make it a whole" (14). These and many others are elegantly elaborated in this nuanced and somewhat annoying anthology. Capon admits that his images of God are based on Scripture's revelation and that "The Holy Spirit was pleased to let their imagery stand *wie es steht geschrieben*—as it lies before us—in the one and only Bible we have" (163). Drawing his ideas from the biblical text is refreshing, although when one sees how he applies them concerns are readily raised.

Criticism of the book can be made on several fronts. At times the reader wonders whether he is reading the stream-of-consciousness ramblings of a mad-fool or the challenging, disconcerting, provocative, dismaying insights of a modern prophet. As a writer, Capon is rhetorically rich and imaginatively poetic, filling the pages with wild metaphors and engagingly contemporary images. As a theologian, his paradoxical approach leads to alarm as he struggles between theologically conservative and liberal views—he is critical of the Jesus Seminar, yet questions Pauline authorship; he affirms Luther's reformation, yet critiques his medieval mind; he espouses universalism, yet shows that Jesus is the only way; he is strongly Trinitarian, yet falls into several heretical tendencies regarding the person of Christ; he understands the centrality of the person of Christ, yet undermines the redemptive work of Christ. And, as a historian (in the second part of the book), he draws broad brush-strokes fairly accurately over centuries of Christian conversations, yet is sometimes overly simplistic in how these views should be perceived in our present society.

Homileticians will find Capon helpful in the ways he draws together biblical images that occur throughout Scripture. For example, he says: "The rock, therefore, is one of the choicest illustrations of the Spirit's hand in Scripture. Starting with a rock standing alone in a desert, he can lead Isaiah to say the Lord's people were quarried out of a rock that already contained them, Paul to declare that the rock was Christ, the Gospel writers to proclaim the rock as a cornerstone, and Peter to make the cornerstone an image of the scandal of the cross and the

paradox of the mystery of Christ" (16). The breadth of images are relished through his eyes.

Knowing the theologically paradoxical nature of this book allows readers of this journal to be critical, yet find help for their ministry. Almost in a self-disclosing manner, Capon warns at one point: "The very plausibility of most heresies makes them easier to grasp, and to sell, than orthodoxy. For the essence of heresy isn't a fondness for wrong ideas. It's a preference ("heresy" is from *hairein*, "to take," "to select") for one aspect of a truth over a paradoxical wholeness of that truth" (99). Such erratic jumping around is evident when he bounces from compelling criticism of higher criticism to his own rejection of the Pauline authorship of several New Testament epistles. Similarly, his tendency toward universalism rather than rejoicing in God's universal grace in Christ is disconcerting, as is his rejection of the possibility of hell, yet he relishes the imagery of fire and brimstone. Unfortunately, he is fascinated with recapitulation Christology, but rejects forensic justification, which he calls "transactionalism" (61-62).

Every pastor who reads this book will benefit from the imaginative stretching that Capon provides. This little work is not for the weak, but for those who are awake theologically. With a strong Lutheran base, pastors gathering in circuit Winkels will enjoy the stimulating discussions from his questionable and questioning propositions, which will naturally erupt from this work.

The structure of the book breaks the mold of expectations, too. Immediately after the table of contents, there is a page-long "bibliographical Note," which would normally be at the end of a scholarly work, but Capon draws it front and center. And right after that, he presents an "Index of Images," almost 300 stronger (132) and weaker (116) images, again something usually reserved for the last pages of a book, but abruptly and intentionally pushed to the fore. The two parts of the work, too, are rather disparate; yet they provide a unit of thought. This reviewer is certain that this will not be the last book of this kind, as Capon notes, "But in theology, the last word seldom gets said" (98).

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Indices to Volume 66 (2002)

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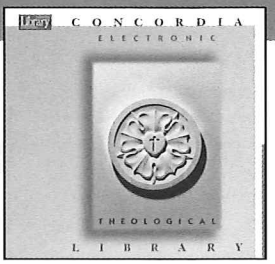

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