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Jesus and the Woman at the Well: Where Mission Meets Worship

Peter J. Scaer

Introduction

The purpose of the fourth gospel is explicit and well known: that those who hear it might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that, believing in Him, they might have life in His name (John 20:31). As such, the engendering of faith that leads to eternal life lies at the very heart of John's purpose. Eternal life, however, is not simply something that we will inherit at our death or receive at our Lord's second coming; it is the present possession of God's people. Jesus makes this clear, saying, "He who hears my word and believes the One who sent me has eternal life, . . . and has [already] crossed over from death to life" (5:24).¹ Even now the believer has streams of living water flowing from within (4:14). Indeed, the one "who lives and believes in [Christ] will never die" (11:26). More so than any other evangelist, John would have us understand that eternal life already belongs to all those who trust in Him who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (14:6). Since eternal life is a present reality, we do well to consider how this life is defined, and what it looks like.

John's Apocalypse: An Eternal Life of Worship

For a picture of eternal life we customarily turn to John's other great work, the Apocalypse. In the Revelation, John offers a tantalizing glimpse into the heavenly realities, an extraordinary preview of the life to come. Once we adjust our vision to the technicolor landscape of golden streets and jewel-laden walls, we see that eternal life is defined by Christ-centered worship. John invites us to gather around the Lamb, slain for the sin of the world. With people from every nation we sing the songs of angels, sit by the life-giving, crystalline river, and eat from the tree of healing. John describes heavenly worship as a marriage feast in all its glory (Revelation 19:7).

If, however, the Apocalypse offers us a picture of worship drawn from the heavenly perspective, so also John's Gospel offers us an introduction

¹All Scripture translations are those of the author.

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to heavenly worship as we experience it here, on earth. Throughout the Gospel of John, we see that Christ's own evangelism and teaching prepares the would-be believer for a life of eternal worship. This worship begins not when we die or when our Lord returns, but even now. Heavenly worship, like eternal life itself, is, for the Christian, a present reality. Even now, we are invited to stand in the presence of Christ, who is Himself the true Lamb, the new temple, the source of life-giving waters, and the long-awaited bridegroom.

As such, evangelism and worship are not easily separated. Indeed, they form a natural continuum, even as courtship leads to marriage. So it is that our Lord said to the Samaritan woman, "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him" (John 4:23). Let us then turn to the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

Jesus' Encounter with the Samaritan Woman: The Intersection Between Evangelism and Worship

Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well (John 4:1-42) is one of the most beloved stories in the Gospels. Many have turned to this well-crafted narrative as a prime example of evangelism and outreach.² The One who breaks down the barriers between God and man through His incarnation now begins to bridge the gaps that separate fallen humanity. Missiologists commonly observe that in this story Jesus crosses over a number of cultural bridges: the holy, Jewish man reaches out to a sinful, Samaritan woman.³ Along the way, He breaks down barriers of holiness, ethnicity, gender, and religion. Moreover, by offering the gift of salvation to the fallen Samaritan woman, the Lord shows that there is hope for all of us. He is, indeed, the Savior of the world.⁴

²See, for instance, Johannes Nissen, "Mission in the Fourth Gospel: Historical and Hermeneutical Perspectives," in *New Readings in John*, edited by Johannes Nissen and Sigfred Pedersen (Sheffield, United Kingdom: Sheffield Publishing, 1999), 213-232. See also, Tesera Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988), 79-196.

³See Robert Maccini, *Her Testimony is True: Women as Witnesses According to John*, Journal for the Society of New Testament Studies [JSNTS] 125 (Sheffield, United Kingdom: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 118-144.

⁴See Okure, *Johannine Approach to Mission*, 184-185.

The fact that this text also offers a beautiful picture of the intersection between mission and worship receives less attention. Christ, as God's best missionary, at once reaches out to the Samaritan woman, but He also draws her in. Rather than leaving her in the purgatorial limbo of the seeker-service, He leads her to Himself, into a place from which living waters flow, and true bread is discovered. In short, He draws her into His church, where alone there is worship of the Father, marked by Spirit and truth.

Worship and Courtship

If John describes heaven as a wedding feast at which Christ is the groom and the church is His bride, we should not be surprised that in his Gospel John depicts evangelism as a type of courtship that leads to marriage.

Indeed, a growing number of scholars have come to see the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman as a Johannine variation on an Old Testament betrothal story. According to Robert Alter, the typical Old Testament betrothal scene consists of the five following elements: (1) the future bridegroom or his surrogate travels to a foreign land (just as Jesus Himself traveled to Samaria), with its very different customs; (2) He encounters a girl at the well (here, in an ironic twist, Jesus encounters not a girl, but a woman, who is, shall we say, experienced); (3) someone draws water from the well (in John's story, there is, instead, a lengthy discussion about drawing water); (4) the girl rushes home to tell her family about the strange man (here the Samaritan woman also runs home to tell the others about Jesus); and (5) the strange man is invited to a family meal and a betrothal is concluded between the stranger and the girl (in this case, after a discussion about a meal, Jesus becomes the focal point of the entire community. As a result, the Samaritans proclaim Him to be the Savior of the cosmos). Thus, in the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, all the elements of Old Testament betrothal are present, but with a number of surprising twists.⁵

We might, then, regard the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman as a type of romance. First, consider the setting. The reader, familiar with the Old Testament, would take special note of the fact that the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman takes place at Jacob's Well. The

⁵Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 52.

well, in Old Testament times, was the place of courtship.⁶ It was at a well that Moses met Zipporah (Exodus 2:15-22), and that Abraham's servant found a bride for Isaac (Genesis 24:1 and following). Of course, it was at a well that Jacob first gazed upon Rachel's lovely eyes, causing his own to weep with joy (Genesis 29:1-14).

The story of Jacob's courtship at the well, in particular, remained a popular one in both rabbinic and Hellenistic-Jewish writings. Josephus's own retelling of the Old Testament includes a tender picture of Jacob and Rachel at the well.⁷ Thus, when John tells us that the place of meeting was a well, and Jacob's Well at that, he is not only offering us a geographical detail, but he is preparing us for a particular type of story.

The context also argues for interpreting this story as a courtship. Jesus begins His ministry at Cana, performing His first miracle at a wedding, thus signaling His status as the true bridegroom (John 2). Following the story of the wedding, and immediately preceding the story of the woman at the well, John the Baptist describes his relationship to Christ in matrimonial terms, claiming, "The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; the best man, who stands and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice" (3:29). Thus, John the Baptist compares his work to that of a best man preparing for the groom, who is Christ. The reader is left to wonder what kind of groom the Christ will be.

We should add that not only is a matrimonial theme suggested by the context and setting of the story, but it also plays prominently in the content. After a discussion of water at the well, Jesus abruptly changes the subject, telling the woman to fetch her husband (4:16). The woman replies that she has no husband. Undoubtedly she is embarrassed to reveal her scandalous past. Is she also making herself available to a new suitor? Surely, this is not the first time, nor would it be the last, that people would fail to comprehend the words of Jesus. John loves to play with ironic confusion and misunderstanding. What is true bread? What is true water? Who is truly blind and who can truly see? As representative of the Jewish people, Nicodemus was confused as to the nature of heavenly birth. The context leads the reader to wonder whether the Samaritan woman was still thinking in earthly terms, leaving herself

⁶See Jerome Neyrey, "Jacob Traditions and the Interpretation of John 4:10-26," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (1979): 419-437.

⁷*Antiquities* 1:286-292.

open for a sixth marriage and a husband who could finally make her happy. In a provocative article, John Bligh puts it this way:

Perhaps she is another example of persons who want Christ for the wrong reason. The first word which he addresses to his prospective followers is: "What do you want?" (1:38). The Galileans come to him wanting bread and fish (compare 6:26); he offers them the true bread, which is himself. The woman standing before him wanting, perhaps only half-consciously, marriage; he offers her instead the reality of which marriage is a figure.⁸

Indeed, when the disciples returned from their trip to the city to buy bread, they too may have misunderstood the situation. Though they were too embarrassed to say it, they were "amazed that he was talking to a woman," and wanted to ask, "What are you looking for?" and "Why are you talking with her?" (4:27). The problematic issue for the disciples, most interestingly, was not that Jesus was talking to a Samaritan, but to a woman. Representative of common opinion on the subject, Rabbi Nathan writes, "One does not speak with a woman on the street, not even his own wife, and certainly not with another woman, on account of gossip."⁹ Accordingly, the disciples were scandalized by Jesus' relationship with the woman, though they were too afraid to challenge Him on the matter.

Jesus, however, had other intentions. He was seeking more than an earthly marriage. So when the woman claimed she had no man, our Lord replied that, in fact, the Samaritan woman had five husbands, and the man she had then was not her husband (4:18). Here many commentators have detected a sly reference to the Samaritan people as a whole, who were known for their religious promiscuity. J. Eugene Botha concludes, "The implication is that the woman's moral life, as representative of the Samaritans', is also indicative of the quality of the worship of the Samaritans."¹⁰ Indeed, the woman's marital history echoes that of the Samaritans as described in 2 Kings 17:30-32. In their syncretism, the Samaritans were said to have worshiped the gods of five other nations. Josephus echoes this commonly-held assumption in his *Antiquities*, where

⁸John Bligh, "Jesus in Samaria," *Heythrop Journal* 3 (1962): 335-336.

⁹Aboth Rabbi Nathan 2 (1d).

¹⁰J. Eugene Botha, *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1991), 155.

he notes that the Samaritans incorporated the gods of five other countries, thus provoking "the Most High God to anger and wrath."¹¹ The Samaritan woman is, of course, an historical personage, but she also stands as a symbolic figure for her people. The question John would have us ask is whether the Samaritan woman will find in Jesus her true bridegroom. Five husbands had not brought her any personal satisfaction or ultimate meaning. Earthly water could never satisfy her thirst. False religions could not deliver what she, representative of the Samaritan people, needed. Only Jesus could satisfy her longing. Only Jesus could provide living water. Only Jesus could serve as her true bridegroom.

Jesus as the True Locus for Worship

Indeed, this pericope makes it plain that true satisfaction is to be found nowhere except in the flesh and blood bridegroom, Jesus Christ. True worship, therefore, must be through the Son. The Samaritan woman first broached the topic of worship, saying: "Our ancestors *worshiped* on this mountain, but you people claim that the place where men ought to *worship* God is in Jerusalem" (John 4:20).

Many commentators have surmised that the Samaritan woman changed the subject in order to avoid the delicate matter of her own marital history. Yet our Lord took this as an opportunity to discuss the nature of true worship. Jesus replied,

Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will *worship* the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You people *worship* what you do not understand, while we understand what we *worship*; after all salvation is from the Jews. Yet an hour is coming and is now here when the true *worshipers* will *worship* the Father in Spirit and truth. And indeed, it is just such *worshipers* that the Father seeks. God is Spirit, and those who *worship* Him must *worship* in Spirit and truth (John 4:21-24).

The Greek word for worship, "προσκυνέω," appears ten times in five verses. Remarkably, the very heart of Jesus' evangelism of the Samaritan woman centered on a discussion of worship. Evangelism and worship intersect and overlap. Yet the dialogue, while fascinating, has proven somewhat enigmatic. What does it mean "to worship in Spirit and truth"?

¹¹*Antiquities* 9:288.

Does this mean, as some have suggested, that true worship must eschew earthly elements? Is such worship marked by authenticity and sincerity of heart? — or is there more?

Given the immediate context, we would do well to conclude that, with the advent of Christ, the worship of God will no longer be limited geographically. The Samaritans worshiped on Mount Gerizim. According to the Samaritan Pentateuch, Moses commanded that an altar be built on Mount Gerizim. Samaritans also claimed the mountain as the holy place upon which Jacob received his vision of ascending and descending angels.¹² Having received his vision, Jacob himself confessed, "This is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven" (Genesis 28:16-18). If Jacob claimed Mount Gerizim as the house of God and the gate of heaven, who were the Samaritans to disagree?

Jesus contradicted the woman's assumptions, however, calling Samaritan worship inadequate: "You [Samaritans] worship what you do not know. We worship what we know" (John 4:22). Perhaps Jesus is playing on the words of Jacob, who, having awoken from his vision said, "Surely, the Lord was in this place and I did not know it" (Genesis 28:16).¹³ In words reminiscent of His conversation with the Canaanite woman, Jesus added, "Salvation comes from the Jews" (John 15:24). However, our Lord did not stop with anti-Samaritan polemic; He proceeded to say that even the Jerusalem temple was becoming obsolete. "For the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (John 4:21). Physical descent from the patriarch Abraham would not save the Jews, nor would Jacob save the Samaritans. Jacob's water could not satisfy. Jacob's ladder was not the gate into heaven, and they would no longer find God in the temple. Or, perhaps, we should put the matter positively: Jesus is Jacob's ladder, the true gate to heaven. He is the true temple of God, the place of His dwelling. By speaking in this way, Jesus prepared the Samaritan woman for heavenly worship, in which "there is no need of a temple," for the saints stand always in the presence of God and the Lamb. Not surprisingly, when the Samaritan woman left Jesus, she also left behind her water jug, for she wanted only the water that could truly satisfy. She

¹²See John MacDonald, *The Theology of the Samaritans* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 327-333; *Antiquities* 18:85-87.

¹³See Neyrey, "Jacob Traditions," 427-428.

then invited her fellow Samaritans on a pilgrimage of sorts, a pilgrimage not to Jerusalem or to Mount Gerizim, but to Jesus, the one who reveals all things.

Worship in Spirit and Truth

With the passing significance of Gerizim and Jerusalem, some have concluded that the worship of God in this new hour is purely spiritual, that is, entirely without ties to physical or earthly elements. Worship in Spirit and truth has been accordingly understood as synonymous with a type of heart-felt devotion, in opposition to the ceremonies of Judaism, Catholicism, or, for that matter, liturgical Lutheranism. In exegeting this passage, Calvin defined worship in Spirit and truth in this way: "It is to lay aside the entanglements of ancient ceremonies, and to retain merely what is spiritual in the worship of God; for the truth of the worship of God consists in the Spirit, and the ceremonies are but a sort of appendage."¹⁴ Such an interpretation finds its modern-day counterpart in the work of F. F. Bruce, who writes, "Material things could at best be the vehicle of true worship but could never belong to its essence." This type of interpretation lays the center of worship squarely within the human heart, and has little use for outward ceremonies. Within our own circles, many would agree that the liturgy is likewise an appendage to the gospel, and that heart-felt faith must take precedence.

However, the focus of John is not upon inward cleansing or pure intention, but upon the question of where God may be found and worshiped. The issue for discussion between the Samaritan woman and Jesus was not sincerity of heart, but the location of God. Where can God be found, so that He might bestow His blessings, even as we offer Him our worship? John would have us know that there is a true geography of worship, and that worship centers in the person of Christ. Our Lord is the place where one meets and worships God. As Johannes Nissen puts it, "Jesus is the temple for the true worship of the Father. He is the new holy place."¹⁵ To worship in truth, then, is to recognize that the Father can only be known through His Son.

¹⁴John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, translated by William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 163.

¹⁵Johannes Nissen, "Mission in the Fourth Gospel: Historical and Hermeneutical Perspectives," in *New Readings in John*, edited by Johannes Nissen and Sigfred Pederson, JSNTS (Sheffield, United Kingdom: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 224.

Worship, Wisdom, and the Word of Jesus

John would have us know that Jesus is the true place of God's presence. To enter into His presence is to enter sacred space. As Marianne Meyers Thompson puts it, "As the locus of God's presence, Jesus serves as the 'place' of epiphany, and so reidentifies the 'place' of worship."¹⁶ This then begs the questions: How does the reader enter into the sacred space that is Jesus? How does one come into contact with Jesus, and thereby worship the Father?

As Jesus is the very revelation of God in the flesh, this revelation comes first through the self-revelation of His word. The story of the Samaritan woman is, after all, a conversation in which Jesus revealed Himself through words. During this conversation, Jesus took His interlocutor from the position of unbelief towards that of faith. Jesus led the woman from a discussion of water to living water, and from a discussion of worship to the revelation that He is, indeed, the promised Messiah, the one called Christ. The culmination of the conversation came when the woman said, "I know that Messiah, the one called Christ, is coming. When that one comes, he will announce to us all things" (John 4:25). Indeed, Jesus then announced the most important thing, declaring, "I am, the one speaking to you" (John 4:26).

The Samaritans themselves began to believe in Christ when they heard the story of the woman, especially of her account of the small miracle: "He told me everything I have done" (John 4:39). However, the Samaritans came to deeper belief not because of Jesus' miracles, but because of His teaching, or, more precisely His word: "Many began to believe in Him because of His *word*, and they said to the woman, 'We no longer believe because of what you said; for we *have heard ourselves*,'" (John 4:42). Through the word of Jesus, God accomplished His purpose. He found worshipers who would worship Him in truth and Spirit. As Jesus preached the word, so also the Samaritan people confessed Jesus as "the Christ, the Savior of the world" (John 4:42).

¹⁶Marianne Meyers Thompson, "Reflections on Worship in the Gospel of John," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 19 (1998): 269.

Jesus as the Object of Worship

Much of recent Johannine scholarship has rightly recognized the role of Jesus as the place and mediation of God's presence. We might add that this pericope, among others, also prepares us for the reality that Jesus is Himself the proper object of worship. As noted above, when discussing the role of the Messiah, Jesus Himself claimed the title, saying, "I am, the one speaking to you." For the woman, this probably was no more than a declaration of Messiahship. Notably, though, this is the first in a series of seven absolute "I am" sayings in the Gospel of John. Richard Bauckham makes the intriguing observation that the number of "I am" statements in the Gospel of John matches the number of times in the Old Testament where God identifies Himself as the great "I am." Bauckham writes, "The series of sayings thus comprehensively identifies Jesus with the God of Israel who sums up his identity in the declaration 'I am he.' More than that, these sayings identify Jesus as the eschatological revelation of the unique identity of God."¹⁷ Thus, through His evangelism of the Samaritan woman, He also prepared her for worship. This worship must be through Him as mediator. Furthermore, He prepared her, as representative of the church, to see that worship must also be to Him, who is true God who had made Himself known even in the Old Testament.

The Baptismal Context of Worship

As we have seen, the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman might be described as a type of courtship, during which catechesis, or teaching, takes place. In other places in Scripture we see that teaching leads to, and is paired with, baptism (for example, Matthew 28). May we also see in the story of the Samaritan woman a link between teaching and baptism?

In order to come to some preliminary answer to this question, we would do well, once again, to consider the context. Chapter 3 of John's gospel is essentially baptismal in emphasis. The chapter begins with the story of Nicodemus, whom John pictures as representative of the Jewish people. He learned from Jesus the baptismal necessity "of being born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). Those who are baptized are indeed "born of the spirit" (John 3:8). Baptism is clearly the means by which the Spirit works His miracle of regeneration. This is followed shortly after by a

¹⁷Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 55-56.

story of John the Baptizer, who was baptizing in Aeon because of the abundance of water. After discussing ceremonial washing with the Jews, the disciples of the Baptist described Jesus in this way: "Here he is baptizing and everyone is coming to him" (John 3:26). The Baptist's disciples pictured Jesus as a type of magnet, attracting people to Himself. As He drew people to Himself, so also He baptized.

Chapter 4 then further develops the baptismal theme. John tells us the very reason that Jesus went to Samaria was that He had gained a reputation as a baptizer. Though He did not personally perform any baptisms, He "was making and baptizing more disciples than John," and this fact apparently disturbed the jealous Pharisees (John 4:1).

Once Jesus met the Samaritan woman, the conversation centered on the topic of water. The Samaritan woman thought Jesus was speaking of ordinary water, but Jesus informed her that the water He provides is: (1) a living water (John 4:10); with the result that (2) whoever drinks it will never thirst again (John 4:13); and within them will be (3) "a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

This water, of course, has reference to the word of God. The book of Proverbs speaks of the teaching of the wise as "a fountain of eternal life" (Proverbs 13:14; see also 18:4 and Isaiah 55:1). This living water is also closely associated with the Spirit of God, whom the prophets predicted God would pour out upon His people (for example, Ezekiel 36:25-27). In John 7, Jesus Himself speaks about the Spirit as a "Life-giving water" (John 7:37-38).¹⁸

May we see in this living water also a reference to baptism? The preceding context argues for such a conclusion. John introduces the story by describing Jesus as one who baptizes even more than John. Now, at the well, He carries out this baptismal ministry. Some object that this is an unwieldy mixing of metaphors. Immersion clearly symbolizes the death of the old man, and a new birth from on high. The external application of water points to the washing away of sins. The drinking of water, however, seems to have no direct baptismal analogy. However,

¹⁸For a discussion on this water imagery, see Larry Paul Jones, *The Symbol of Water in the Gospel of John* (Sheffield, United Kingdom: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). See also Craig Koester's *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 155-184.

this type of logic did not prevent Paul from writing, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Neither did this mixed metaphor stand in the way of early Christians. One of the earliest Christian symbols associated with baptism was that drawn from Psalm 42: "As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God" (42:1). Not surprisingly, early catacomb art featured pictures of the woman at the well as a symbol for baptism.¹⁹ Indeed, the imagery of drinking in the life-giving spirit at baptism is natural, for it teaches an essential baptismal truth: namely, that not only do the waters of baptism wash away sins and offer second life, but through them, the Spirit enters the Christian and makes His home therein. By teaching about baptism in this way, John may be combating a tendency towards seeing baptism as simply an outward, symbolic ritual.

If we find it difficult, however, to decide whether the living water refers primarily to the word, the Holy Spirit, or baptism, this is, I suppose, as it should be. For the water, the Spirit, and the words of life all come from the same source, namely our Lord. Jesus is the one who offers life-giving waters (John 4), His Spirit is life-giving (John 7), and He baptizes with the Spirit (John 1). John thus links life and water, water and the Spirit, the Spirit and life, and baptism and the Spirit. Indeed, for the baptized Christian, word, water, Spirit, and baptism are essentially and eternally linked in the person of Christ, from whose crucified body comes both water and Spirit (19:34). Did the Samaritan woman understand the baptismal context of Jesus' words? — perhaps not at first. But then, many of the things that Jesus said, He said in order that they might be remembered and understood later. The pericope then works on any number of levels. For the Samaritan woman, as well as for the first-time reader, the words are enticing, and are for the purpose of evangelism. For the Christian, the reference to living water serves as catechesis, deepening our understanding of the sacramental reality of the church and of worship. To enter into the church is to receive the living waters. To receive the living waters is to prepare for the heavenly worship of Revelation, where water flows from the throne of God and the Lamb.

¹⁹Paul Niewalda, *Sakramentssymbolik im Johannesevangelium* (Limburg, Germany: Lahn-Verlag, 1958), 126.

We might add yet one more parallel to the story. As noted above, the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman is essentially one of betrothal. Jesus leads a woman, representative of the Samaritans, to the water of life. Perhaps Paul was thinking about these links between marriage and baptism when he wrote, "Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for her; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:25-26). The link between baptism and marriage is not simply a Pauline construction, but it has foundation in Christ's own ministry. This is the marvel of John's gospel. He demonstrates that theological truths and church practice have an incarnational basis within the life and work of our Lord.

Food and Obedience: Pointing Towards the Eucharist

Having discussed baptism, we naturally turn towards the altar and expect to find a discussion of our Lord's Supper. This we do not find, at least explicitly, in the story of the Samaritan woman. However, we do note the following curious exchange, which occurs upon the disciples' return from the city, where they had purchased food: "Meanwhile, the disciples urged him, 'Rabbi, *eat*.' But he said to them, 'I have *food* to *eat* of which you do not know.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Could someone have brought him *something to eat*?' Jesus said, '*My food* is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work'" (John 4:31-34).

As Nicodemus misunderstood our Lord's reference to being born from on high, and the Samaritan woman did not understand Jesus' reference to living water, the disciples were likewise befuddled by Jesus' reference to hidden food. While the disciples were thinking about earthly food, Jesus was thinking about fulfilling the will of His Father. What was the will of His Father? — that He be lifted up on the cross, and thereby draw all peoples to Himself. By bringing the Samaritans to Himself, He was fulfilling that very mission. So, in this case, food is mission, the fulfillment of God's will; or simply put, food is obedience.

This link between obedience and food is intriguing on any number of levels. It takes us back to the initial creation, where God issued one, and only one, command. Then the food of disobedience led to eternal death and separation from God. As God began to create a new people for Himself, He also used food as both a gift and a test of obedience. When the children of Israel grumbled because they were hungry, the Lord said

to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way, I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions" (Exodus 16:4). Later, in his explanation of Israelite history, Moses explained, "He gave manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you" (Deuteronomy 8:16).

Again, our Lord's own testing in the desert—an antitype of Israel's own desert wanderings—features the link between obedience and eating. Drawing upon the story of manna in the desert, our Lord rebuked Satan, saying, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by everything that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

Our Lord made the point, and John underlined it: to follow our Lord, the disciples too would need to learn obedience. Perhaps nowhere is the test of obedience greater than in the command to observe the Lord's Supper—take eat, take drink. John 6 would prove a major watershed in Jesus' ministry. Many left Him because they rejected the notion of eating Jesus' flesh or drinking His blood. Peter, however, learned the lesson of obedience to Christ's word, saying, "Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life" (6:61). John Bligh put it this way, by eating manna the Israelites "discovered that God could give life and strength by apparently inadequate means. They were taught that man lives by obeying God's commandments even when these seem foolish. The eating of the eucharist, like the eating of manna, is an act of faith and of obedience through which the eater is strengthened."²⁰

Ecclesial Exegesis

The way that one understands the Gospel of John depends, it seems to me, upon the context in which it was written. Is this a sectarian document, written for a group that is outside of dominant ecclesiastical structure (as is often claimed), or is the Gospel written from a churchly perspective?²¹ Is this a document written to combat an overemphasis on

²⁰Bligh, "Jesus in Samaria," 336.

²¹For a persuasive argument that the fourth gospel was written to a sectarian community, see Richard Bauckham, "The Audience of the Fourth Gospel," in *Jesus in the Johannine Tradition*, edited by Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 101-114. Robert Gundry also made this argument in

the sacraments, or rather, is it an attempt to demonstrate that the institutions of the church are intimately related to "what Jesus said and did in his life"?²² I suggest that the word of John's gospel is not only the foundation of the church, but it was written by a churchman in the context of the church. In a book of the church, we should fully expect to see churchly references to such things as baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the like. Granted, we have entered into a type of hermeneutical circle, but this is the very nature of the New Testament. It is a word of God that comes from Christ's apostles, and thus from the very heart of the church. The word is born of the church, even as it sustains her.

Implications: Evangelism and Mission Lead to Worship

What might the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman say about the way in which we approach evangelism, missions, and worship? In this story, we see evangelism and catechesis as a type of courtship. In this courtship, Jesus leads the would-be-believer not only to faith, but into the church where faith is created and sustained. The reader is led to understand that in order to take Jesus as the bridegroom, one must enter into the position of the churchly bride. Often today, evangelism embraces Jesus, but ignores the church. Often, evangelism is a product of what is called the parachurch. Yet, John would have us know that evangelism leads directly into the church, where Jesus makes Himself known in the word and in the sacramental realities. Therefore, in our evangelism and catechesis, we must not only lead people into a so-called personal relationship with Jesus, but we must lead them into the church, the very place where Christ offers His gifts and expresses His intimate love towards us.

Too often, I think, the church is thought of as incidental to salvation, and the sacraments are treated as if they were appendages to the gospel message, an addition to the core evangelistic purpose of proclaiming Jesus as Savior. Yet, Jesus incorporates a type of sacramental preparation even into His evangelism. What better way to entice the world to the baptismal waters than with a discussion of living water? What better way to prepare a person for the eucharist than by discussing the bread of life?

Jesus, the Word according to John the Sectarian: A Paleofundamentalist Manifesto for Contemporary Evangelism, Especially Its Elites in North America (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

²²Raymond Brown, *John* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), CXIV.

Often in pedagogy, the student learns to perform tasks, and only later to understand their significance. So also, in the Gospel of John, Jesus teaches and introduces, with the expectation that understanding will come later, even as the Spirit is released at His crucifixion and resurrection. Of course, the reader is in a privileged position, for he already knows the end of the story and is already participating in the sacramental realities that our Lord introduces. Thus Jesus' teaching is evangelism for the Samaritan woman, but it is also catechesis for the church. Even as He introduces the woman to Himself, He leads us deeper into the sacramental realities by which He makes Himself known. Likewise, He leads us into the church, not as an institution set apart from Christ, but as the very place where He offers His good gifts, and where eternal worship begins.

Baptism as Consolation in Luther's Pastoral Care

John T. Pless

"Ah, dear Christians, let us not value or treat this unspeakable gift so half-heartedly. For baptism is our only comfort and the doorway to all of God's possessions and to the communion of all the saints. To this end may God help us." So wrote Luther in his baptismal booklet appended to the second edition of the Small Catechism in 1529.¹ By including his *Taufbuechlein* of 1526 in the catechism, Luther accented not only the liturgical significance of baptism, but also the value of this sacrament for the Christian life. Luther identifies baptism as the believer's "only comfort." This paper examines this theme in representative pastoral pieces in Luther's writings following the publication of the catechisms.² The language of the catechisms on baptism shaped Luther's use of baptism for the consolation of Christians.³

While baptism was featured quite prominently in the early church, its place was diminished in the Middle Ages. There was little catechetical literature to tutor the faithful on the significance of baptism. In fact, the chief feature of baptism seemed to be that of initiation. Baptism was the beginning point on the sacramental continuum, but it had little significance for the ongoing spiritual life, as the eucharist and especially penance overshadowed baptism. By way of contrast, Luther did not limit baptism to the moment of the rite, but asserted the enduring benefits of baptism both for daily life and, finally, for the approach of death itself.⁴

¹Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, translators, *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 373. Hereafter abbreviated as Kolb and Wengert.

²This paper was a seminar presentation at the Tenth International Congress for Luther Research, Copenhagen, Denmark, in August 2002.

³See Albrecht Peters, *Kommentar zu Luthers Katechismen Band 4: Die Taufe. Das Abenmahl* (Goettingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 71-126 for a treatment of Luther's theology of baptism in the catechisms. See also Klaus Schwarzwaeeller, *Fuelle Des Lebens Luthers Kleiner Katechismus* (Muenster, Germany: Lit Verlag, 1998), 219-243.

⁴See Mark Tranvik, "Luther on Baptism," *Lutheran Quarterly* 13 (Spring 1999): 75-90 for an overview of Luther's baptismal teaching. Other helpful studies include Lorenz

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For Luther, baptism was no mere rite of initiation on the spectrum of sacramental acts, but the basis and content of the Christian's life that is brought to completion only in the resurrection of the body.

In May of 1531, Luther received word that his mother was seriously ill in Mansfeld. The sickness would prove fatal as Margaret would die the next month, June 30, just a little over a year after the death of her husband. On May 20, Luther wrote a tender letter to his mother alluding especially to John 16:33 ("I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world"). In this letter, Luther rejoiced that his mother was well-instructed in God's fatherly goodness and grace and urged her to accept this suffering as a slight affliction in comparison with the sufferings of Christ. He wrote, "You know the real basis and foundation of your salvation, on which you must rest your confidence in this and all troubles, namely Jesus Christ, the cornerstone, who will never waver or fail us, nor allow us to sink and perish, for he is the Saviour and he is called the Saviour of all poor sinners, of all who face tribulation and death, of all who rely on him and call on his name."⁵ Throughout the letter, Luther pointed to Christ's passion and resurrection as the source of confidence in the face of death. Luther's imagery for the threat of death is vivid: "You can show your teeth, but you cannot bite. For God has given us the victory through Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be praise and thanks. Amen."⁶ Christ is not the accuser and judge, but Savior and Comforter.

But where is such a Christ to be found? Luther directed his mother to word and sacrament. Near the end of the letter Luther wrote:

Groenvik, *Der Taufe in der Theologie Martin Luther* (Åbo, Finland: Åbo Akademi University Press, 1968); Robert Kolb, "What Benefit Does the Soul Receive from a Handful of Water?: Luther's Preaching on Baptism, 1528-1539," *Concordia Journal* 25 (October 1999): 346-363; David W. Lotz, "The Sacrament of Salvation: Luther on Baptism and Justification," *Trinity Seminary Review* 6 (Spring 1984): 3-13; and Jonathan Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1994).

⁵Theodore Tappert, editor, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 1995), 34. For a very thorough treatment of Luther's use of letters as tools for pastoral care, see Gerhard Ebeling, *Luthers Seelsorge an seinen Briefen dargestellt* (Tuebingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr, 1997), although Ebeling overlooks the significance of baptism in these letters.

⁶Tappert, *Luther: Letters*, 35.

To such knowledge, I say, God has graciously called you. In the gospel, in baptism, and in the Sacrament (of the Altar) you possess his sign and seal of this vocation, and as long as you hear him addressing you in these, you will have no trouble or danger. Be of good cheer, then, and thank him joyfully for such great grace, for he who has begun a good work in you will perform until the day of Jesus Christ. We cannot help ourselves in such matters. We can accomplish nothing against sin, death, and the devil by our own works.⁷

While Luther only mentioned baptism in this letter, it is significant that Luther directed his mother to baptism, along with the gospel and the Lord's Supper, as the place where God speaks. For Luther, pastoral care does not direct the dying Christian to her own thoughts or deeds, but to the promises of God given in the *externum verbum* of gospel, baptism, and supper.⁸ Earlier in this letter, Luther reminded his mother that God had brought her to the knowledge of salvation and "not allowed her to remain in papal error, by which we were taught to rely on our own works and the holiness of monks and to consider this only comfort of ours, our Saviour, not as a comforter but as a severe judge and tyrant, so that we could only flee from him to Mary and the saints and not expect of him any grace or comfort."⁹ Luther set this approach in contrast to Christ, who reconciles sinners to the Father rather than visiting them with wrath and condemnation.

In his 1519 treatise, *The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism*, Luther complained that the papists ignored baptism in favor of self-made satisfactions:

They go so far as to disregard their baptism, as if they had no more need of it beyond the fact of having once been baptized. They do not know that baptism is in force all through life, even until death, yes—as said above—even to the Last Day. For this reason they

⁷Tappert, *Luther: Letters*, 35-36.

⁸On this *extra nos* accent, note Luther's defense in his 1527 lectures on Titus: "If we were able to enter heaven without outward things, there would be no necessity to send Christ." *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 volumes, edited by J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia and Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-1986), 29:83. Hereafter abbreviated as *LW*.

⁹Tappert, *Luther: Letters*, 35.

presume to find some other way of blotting out sin, namely by works. So for themselves and all others, they create evil, terrified, and uncertain consciences, and despair at the hour of death. They do not know how they stand with God, thinking that by sin they have lost their baptism and that it profits them no more.¹⁰

Now in this letter to his dying mother, Luther made use of a baptism that is efficacious throughout this life until it is brought to consummation in the resurrection of the flesh.

On June 29, 1534, Luther wrote to John Ruehl, chancellor to Count Albert of Mansfeld and a relative of Luther by marriage. Luther had learned of Ruehl's illness and his impatience in suffering. After comforting Ruehl with the words of 2 Corinthians 12:9 ("My strength is made perfect in weakness"), Luther wrote:

The realization that you have been called by this Man, that you have been blessed by a knowledge, desire, and love for his Word, and that you have been sealed therein by his Baptism and Sacrament should surely make you more cheerful. What more do you expect of him who has inwardly given you such love toward him and outwardly given you such seals and such a testimony of his grace? Dear doctor, behold the good things you possess at his hands rather than what you suffer. The balance is tipped immeasurably in favor of the former.¹¹

Luther drew Ruehl's thoughts away from what he suffered to the fact that he had been called to faith by Christ. The gifts of Christ outweigh all pain and grief.

After reminding Ruehl that God is able to restore him to health, Luther quoted Paul, "whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8). Luther commented, "Yes, indeed, *Domini* in the genitive and in the nominative—in the genitive (we are the Lord's) because we are his dwelling place, his members, and in the nominative (we are lords) because we rule over all things through faith, which is our victory, and because, thanks be to God, we trample the lion and the dragon underfoot."¹² While Luther did not explicitly connect Romans 14 to

¹⁰LW 35:37.

¹¹Tappert, *Luther: Letters*, 37-38.

¹²Tappert, *Luther: Letters*, 38.

baptism, baptism seems to be implicit in the comfort that he gives to Ruehl, for it is in baptism that God claims sinners as His own children. Hence, this letter of comfort echoes Luther words from *The Holy and Blessed Sacrament*: "This blessed sacrament of baptism helps you because God allies himself with you and becomes one with you in a gracious covenant of comfort."¹³ Through faith, which alone can apprehend the blessings of baptism, the believer is a lord over death and the devil. Recall the words of the Large Catechism: "In baptism, therefore, every Christian has enough to study and practice all his or her life. Christians always have enough to do to firmly believe what baptism promises and brings—victory over death and the devil, the forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts."¹⁴

In a table talk from autumn of 1532 recorded by Conrad Cordatus, Luther addressed predestination from the perspective of baptism. Cordatus reports that Luther warned against speculation regarding election saying that "when a man begins to dispute about it, it is like a fire that cannot be extinguished, and the more he disputes the more he despairs."¹⁵ God shows Himself to be opposed to these troublesome and terrifying thoughts. It is for this reason, said Luther, that God "instituted Baptism, the Word, and the Sacrament as signs to counteract it."¹⁶

Luther sees baptism, along with the preaching of the gospel and the Sacrament of the Altar, as the only sure defense and shield against the despair incited by predestination. Luther says:

¹³LW35:33.

¹⁴Large Catechism IV:41-42; Kolb and Wengert, 461.

¹⁵Tappert, *Luther: Letters*, 122; Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 58 volumes (Weimar, 1883-), TR Number 263 (hereafter abbreviated as WA). Also see the "table talk" recorded by Caspar Heydenreich on February 18, 1542 where Luther addressed predestination (Tappert, *Luther: Letters*, 131-138; WA, TR Number 5658a). Here Luther counseled those who are troubled by questions of divine election not to attempt to "climb into heaven" but to "begin at the bottom with the incarnate Son and with your terrible original sin" (Tappert, *Luther: Letters*, 133). Luther said "God did not come down from heaven to make you uncertain about predestination or cause you to despise the Sacraments. He instituted them to make you more certain and to drive such speculations out of your mind" (Tappert, *Luther: Letters*, 133). Luther continued "... these speculations about predestination are of the devil. If they assault you, say: 'I am a son of God. I have been baptized. I believe in Jesus Christ, who was crucified for me. Let me alone, devil'" (Tappert, *Luther: Letters*, 134).

¹⁶Tappert, *Luther: Letters*, 122.

We should rely on these and say: "I have been baptized. I believe in Jesus Christ. I have received the Sacrament. What do I care if I have been predestined or not?" In Christ, God has furnished us with a foundation on which to stand and from which we can go up to heaven. He is the only way and the only gate that leads to the Father. If we despise this foundation and in the devil's name start building at the roof, we shall surely fall. If only we are able to believe that the promises have been spoken by God and see behind them the one who has spoken them, we shall magnify that Word. But because we hear it as it comes to us through the lips of a man, we are apt to pay as little attention to it as to the mooing of a cow.¹⁷

From this we may observe several aspects of Luther's understanding of baptism. First, baptism is a sign of God's favor in Christ and is based on His promises. Luther wrote "Now the first thing to be considered about baptism is the divine promise. . . . This promise must be set far above all the glitter of works, vows, religious orders and whatever else man has introduced, for on it all our salvation depends."¹⁸ In 1519 Luther spoke of baptism as a sign and token that separates Christians from the unbaptized, baptism is not merely an identifying mark or badge. The sign is fulfilled in that which it signifies, namely dying and rising in Christ. Therefore, Luther wrote:

The significance of baptism—the dying or drowning of sin—is not fulfilled completely in this life. Indeed this does not happen until man passes through bodily death and completely decays to dust. As we can plainly see, the sacrament or sign of baptism is quickly over. But the spiritual baptism, the drowning of sin, which it signifies, lasts as long as we live and is completed only in death. Then it is that a person is completely sunk in baptism, and that which baptism signifies comes to pass.¹⁹

A similar point is made the following year in *The Babylonian Captivity*:

Baptism, then, signifies two things—death and resurrection, that is full and complete justification. When the minister immerses the child in the water it signifies death, and when he draws it forth

¹⁷Tappert, *Luther: Letters*, 122 (WA, TR, Number 2631b).

¹⁸*Babylonian Captivity*, LW 36:58-59.

¹⁹*Holy and Blessed*, LW 35:30.

again, it signifies life. Thus Paul expounds it in Rom. 6 (:4): "We were buried therefore with Christ by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in the newness of life." This death and resurrection we call the new creation, regeneration, and spiritual birth. This should not be understood only allegorically as the death of sin and the life of grace, as many understand it, but as actual death and resurrection. For baptism is not a false sign.²⁰

Baptism is an efficacious sign because of God's word of promise. "Now, the first thing to be considered about baptism is the divine promise," says Luther. Faith clings to the promise: "For just as the truth of the divine promise, once pronounced over us, continues until death, so our faith in it ought never to cease, but be nourished and strengthened until death by the continual remembrance of this promise made to us in baptism."²¹

Second, baptism can be trusted because it is the work of the Triune God. Also in *The Babylonian Captivity*, Luther asserts "For man baptizes, and yet he does not baptize. He baptizes in that he performs the work of immersing the person to be baptized; he does not baptize, because in doing so he acts not on his own authority but in God's stead. Hence, we ought to receive baptism at human hands just as if Christ himself, indeed God, himself, were baptizing us with his own hands."²² This same point is made again in the Large Catechism: "To be baptized in God's name is to be baptized not by human beings but by God himself. Although it is performed by human hands, it is nevertheless truly God's own act. From this fact everyone can easily conclude that it is of much greater value than the work of any human being or saint. For what human work can possibly be greater than God's work?"²³

Therefore, Luther urges those who are troubled by satanic assaults on faith to rely on baptism. Baptism is to be used as weaponry against Satan as he attacks the conscience: "Thus, we must regard baptism and put it to use in such a way that we may draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or conscience oppress us, and say: 'But I am baptized! And if I have been baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have

²⁰LW 36:67-68.

²¹*Babylonian Captivity*, LW 36:58-59.

²²LW 36:62.

²³*Large Catechism* IV:10; Kolb and Wengert, 457-458.

eternal life, both in body and soul."²⁴ And again "Thus we see what a great and excellent thing baptism is, which snatches us from the jaws of the devil and makes us God's own, overcomes and takes away sin and daily strengthens the new person, and always endures and remains until we pass out of this misery into eternal glory."²⁵

Baptism also gives consolation to those who mourn. Caspar Heyenreich, a frequent guest in Luther's home and court chaplain to the Duchess Catherine of Saxony, was away from home when his wife gave birth to a son who died soon after birth. On April 24, 1545, Luther wrote Heyenreich a brief note of sympathy. In it Luther recognized the distress that his friend was experiencing on account of his absence at the birth and death of his son. Yet, Luther urged Heyenreich to take comfort in the knowledge that his son was baptized: "Lay aside your sorrowing. Rejoice, rather, because he was reborn in Christ and because you will see him in glory whom you have not seen in this wretched world."²⁶

Luther treasured baptism as a means of comfort because baptism delivers the benefits of Jesus' cross. A sermon that Luther preached on the occasion of the baptism of Bernhard, son of Prince John of Anhalt on April 2, 1540 illustrates this well. Using the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3:13-17 as his text, Luther sees baptism as the location of a "beautiful,

²⁴*Large Catechism* IV:44-45; Kolb and Wengert, 462.

²⁵*Large Catechism* IV:83; Kolb and Wengert, 466.

²⁶Tappert, *Luther: Letters*, 80 (WA, Br XI 76). As this newborn infant was baptized, Luther directs the grieving father to the certainty of the sacrament. However, Luther is sensitive to those who mourn the death of a child who died before the sacrament could be administered. He takes up this topic in a tract of 1542, *Comfort for Women who Have Had a Miscarriage* (LW 43:247-250; *Ein Trost den Weibern, welchen es ungerade gegangen ist mit Kindergebaeren*, WA 53, 205-208). Here Luther urges the mothers of these unbaptized infants to trust in the mercy and faithfulness of God. Using the example of Monica who prayed for the conversion of Augustine, Luther reminds mourning parents that God has heard their prayers. He writes ". . . because the mother is a believing Christian it is to be hoped that her heartfelt cry and deep longing to bring her child to be baptized will be accepted by God as an effective prayer" (LW 42:248-249). Luther also uses the Old Testament to comfort these women: "Who can doubt that those Israelite children who died before they could be circumcised on the eighth day were yet saved by the prayers of their parents in view of the promise that God will be their God. God (they say) has not limited his power to the sacraments, but has made a covenant with us through his word. Therefore we ought to speak differently and in a more consoling way with Christians than with pagans or wicked people" (LW 42:249).

glorious exchange" where Christ takes upon Himself the sin and guilt of the sinner and bestows on the sinner His righteousness and holiness:

Is not this a beautiful, glorious exchange, by which Christ, who is wholly innocent and holy, not only takes upon himself another's sin, that is my sin and guilt, but also clothes and adorns me, who is nothing but sin, with his own innocence and purity? And then besides dies the shameful death of the Cross for the sake of my sins, through which I have deserved death and condemnation, and grants me his righteousness, in order that I may live with him eternally in glorious and unspeakable joy. Through this blessed exchange, in which Christ changes places with us (something the heart can only grasp in faith), and through nothing else, are we freed from sin and death and given his righteousness and life as our own.²⁷

Faith receives all that Christ has done on the cross in baptism. In the Large Catechism Luther comments that both cross and baptism are a gift to be received, not a work to be done: "Thus you see plainly that baptism is not a work that we do but that it is a treasure that God gives us and faith grasps, just as the Lord Christ upon the cross is not a work but a treasure placed in the setting of the Word and offered to us in the Word and received by faith."²⁸ In language reminiscent of the Large Catechism, Luther preached:

²⁷LW51:316. Tranvik observes, "Following Paul in Romans 6:4, Luther sees baptism as the way the cross and resurrection become contemporaneous with the believer. Baptism effects the 'joyous exchange' (*froehliche Wechsel*), a term Luther used frequently to express his understanding of the atonement" ("Luther on Baptism," 79). Also see Robert Kolb: "... one of the Pauline themes regarding baptism which Luther employed from his earliest treatments of the sacrament, that of dying and rising with Christ (Romans 6:3-11; Col. 2:11-15), is used in this commentary (Galatians 1535) in connection with his presentation of the justification of the sinner before God. It occurs particularly in the context of Luther's image of the 'joyous exchange' of the sinner's unrighteousness for Christ's righteousness. Thus, even in the absence of many explicit references to baptism, in this most important work of Luther's appears one more confirmation of the thesis that Luther's doctrine of justification through faith was shaped, at least in part, by the baptismal theology of the apostle, as expressed above all in Romans 6:3-11 and Colossians 2:11-15" ("God Kills to Make Alive: Romans 6 and Luther's Understanding of Justification (1535)," *Lutheran Quarterly* 12 [Spring 1998]: 34).

²⁸*Large Catechism* IV:37; Kolb and Wengert, 461.

Such knowledge and faith produces a joyful heart, which is certain and can say: I know of no more sins, for they are all lying on Christ's back. Now, they can never lie both upon him and upon us. Therefore no one can say that he makes satisfaction for sin through his own righteousness or discipline; for atonement and redemption of sin belongs to Christ alone. But Christ is neither my work nor yours nor any man's work. Nor are they his body and blood, which he sacrificed for our sins; he is true God, true man, who bears the sins of the whole world. But he takes them and drowns and smothers them in baptism and the Cross, and lets you proclaim that he has given his body for you and poured out his blood for the forgiveness of your sins.²⁹

Baptism, therefore, gives the stricken conscience the consolation of God's favor because it is God's work. Again in words that echo the Large Catechism, Luther draws on the baptism of Jesus as the template for the Christian's baptism as he proclaims that "baptism is not a useless, empty thing, as the sectarians blasphemously say, but in it all righteousness is fulfilled."³⁰ In baptism, sins are forgiven and faith is fortified. Luther continues:

Hence, not only are sins forgiven in baptism, but we are also made sure and certain that God is well pleased with it that he together with Christ and his Holy Spirit, propose to be present when it is administered and he himself will be the baptizer; although this glorious revelation of the divine majesty does not now occur visibly, as it did that time on the Jordan, since it is sufficient that it occurred once as a witness and a sign.³¹

Luther sees the baptism of Jesus as a manifestation of the gospel. We are to look on the Lord's baptism in the Jordan with eyes of faith and so, Luther says, "Interpret this glorious revelation and divine radiance and splendor which shone forth above the baptism of Christ as happening for us."³²

²⁹LW 51:317.

³⁰LW 51:318.

³¹LW 51:318-319.

³²LW 51:319. The year after Luther preached this sermon, he wrote his catechism hymn, "To Jordan Came, the Christ our Lord" (*Lutheran Worship*, hymn 223). Using the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan as a basis for this hymn, Luther sets in hymnic form

Engaging in a catechetical polemic against those who would make baptism only a sign, like a brand that marks a sheep, Luther argues that because God's word has been added to the water, the word creates and effects what it proclaims: "For where the Word of God, by which he created heaven and earth and all things, is present, there God himself is present with his power and might."³³ The Holy Trinity is the actor in baptism: "For when it is done in his name it is done indeed by the Holy Trinity."³⁴ Luther exhorts the congregation to look not at the hand of the minister who administers baptism, but to the word of God that establishes baptism as a bath of regeneration.

Luther then makes a decisive move in the sermon to link cross and baptism more firmly. This he does by using John 19:34 and 1 John 5:16 to establish the point that to be baptized is to be washed in the blood of Christ. Luther sees an image of baptism in the mingled blood and water flowing from the side of the crucified Christ. Likewise, Luther maintains that when the Apostle refers to Christ as coming not only by water but with water and blood (1 John 5:6), "he is always wanting to mingle the blood in the baptism in order that we may see in it the innocent, rosy-red blood of Christ. For human eyes, it is true, there appears to be nothing there but pure white water, but Saint John wants us to open the inward and spiritual eyes of faith in order to see, not only water, but also the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ."³⁵ So, to be baptized is to be washed and

many of the themes set forth in the 1540 sermon, especially the linkage between Christ's atonement and baptism. See Robin Leaver, "Luther's Catechism Hymns 5. Baptism," *Lutheran Quarterly* 12 (Summer 1998): 161-169. Leaver notes the parallelism between the Small Catechism's treatment of baptism and the stanzas of this hymn. Note also how the hymn accents the comfort that faith is given through the Word and promise of the Triune God in baptism as baptism is a bath that washes away transgression and quenches the bitterness of death (stanza 1), bestows the Spirit in the water (stanza 2), causes the Trinity to dwell with us (stanza 4), gives the blessing of salvation and makes one a joyful heir of heaven (stanza 5), and brings healing and pardon, freeing us from sins inherited from Adam and committed by ourselves (stanza 7).

³³LW 51:320.

³⁴LW 51:321.

³⁵LW 51:325. Compare with stanza 7 of Luther's baptismal hymn: All that the mortal eye beholds / Is water as we pour it. / Before the eye of faith unfolds / The pow'r of Jesus' merit. / For here it sees the crimson flood / To all our ills bring healing; / The wonders of his precious blood / The love of God revealing, / Assuring his own pardon (*Lutheran Worship*, hymn 223).

renewed by the blood of Christ's atoning death. Baptism is now the place where God has located the blood that brings forgiveness. Luther continued:

This blood and its merit and power he put into baptism, in order that in baptism we might receive it. For whenever a person receives baptism in faith this is the same as if he were visibly washed and cleansed of sin with the blood of Christ. For we do not attain the forgiveness of sins through our work, but rather through the death and the shedding of the blood of the Son of God. But he takes this forgiveness and tucks it into baptism.³⁶

Luther concludes the sermon by urging his hearers to "magnify and value our precious holy baptism" as a "true image and sign, erected by God himself, in which we surely find and meet with his grace."³⁷ The conclusion of the 1540 sermon recalls Luther's praise of baptism in the Large Catechism: "No greater jewel, therefore, can adorn our body and soul than baptism, for through it we become completely holy and blessed, which no work on earth can acquire."³⁸

In summary, Luther sees baptism as an evangelical means of consolation in times of *Anfechtung*, as well as physical suffering, because it draws the believer outside of himself into Christ's saving death. The fact that baptism is external provides faith with a reliable anchorage outside of wavering emotions. The certainty of baptism is to be found in the trustworthiness of God's promise and work. Mark Tranvik aptly describes Luther's position:

Luther also underscored the importance of the external sign because of faith's fragility. He likens faith to "butter in the sunshine." While Luther will always maintain that trust in the promise makes baptism

Quitmeyer's translation fails fully to convey Luther's thought as Luther does not speak generically of baptism as an assurance or even revelation of God's love, but of baptism as the agency of liberation from the sin of Adam, as well as our own, through the blood of Christ. Note the original German text: Das Aug allein das Wasser sieht, / Wie Menschen Wasser giessen; / Der Glaub im Geist die Kraft versteht / Des Bluttes Jesu Christi, / Und ist vor ihm ein rote Flut, / Von Christi Blut gefaerbet, / Die allen Schaden heilen tut, / Von Adam her geerbet, / Auch von uns selbst begangen (WA 35:468-470).

³⁶LW 51:325.

³⁷LW 51:327-328.

³⁸Large Catechism IV:46; Kolb and Wengert, 462.

efficacious, he is wary of focusing on faith: "One must believe, but we neither should nor can know it for certain." Therefore, one dare not base his baptism on his faith. For who can be sure if he really believes? The enthusiasts' stress on subjectivity, like the late medieval view of penance and monasticism, troubles Luther because it puts the question of salvation back into the hands of a frail and doubting humanity. God, however, is merciful. He comes to us via outward means—water, bread, and wine. He pledges himself to us in these visible and tangible signs, for "faith must have something to believe—something to which it may cling and upon which it may stand."³⁹

Baptism is a place of refuge for the troubled and distressed soul because it encompasses the whole of the Christian's life. Already in *The Babylonian Captivity*, Luther condemned Jerome's notion of penance as "the second plank after the shipwreck of baptism as a pernicious error."⁴⁰ He repeats this condemnation in the Large Catechism, concluding that Jerome's view "takes away the value of baptism, making of it no further use to us."⁴¹ Baptism has value precisely because it embraces the entire life of the believer from font to grave and entails "daily contrition and repentance" to use the words of the Small Catechism.⁴² Luther is explicit on this point in the Large Catechism: "Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, begun once and continuing ever after. For we must keep at it without ceasing, always purging whatever pertains to the old Adam, so that whatever belongs to the new creature may come forth."⁴³

³⁹Tranvik, "Luther on Baptism," 83-84.

⁴⁰LW 36:61.

⁴¹Large Catechism IV:82.

⁴²Small Catechism IV:12; Kolb and Wengert, 360.

⁴³Large Catechism IV:65; Kolb and Wengert, 465. Also note Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Luther*, 170: "The circularity of the Christian life for Luther is reflected in several aspects of his theology. Conversion itself becomes, not an event, but a state to be persevered in by the Christian who must be *semper penitens*. The indivisibility of grace is another expression of the same principle; for Luther the Christian is no longer a pilgrim travelling from one degree, mode, or means of grace to another. But perhaps it is in the *simul* doctrine that the circularity of the Christian life comes to its clearest expression. A Christian never progresses beyond the need for justification because of the nature of justification itself—he remains a sinner although righteousness is imputed to him as he lives by faith. But living in faith is a continuous necessity, not a once-for-all event. Sin remains, the need for repentance and faith remains. The person who is *simul justus peccator*, who is living at once in two kingdoms, who is both

For Luther, the medieval penitential practices are replaced by a renewed emphasis on the baptismal life as the life of repentance and faith. Confession and absolution remain, but are envisioned in connection to baptism and a return to the forgiveness of sins bestowed in baptism.

flesh and spirit, is, in Oberman's phrase, 'man between God and the devil.' The life of faith is no complacent reflection on past victories but an armed struggle."

Luther's Care of Souls for Our Times

Reinhard Slenczka

Introduction

Over 450 years have passed since the death of Martin Luther (February 18, 1546). All Protestant churches should be grateful for the work of the Reformer, but especially those churches that—against his express will—call themselves “Lutheran.” However, do we, as Lutherans in proclamation and catechesis, still uphold the chief concern of the Reformation? Reformation, that is, re-formation, aims at the elimination of deformations, abuses, and defects that invade and appear in the church at all times. In this sense, thinking about “Luther’s care of souls for our times” is not only about remembering a godly man, but also about examination of our church today.¹

This examination starts with the questions: What actually is pastoral care? What is the current state of pastoral care and pastors? No doubt, this theme is of high and immediate interest for the (continuous) education of theologians at theological research institutes, academies, conventions, and retreats, especially in the context of the ever-increasing supply of counseling agencies and pastoral care given by phone. The number of internal and external needs is high in our times. Therefore, there is a high demand and a corresponding supply in this field of church activity. Counseling in situations of moral conflict is doubtlessly in the limelight, and here pertinent knowledge and training are required in order to understand and help. It is not surprising that conflicts in the areas of marriage, family, and raising children, as well as economic concerns, are in the foreground. However, it might be worthwhile asking to what extent such counseling in the name of the church and in facilities owned by the church is done in accordance with the foundations of the Christian faith. Psychology as “the science of the soul,” or, as the German author Thomas Mann translated this word, “the dissection of the soul,” is the precondition and method for meeting needs.

¹This paper was presented in part at a meeting of the Friends of the Evangelical Academy Tutzing on September 24, 1996, in Dinkelsbühl, Bavaria, Germany. The concluding part, “Luther as pastor for Livonia,” was added later.

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But what is the soul? In modern psychology, the soul is almost exclusively equated with consciousness and subconsciousness; that is, that which moves man in his reasoning, feeling, and desiring. Consequently, satisfaction and self-consciousness are goals of such care and counseling.

Yet, the expansive conceptual domain of "soul," in connection with heart and conscience, has a thoroughly biblical foundation. The soul has to do not only with self-consciousness. Rather, throughout both the Old and New Testaments it is about the relationship between God and man. This is clear in the double commandment of love of God and the neighbor: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your *heart*, with all your *soul*, and with all your strength" and "you shall love your neighbor as *yourself*: I am the Lord" ([Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18] compare Matthew 22:37-39).

It is noted here that according to the meaning and use of the word "soul," physical and psychical dimensions coincide because "soul" denotes both the conscience and the act of breathing. We know that the same holds true for the heart, as this blood pump reacts to internal and external impulses. This is why it is so telling that the soul can be addressed in direct speech: "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise him, the help of my countenance and my God" (Psalm 42:11; Psalm 43:5). The soul is also the center of responsibility before God. For example, the Rich Fool says to his soul: "'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'" (Luke 12:19-20).

The admonitions in the epistles of the New Testament are always meant as a reminder of baptism. They are also aimed at the soul, as can be seen in the First Epistle of Peter: "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever" (1:22-23).

The following admonition is also directed at the soul: "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable" (1 Peter 2:11-12). In the Epistle of James this relationship between God and soul established by

means of the word is also addressed: "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). Additionally, a warning is issued for the congregation in view of its responsibility for those who have fallen from the truth and are to be led back: "He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:20).

More examples could easily be given, but those mentioned are enough to demonstrate that, according to the Bible, the soul is not something like an organ or the limited area of the conscious and the subconscious. Rather, it has to do with man as a whole in his relation to God; that is, in his communion with God that is established by word and sacrament and consummated in faith. About the hope founded therein it is said: "This (hope) we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil" (Hebrews 6:19). This anchor of the soul enters the communion with Jesus, the High Priest, unto eternity. This means time and eternity are connected here in the communion with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. One needs to keep these facts in mind in order to be able to understand what Christian care of the soul is all about.

To conclude these preliminary considerations, the question might be raised whether pastoral care can be taught and learned at all. This is obviously presupposed for programs of education. Consequently, the content and methods of pastoral care have become more and more independent in theory and practice. This is, however, only a quite recent development. Originally, pastoral care's field of activity was confession and repentance; that is, acknowledgment and confession of sin and the declaration of forgiveness. It might again be a serious question whether, and in which form, pastoral care deals with the acknowledgment of sins and forgiveness today. Yet what is necessary here are not certain methodical insights, but spiritual authority, which is founded on and limited by Jesus Christ's word, His gift to His disciples, and His commission of them: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."² That is to say, spiritual gifts are not gained by training and effort, but conferred and awakened. It is an old, but now forgotten, rule

²John 20:22-23; Matthew 16:19; 18:18.

that pastoral care is learned by receiving pastoral care. Consequently, it has also been forgotten that pastors need pastoral care. This, too, is a shortcoming in our times.

We now have presented several observations regarding the duties, problems, and, above all, the presuppositions of pastoral care and being a pastor in our times. Let us now consider the topic in Martin Luther's thought and practice.

Foundation, Contents, and the Place of Pastoral Care in Luther

When one attempts to extract the nature of pastoral care from Luther's life biographically and in his writings thematically, one quickly finds that this is not feasible.³ Life and the work form a unit in Luther, and person and subject matter are inseparably connected. The much cited "quest for the propitious God" was Luther's own plight, which led him into the monastery and forced him time and again into confession and acts of penance. The declaration of the justification of the sinner through faith in Jesus Christ alone is the glad tiding that shaped Luther's pastoral care throughout the remainder of his life. Everything is defined and permeated by the fact that he had experienced the deep fear of God's judgment and that the light of forgiving love had dawned on him in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Be it his sermons and letters, hymns and prayers, academic lectures and disputations, or even pamphlets, doctrinal writings, and catechisms—everywhere there is what one might call pastoral care received and passed on.

Thus, he tells his students at the beginning of the semester in his Lecture on Psalms: "And this is what I see, that he is not a theologian who knows great things and teaches many things, but he who lives holy and

³Compare, among others, Theodor Brandt, *Luthers Seelsorge in seinen Briefen* (Witten, Germany: Luther-Verlag, 1962); Ute Mennecke-Haustein, *Luthers Trostbriefe* (Gütersloh, Germany: Gütersloher Verlags-Haus Mohn, 1988); Gerhard Ebeling, "Der theologische Grundzug der Seelsorge Luthers," in *Luther als Seelsorger*, edited by J. Heubach (Erlangen: Martin Luther Verlag, 1991): 21-48; Gerhard Ebeling, "Trostbriefe Luthers an Leidtragende," in *Kirche in der Schule Luthers: Festschrift für D. Joachim Heubach*, edited by B. Hägglund and G. Müller (Erlangen: Martin-Luther-Verlag, 1995), 37-48. Meanwhile, a comprehensive and impressive presentation of this theme has been published: Gerhard Ebeling, *Luthers Seelsorge: Theologie in der Vielfalt der Lebenssituationen an seinen Briefen dargestellt* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1997).

theologically [that is, according to the word of God]. The more I become estranged from this life, the more I dislike my profession."⁴

Luther engaged in a fierce battle with Erasmus of Rotterdam concerning the freedom and bondage of the will and the testimony of Scripture, according to which God says: "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated" (Romans 9:13, Malachi 1:2, 3). How does one comprehend that some understand and some are hardened, that God wants all to be saved, yet some are lost? At all times one is tempted to solve this contradiction, for example, by a principle of general love and final restitution of all things. Luther perceives the problem very clearly—and thereby also humanity's opposition: "It has been regarded as unjust, as cruel, as intolerable, to entertain such an idea about God, and this is what has offended so many great men during so many centuries. And who would not be offended?" It is one thing to stand before a problem trying to solve it; it is yet another thing to endure a problem. Thus Luther continues: "I myself was offended more than once, and brought to the very depth and abyss of despair, so that I wished I had never been created a man, before I realized how salutary that despair was, and how near to grace."⁵ Here we arrive at the center—the nature of grace. The question of what grace is, whereby it is recognized, and how it is received, will be treated in what follows.

Whenever the quest for the propitious God is perceived as the starting point of the Reformer's realization, then the question is quickly raised whether this is still the quest of humankind today. Many claim that today's humankind does not ask about God, but that it is rather moved by the questions: How do I get a propitious neighbor? How can I make sense of my life? What can we do, and what do we have to do, in order to save humanity's *lebensraum* from self-destruction?

Luther describes how priests in his time used the pulpit to generate the fear of judgment: "Hence the expression in the pulpit when the general confession was recited to the people: 'Prolong my life, Lord God, until I

⁴Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 58 volumes (Weimar, 1883-), 5:26,18-21. Hereafter abbreviated as WA.

⁵J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann, editors, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 volumes (Saint Louis: Concordia and Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-1986), 33:190. Hereafter abbreviated as LW.

make satisfaction for my sins and amend my life."⁶ Yet, and this is how Luther continues, the flaw of this proclamation does not lie in the urgency of its call to repentance, rather, "There was no mention here of Christ or of faith. Rather, men hoped by their own works to overcome and blot out their sins before God."⁷

When the quest for the propitious God leads one to attempt to propitiate God, then it is a wrong quest, caused by flawed proclamation and catechization. Luther, reflecting on his own experience, once told his congregation in a sermon on the baptism of Jesus how it should be:

Oh, when would you finally become pious and do enough to have a propitious God? Thoughts like these drove me into monkery where I tortured and vexed myself with fasting, freezing, and a strict life. Yet I did not accomplish anything with this except that I lost dear Baptism myself, even helped deny it. . . . Therefore, in order not to be seduced by such, let us uphold this teaching pure that, as we see and grasp here, baptism is neither our work nor doing, and maintain a great and deep difference between God's works and our works.⁸

The remembrance of baptism as the work that God does to us is therefore the right answer to the wrong quest for the propitious God.⁹

Another issue that needs to be explored regarding Luther's pastoral care is God's word of Holy Scripture. When we, in today's pastoral care and catechization, are confronted with the difficulties of having to translate Holy Scripture as a text from times long past into today's situation and hermeneutical presuppositions, then the Bible may seem to be alien and outdated to us. In Luther, however, we encounter an immediate use of Scripture that is thoroughly defined by the fact that

⁶One might also inquire whether and where people today are called to repentance and confession. Rather, are not consciences calmed and reassured by telling them in proclamation, catechization, and in public statements: "In our situation and according to the latest scientific discoveries this and that is to be seen and done differently"?

⁷Smalcald Articles III, 13-14, in 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). Hereafter abbreviated as Tappert.

⁸WA 37:661,23-27, 35-38.

⁹This might raise the question of how we deal with the remembrance of baptism and the responsible administration of baptism in the Christian congregation.

God Himself is present in His word, in which He speaks and through which He acts. This is something entirely different than understanding and consenting. This might be illustrated by an example from Luther's exposition of the narration of the fall in Genesis 3. One needs to remember that the word "sin" is not used in this story, but certain events, relations between the creatures of God, and their relation to their creator are described. The word is the means of relation between God and man, and this begins with the permission, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat," and the prohibition, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). The fall begins when the creatures, the serpent and Eve, engage in a discussion about the question, "Has God indeed said . . ." (Genesis 3:1). Here the exegesis starts with the discussion about wording, validity, and application of God's word. Thereby salvation and condemnation, death and life is decided.

The biblical narrative has a foundational meaning for all times, and it is this point that Luther makes clear in his exposition. The temptation to sin starts by rendering God's unequivocal word problematic: "Unbelief is the source of all sins; when Satan brought about this unbelief by driving out or corrupting the Word, the rest was easy for him." What happens here, therefore, does not take place apart from the word, it is rather done to the word and through the word. This is why the text goes on: "'Every evil begins in the name of the Lord.' Therefore just as from the true Word of God salvation results, so also from the corrupt Word of God damnation results. By 'corrupt word' however, I do not mean only the ministry of the spoken Word but also the inner conviction or opinions that are in disagreement with the Word."¹⁰

Luther continues, "For if God and his will can only be known through the Word of God of Holy Scripture, then we are dealing with a false god and an alien will, if this Word is deformed or if we turn away from it. This is why it is true that 'this is the beginning and the main part of every temptation, when reason tries to reach a decision about the Word and God on its own without the Word.'" In relation to the word and through the word, our relation to God and, conversely, God's relation to us are decided. Another important observation that Luther passes on to his students is part of this: "This is what the devil is wont to bring about in

¹⁰LW 1:147.

all his temptations, that the farther man draws away from the Word, the more learned and the wiser he appears to himself."¹¹

Thus, for Luther, the way we understand is the effect of God's word on us. The effect of God's word, however, takes place in law and gospel. Yet this, too, is not a teaching that one may appropriate or that one may or may not understand; it is rather something to be learned, and this happens by listening to God's word of Holy Scripture. This directly touches on the care of souls because here the human soul is touched by the word of God.

So far we have been considering examples from the academic realm. Now let us look at examples from Luther's table talk. In these conversations, which his student guests recorded, Luther frequently narrated what he personally experienced and taught. Three aspects of this effect of the word of God in law and gospel will be illustrated by quotes.

1. The first points to the fact that no one can be a theologian without the understanding of this distinction between law and gospel:

Anybody who wishes to be a theologian must have a fair mastery of the Scriptures, so that he may have an explanation for whatever can be alleged against any passage. That is to say, he must distinguish between law and gospel. If I were able to do this perfectly I would never again be sad. Whoever apprehends this has won.

Whatever is Scripture is either law or gospel. One of the two must triumph: the law leads to despair, the gospel leads to salvation. I learn more about this every day. . . . The gospel is life. The pope drove me to this; he opened my eyes to it. It is as Augustine said to himself: the heretics provoke us to search the Scriptures. Otherwise nobody would think about them.¹²

Let us look closely here: Despair and salvation—but correspondingly also judgment and grace, understanding and hardening—are part of the effect of God's word in law and gospel. Luther can say accordingly: "Every word of God terrifies and comforts us, hurts and heals; it breaks down and builds up; it plucks up and plants again; it humbles and exalts

¹¹LW1:154, 160.

¹²LW54:111, #626 (1533).

[Jeremiah 1:10].¹³ Thus, human experiences are not simply addressed, they are triggered; and it is worthwhile considering whether we do not miss or get in the way of this experience because we think that we first have to introduce preparations and adaptations in order to understand the word of God.

2. The second insight is that the distinction between law and gospel is not caused by the ability or knowledge of the reader or listener, but that it is the gift and effect of the Spirit of God in God's word:

There's no man living on earth who knows how to distinguish between the law and the gospel. We may think we understand it when we are listening to a sermon, but we're far from it. Only the Holy Spirit knows this. Even the man Christ was so wanting in understanding when he was in the vineyard that an angel had to console him [John 12:27-29]; though he was a doctor from heaven he was strengthened by the angel. Because I've been writing so much and so long about it, you'd think I'd know the distinction, but when a crisis comes I recognize very well that I am far, far from understanding. So God alone should and must be our holy master.¹⁴

To realize and to confess ignorance is evidence of the effect of God working through His word.

3. The third reference from a table talk on the effect of and the distinction between law and gospel is aimed at the devil. One is not to be fearful of the devil, but one is to recognize him and avoid him. According to the testimony of Scripture, the narration of Jesus being tempted by the devil is of foundational significance (Matthew 4:1-11). After the Sonship of Jesus was revealed in the word on the occasion of His baptism, He is led by the Spirit (of God!) into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Each of the three temptations aims at one manifest proof of the Sonship of Jesus Christ: "If you are the Son of God. . . ." The temptation is fended off time and again by the persistent reference: "It is written. . . ." The second temptation shows how the devil himself refers to the word and says: "It is written. . . ." Finally, the decisive stage is reached when worship and the First Commandment are at stake, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve." The Son of God has

¹³LW 42:37.

¹⁴LW 54:127, #1234 (1531).

overcome this temptation for us. Yet, His example shows us how the rebellion against God is triggered and revealed by the word of God. This would be impossible without the word. This also holds for law and gospel, as it is stated:

It's the supreme art of the devil that he can make the law out of the gospel. If I can hold on to the distinction between law and gospel, I can say to him any and every time that he should kiss my backside. Even if I sinned I would say, "Should I deny the gospel on this account?" It hasn't come to that yet. Once I debate about what I have done and left undone, I am finished. But if I reply on the basis of the gospel, "The forgiveness of sins covers it all," I have won. On the other hand, if the devil gets me involved in what I have done and left undone, he has won, unless God helps and says, "Indeed! Even if you had not done anything, you would still have to be saved by forgiveness, for you have been baptized, communicated, etc."¹⁵

The examples that have been presented show the direct effect of the word of God, which we evade when we think we first have to enable or find an intellectual access by bridging the historical distance. The pertinent, serious pastoral question for us here is what actually remains of God's word of Holy Scripture when we—pushing it back into the past and distancing us from it historically—completely overlook how it is present and having an effect in our times, namely, at the center of the Divine Service.

A last observation regarding the foundation, content, and place of pastoral care in Luther relates to the catechism. The catechisms of Luther emerged from a series of sermons, and this might serve as a reminder that they are actual proclamation and catechization. They are, therefore, not to be put back on the shelf like a common book. In the preface to the Small Catechism we find two observations that are foundational for pastoral care. On the one hand, Luther states that every member of the congregation—not only the children—needs to know this basic knowledge of the Christian faith, that is, needs to memorize it. Having memorized the text, then they can begin to integrate and apply it to their life.¹⁶ Luther's thrust is that the language of the faith must be learned first and must be memorized. To use more than one form will confuse things,

¹⁵LW 54:106, #590 (1533).

¹⁶Small Catechism, Preface 14; Tappert, 339.

for "... young and inexperienced people must be instructed on the basis of a uniform, fixed text and form. They are easily confused if a teacher employs one form now and another form . . . later on."¹⁷

The other aspect Luther points to in the preface to the Small Catechism is the foundational significance of the parts of the catechism, not only for the existence of the Christian congregation but also for the surrounding community. This has to do with the specific formation of the consciences and their preparation for the distinction between good and evil, between justice and injustice. Here also the foundations for the existence of a human community in family, society, and state are at stake. This is why Luther stated:

You should also take pains to urge governing authorities and parents to rule wisely and educate their children. They must be shown that they are obliged to do so, and that they are guilty of damnable sin if they do not do so, for by such neglect they undermine and lay waste both the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world and are the worst enemies of God and man.¹⁸

Thus, in the catechism—as summary of God's word—the Christian responsibility for the two kingdoms, for that of the heavens and that of the world, is concentrated. This is not simply a question of the possibility of adaptation, but one of the necessity of existence.

This opens a vast horizon for the responsibility of the Christian congregation and its members. Luther gave many practical instructions in this regard, especially the main parts of the catechism. They are a summary of God's word in its different aspects, as it addresses the Christian life and work. Concerning this he says in the small tract "A Simple Way to Pray" that all parts should be meditated under different aspects in a practicing form of contemplation: As a teaching to learn what God requires of me; as a thanksgiving by acknowledging what I receive from God; as confession by admitting what I have left undone; and finally, as a prayer whereby I bring before God what I lack.¹⁹

This is the foundation, content, and place of pastoral care, as well as the introduction to what happens to us and what ought to happen through

¹⁷Small Catechism, Preface 7; Tappert, 339.

¹⁸Small Catechism, Preface 19; Tappert, 340.

¹⁹Compare LW 43:200.

us. The many practical examples of pastoral care that could be listed have this as their common presupposition, namely, that God is present and active in His word.

Consolation—Admonition—Support

Consolation, admonition, and support are the three meanings of the Greek word παράκλησις; παράκλητος, by which the person and the work of the Holy Spirit are characterized. It might also be translated as demand and gift, and this is the process of pastoral care, namely, to provide consolation, admonition, and support with the word of God.

The following section presents three examples for this, mostly from Luther's letters. Usually, these letters begin with the salutation "Grace and peace in the Lord" — *gratiam et pacem in Christo!* We find this phrase at the beginning, and at times at the end, of the epistles of the New Testament. This is no empty formula. "Grace" means gift, pardon of deserved punishment or guilt. "Peace" means reconciliation after war or wrath. "In Christ" means through Him these things are given, with Him we are also connected with each other, and this is what the Spirit-caused essence of the Christian church is all about.

An Example of Consolation

"Consolation" is commonly used in a way largely defined by the biblical language, even if this is not clearly recognized. The biblical words for "consolation" and "consoling" describe how one encourages a child or a sick person to take heart again. The opposites of consolation and consoling, however, are fear, anxiety, dejection, grief, and despair. In a person's life there are many occasions for the latter, yet we often do not know what to say to someone suffering with these feelings. Even pastors have difficulties in this respect and may not know what to say. Genuine pastoral care consoles with God's word of Holy Scripture. This is what Luther himself experienced, passed on, and offers for our edification in the present.

Luther spent the summer of 1530 at Coburg Castle, while the cause of the Reformation was debated at the Diet of Augsburg. Since 1521 he had been outlawed and banned, therefore he could have been killed by anyone. On the border of the Saxon territory at the Coburg he was safe. From here he corresponded with his colleagues at the Diet.

During this time he wrote an exposition of Psalm 118: "Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For his mercy endures forever." This psalm is a song of thanksgiving in view of internal anxiety and external persecution. It says, in part: "The Lord is my strength and song. And He has become my salvation" (14). "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death" (17, 18).

In his dedication to the "*Beautiful Confitemini*" Luther wrote to a friend:

This is my own beloved psalm. . . . Sad to say, there are few, even among those who should do better, who honestly say even once in their lifetime to Scripture or to one of the psalms: "You are my beloved book; you must be my very own psalm." The neglect of Scripture, even by spiritual leaders, is one of the greatest evils in the world. Everything else, arts or literature, is pursued and practiced day and night, and there is no end of labor and effort; but Holy Scripture is neglected as though there were no need of it. . . . But its words are not, as some think, mere literature; they are words of life, intended not for speculation and fantasy but for life and action. But why complain? No one pays any attention to our lament. May Christ our Lord help us by His Spirit to love and honor His holy Word with all our hearts.²⁰

Verse 5 of this psalm reads: "I called on the Lord in distress; the Lord answered me and comforted me." Luther views this as a description of the human situation. Further, though, he believes that it indicates what will happen when God, in His acting, is identified and addressed with God's word. Some examples:

In Hebrew the word "distress" means "something narrow." I surmise that the German noun for distress [*angst*] is also derived from an adjective meaning narrow [*eng*]. It implies fear and pain, as in a process of clamping, squeezing, and pressing. Trials and misfortunes do squeeze and press, as is indicated by the proverb: "The great wide world is too narrow for me." In Hebrew "in a large place" is used in contrast to "distress." "Distress" means tribulation and need; "in a large place" denotes consolation and help. Accordingly this verse really says: "I called upon the Lord in my

²⁰LW 14:45-46.

trouble; He heard me and helped me by comforting me." Just as distress is a narrow place, which casts us down and cramps us, so God's help is our large place, which makes us free and happy. Note the great art and wisdom of faith. It does not run to and fro in the face of trouble. It does not cry on everybody's shoulder, nor does it curse and scold its enemies. It does not murmur against God by asking: "Why does God do this to me? Why not to others, who are worse than I am?" Faith does not despair of the God who sends trouble. Faith does not consider Him angry or an enemy, as the flesh the world, and the devil strongly suggest. Faith rises above all this and sees God's fatherly heart behind His unfriendly exterior. Faith sees the sun shining through these thick, dark clouds and this gloomy weather. Faith has the courage to call with confidence to Him who smites it and looks at it with such sour a face.²¹

To us, this might seem easier said than done. Luther himself says that this happens by no means out of our own reason and strength. Rather, "this is skill above all skills. It is the work of the Holy Spirit alone and is known only by pious and true Christians."²² It is all too human to see prosperity and well-being as God's grace, but misfortune as God's wrath and punishment.

Human nature cannot acquire this skill. As soon as God touches it with a little trouble, it is frightened and filled with despair, and can only think that grace is at an end and that God has nothing but wrath toward it. The devil also adds his power and trickery, in order to drown it in doubt and despondency. The situation is aggravated by the provoking sight of God showering abundant blessings on the other three groups. Then human nature begins to think that the others have only the grace of God and none of His anger. Then the poor conscience becomes weak; it would collapse were it not for the help and comfort that come from God, through pious pastors, or by some good Christian's counsel.²³

The word of God, however, that is given us and placed in our mouth teaches us to recognize God's presence and power over everything and

²¹LW 14:59.

²²LW 14:59.

²³LW 14:59 and following.

to claim them and to cling to them and be held by them. Then one comes to recognize:

[God] wants to drive him to pray, to implore, to fight, to exercise his faith, to learn another aspect of God's person than before, to accustom himself to do battle even with the devil and with sin, and by the grace of God to be victorious. Without this experience we could never learn the meaning of faith, the Word, Spirit, grace, sin, death, or the devil. Were there only peace and no trial, we would never learn to know God Himself. In short, we could never be or remain true Christians. Trouble and distress constrain us and keep us within Christendom. Crosses and troubles, therefore, are as necessary for us as life itself, and much more necessary and useful than all the possessions and honor in the world.²⁴

In the same way as Luther himself was comforted by God's word, so he was able to comfort others. An example of this is one of the letters that he sent from the Coburg to Philip Melanchthon in Augsburg, where there were great difficulties in the negotiations. The delegation of theologians from Saxony had doubts whether they would be able to withstand. Luther wrote to Melanchthon, whom he addressed as "beloved brother and disciple/student of Christ." He emphatically stated that he was not arguing his own case, but God's case: "Should it be a filthy lie that God has given his Son for us, then let the devil or one of his creatures be man in my stead. But if it is true, what should we do about our tiresome fears, trembling, worries, and sadness? Should not he who has given his Son help us with easier affairs, or should Satan be more powerful than he?"

This is not about success in a superficial way, in which one makes one's own way. Rather, the point is to strengthen the certainty that God's will prevails. Thus he warned Melanchthon not to attempt to penetrate the hidden mystery of the glory and counsel of God.

"He who searches the Majesty, will be slain by its glory," or, as the Hebrew text [of Prov. 25:27] reads, "He who searches heavy things, will be weighed down by them." And this is true for you. May the Lord Jesus preserve you "that your faith should not fail" [Luke 22:32] but grow and prevail. Amen. I pray for you, have prayed for you, and will pray for you, and I do not doubt that I will be heard.

²⁴LW 14:60.

I feel this Amen in my heart. If what we want does not happen, it will still happen what is better. For we wait for the coming kingdom when all things in this world will have disappointed.²⁵

Luther wrote to Justus Jonas at the same time:

Philip is tormented by his philosophy [according to which he thinks everything depends on himself] and by nothing else. For [our] affairs are in the hands of him who dares to say in the most audacious manner, "No one shall snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28). I do not want them to be in our hands, and it would not be well advised, either. I had so many things in my hands and have lost everything, I have not retained one thing. Yet what I have been able to throw out of my hands onto him, this I have retained save and sound unto this day. For it is true, "God is our refuge and strength" (Ps. 46:1) (A Mighty Fortress is Our God...), "Who was ever put to shame who put his hope in the Lord?" (Sir. 2:11) – thus asks the Sage, and again, "You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you" (Ps. 9:10).²⁶

One quote from Scripture follows the next. Clearly, only he who knows that God speaks and acts in His word that is given to us as a gift is able to write in such a manner.

Admonition (or Rebuke)

Admonition (or rebuke) is the second element of the care of souls. Whoever shrinks away from this or rejects it altogether needs to remember that in the Bible this aspect is included in the same word that also means "to comfort." Admonition, however, means that a person who is on the wrong track is rebuked and called to repentance by the word of God. We are called and led back to what we have received and to what we are through baptism, cleansing from sin, and walking in the Spirit. God's commandments – which are, contrary to the opinion of many, unchangeable – are the standard for this simply because they are also the standard, perceptible in time, for the judgment of the living and the dead at the end of all times.

²⁵WA Br 5:411,13-412,18; 413,56-63, #1611 (June 30, 1530).

²⁶WA Br 5:409,18-25, #1610.

From the pulpit and the lecturing desk it is easy to denounce issues that are against God's will or to demonstrate that absentees have violated the commandments. However, it is extraordinarily difficult—even impossible—to make an individual person respond to his violation of a commandment of God. For, according to human etiquette, this is offensive and is considered an intrusion upon one's privacy. Yet, Scripture portrays the matter differently. It is not about the condemnation of the sinner, but about his salvation from condemnation through repentance and forgiveness. From this insight stems the urgency with which Paul writes to the Corinthians in view of the many defects in their congregation: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Galatians 5:19-21).

True pastoral care aims at salvation from condemnation. The commandments are the standard for the knowledge of sin; the gospel is the glad tidings of forgiveness for the repentant. This task of the pastor is necessary for salvation, yet many times in human relations it is difficult.

In Luther's sermons and letters we find numerous instances of this personal rebuke and recall. Two letters will suffice as examples. The first, written on July 10, 1531 to the preacher Conrad Cordatus in Zwickau, is about "the official duty of the Christian preachers to punish the sin of the people."²⁷ The second, written on January 27, 1543 to "a certain city council," asserts "that pastors cannot be removed from office because they severely punish public vices."²⁸ Both cases are about conflicts between the pastor and the city council. In the first letter the pastor is encouraged and emboldened to exercise his office and not to remain silent out of fear; otherwise he would neglect his office of a watchman:

It is not appropriate for the pastor to remain silent concerning the sacrilege and injustice committed by the council to him, much less to approve of them, especially because they defend their sin as right and well done. For there is no forgiveness of sin unless the sins are recognized and confessed; and there is endurance of violence and injustice only with those who publicly confess that they are enemies

²⁷Dr. Martin Luthers *Sämmtliche Schriften*, edited by Johannes Georg Walch (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1880-1910), 10:1606-1607. Hereafter abbreviated as SL.

²⁸SL 10:1624-1629.

of the Word. Yet the sins of those who glorify themselves as brothers cannot be tolerated by devout pastors; they need to be punished (Matt. 18:15). The pastors cannot remain silent, much less approve of sin, or else they have to bear the terrible judgment according to Ezekiel 3:18, "His blood I will require at your hand." Therefore, if they want to glorify themselves as brothers, that is, Christians, they have to have their sins punished, have to confess them, and have to amend their lives. Yet if they want to defend their sins as something rightly done, let them for the time being confess that they are not Christians but persecutors and enemies of divine doctrine.²⁹

Luther does not mention here, like in so many other letters, what had been the cause for this argument. The pastoral letters of Luther are not talkative and their point is above all not to describe sin, but to lead to repentance and forgiveness.

This letter encourages a pastor to exercise his office and to seek what serves the salvation of the flock entrusted to him. In the second letter, Luther defends a pastor against a council that wants to remove him from office. Luther carefully examines whether the minister did something wrong. Since there is, even after the hearing of witnesses, nothing that speaks against the pastor, Luther emphatically admonishes the council. The core of this admonition and rebuke is that, according to Luke 10:16, Christ Himself speaks in the word of the preacher:

The first case is this that, if you should scorn and hate your pastor without any reason — this means to scorn Christ himself, the highest of all pastors — you will stumble at the stumbling stone and burn yourselves with the consuming fire. For a single pious, devout pastor is more important to him than all political authorities of the whole world. For their office does not serve him to his heavenly kingdom, as does the office of the pastor. By this office he manages to shut up their hearts and mouths because they do not believe, so you cannot pray, praise, nor lift up your heads before God in any trouble, as he says, Matthew 5:24, "Leave your gift there before the altar and be reconciled first." Then you would not be Christians anymore, would have excommunicated yourselves; that is terrible.³⁰

²⁹SL 10:1606-1607.

³⁰SL 10:1625-1626.

It should be clear to everyone that the word admonition (or rebuke) touches on a sensitive aspect of our church life that is relevant for pastors and congregations alike. Yet it should be clear also that the clarity and the urgency of the admonition according to the standard of the unchangeable commandments of God is fearfully revoked to the same extent to which the interest is solely motivated by human sympathy and antipathy. The fear of the judgment of men — by whom one wants to be liked, whom one does not want to lose or exclude — then becomes greater than the seriousness of God's judgment out of which the sinner is to be saved through repentance and forgiveness.

Intercessor

Intercessor (or proxy) and support describe the third aspect of the activity of the Holy Spirit that defines pastoral care. In addition to consolation and admonition, one intercedes for one another and acts, like an attorney, in another's stead. Romans 8:26-27 reads: "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself makes intercessions for us with groanings that cannot be uttered. Now he who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God."

It is important to see here how the Spirit of God is in us. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit is distinguished from our own spirit, especially when our spirit is weak, lacking the courage to turn to God in prayer. Conversely, it is said of the same Spirit: "The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16). The Spirit's acting as intercessor (or proxy) first of all leads to the recognition that we do not have faith or lead our life in faith out of our own resources. Secondly, it thereby becomes obvious that God is close to us — even within us — in a way that we are only able to recognize through God's word.

The last example showed how Luther pointed a Christian city council to the fact that Christ Himself is present, speaking, and acting in the word of the preacher. The third example I have selected points us to the way in which Christ is present in the sick, the poor, and the captives.

In February 1520 Luther wrote the book "Fourteen Consolations."³¹ These fourteen chapters correspond to the Fourteen Defenders from all evils (the Fourteen Saints) who were to be invoked for some particular disease or danger. This book was written for the sick Elector Frederick the Wise. However, instead of the Fourteen Defenders, Luther presented defenses from the word of God by which the Christian is surrounded, filled, and supported. Christ Himself enjoins pastors to visit the sick; and this is how the dedication commences: "Our sweetest Beatifier, most serene, high-born elector and most merciful lord, has commanded all of us to visit the sick, to free the captives, and to devoutly fulfill all the works of mercy toward our neighbor."³²

As Christ is the example of the service to be rendered to sinners, so He also makes us aware of the judgment of those who did not fulfill His commandment of love. "Then he will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave me no food; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take me in, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me'" (Matthew 25:41-43).

Because Christ is present and suffering in the sick Christian elector, the pastor is summoned and led to him.

For the Christian is not sick when he is sick but Christ, our Lord and Beatifier, himself is, in whom the Christian lives, Gal. 2:20, according to what the Lord Christ himself says Matt. 25:40, "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me"; and although one should regard this commandment of Christ, our Lord and Beatifier, to visit and comfort the sick as the most general commandment toward all men, it nevertheless must be rendered, practiced, and kept more toward the household of faith, as also St. Paul distinguishes, and mostly toward our friends and neighbors. Gal. 6:10.³³

³¹WA 6:104-134 (translated in LW 42:117-166). The following quotes are taken from SL 10:1816-1917.

³²SL 10:1816, compare LW 42:121-122.

³³SL 10:1818, compare LW 42:122.

It is remarkable here how the reality of God's presence is disclosed by the word of God. This is an example of how the Holy Spirit supports us. No human abilities or techniques are developed, but the word itself is active. In fact, the Holy Spirit works consolation and admonition, and also lifts us up. Thus, the office of the minister is not a particular rank, but precisely the ministry through which God Himself in Christ and through the Spirit ministers to us unto our salvation.

The Image of Christ and the Formation of the Christian

We look at images with great frequency; yet we also know – especially since we are flooded by televised images – how images influence the consciousness. This holds true even more for the subconscious and the unconscious. In this way, they form and impress man at the center of his existence; that is, in that realm we have called soul, heart, conscience, and consciousness. How humans are formed is displayed by their actions and their behavior. Yet besides image and formation there is also imagination; and the latter consists of ideas of oneself or of others which, however, do not correspond to reality. The realm of image, formation, and imagination represents an unfathomable realm of human nature. In this realm lie the roots of fear and hope, of confidence and despair, of joy and sorrow, and, therefore, of true and false faith.

The old care of souls, taught by Holy Scripture, knew about the power of images. Consequently, we find also in Luther's sermons and writings of consolation the reference to the significance and effect of images. In the above-mentioned book from 1520 for the ill elector, Luther put together fourteen images in which salvation and damnation become visible through the words of Scripture.

A similar theme appears in an Easter sermon in which the congregation is instructed to contemplate the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ:

Now it is not enough to know the stories, one should also learn to which this serves us and how to use this. . . . Yet we must, if we want to comprehend the use of the resurrection of our Lord Christ, imagine two different images. The one is the sad, miserable, shameful, dreadful, bloody image of which we've heard on Good Friday, how Christ hangs there right among murderers and dies under great pain. Of this image you've heard, how we're to contemplate it with an undoubting heart, that this all happened because of our sins, that he as the right eternal priest gave himself as

a sacrifice for our sin, willing to pay for it by his death. . . . Therefore, as often as we think of, or contemplate, this sad, bloody image we're to meditate nothing but that we see our sin there.³⁴

Contrasted with the sad and horrible image of cross and death of Jesus Christ is the joyful image of His resurrection:

For just as earlier your sins were hanging around his neck and fixed him to the cross, now you see in this other image that there's no sin anymore in him but plain righteousness, no more pain nor sadness but plain joy, no more death but plain life, namely, an eternal life that's far above this temporal life. One should be able to rejoice in such an image always. The first image certainly is, contemplated externally, something rather dreadful; but contemplating the cause, one cannot wish anything better. For as you see that God has taken your sin away from you, which you were unable to bear but would have to go down because of it, and laid it upon his Son who is eternally God and strong enough to deal with sins, there leave your sin; for you won't find a better place where to put them so that they might not weigh you down so much and burden you less.

After this, however, place also this other image before you, in which you see how your Lord Christ, who became so dreadful and miserable because of your sins, is now beautiful, pure, glorious, and happy, and how all sins in him have disappeared. Consider therefore further this: if your sins are not upon you because of the suffering of Christ but are taken away from you and laid upon Christ by God himself, and if they aren't on Christ on this Easter day, after his resurrection, anymore either, where will they be?³⁵

For just as we see in the first image on the Silent Friday (Good Friday) how our sins, our curse and death are upon Christ, so we see on Easter a different image where there is no sin, no curse, no disfavor, no death anymore, but plain life, grace, bliss, and righteousness in Christ. With such an image we're to lift up our hearts; for it is placed before us and given us because we aren't to embrace it in another manner than as if God had raised us from the dead with Christ today. For just as you don't see sin, death, and

³⁴WA 52:246,32-247,8.

³⁵WA 52:247,23-40.

curse in Christ anymore, you're to believe that God, for the sake of Christ, wills to not see them in you anymore either when you embrace his resurrection and find comfort in it. Faith brings us such grace. Yet when it will be that Day, one will not believe it anymore, but see, touch, and feel it.³⁶

It is the image as it is portrayed by the word of Holy Scripture: "before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified" (Galatians 3:1).

A key document where Luther develops the idea of contemplating and the effect of images is the 1519 "Sermon on Preparing to Die."³⁷ One may already have experienced that the sick and the dying are literally assailed by images. The images virtually wrestle with each other, and good pastoral care calls us to help our people as they wrestle with these images.

Caring for the dying first of all aims at the "farewell from this world and all its activities," which is about putting the estate in good order. The other aspect is to "also take leave spiritually," and this starts with asking for, and receiving, forgiveness from persons with whom one has had conflicts. Finally, one is led to realize that the day of death is the Christian birthday (*dies natalis*); and everything depends on this: "Therefore, we must believe this and learn the lesson from the physical birth of a child, as Christ declares (John 16:21)." The right preparation of a Christian for death takes place through care with word and sacrament. This is so important because it is not only about understanding, but also about the whole effect and gift. The word of Christ announces and makes visible what Christ is and does. Consequently, only from this word can be recognized what happens to and in man through word and sacrament. This is the context for the wrestling with images in the hour of dying. Image as perception, imagining as impressing, and in all of this the image as a power that seizes and dominates the whole human being — this is what goes on in this wrestling with the images.

The wrestling in the time of dying revolves around three images, namely, the image of death, the image of sin, and the image of hell. These are the "non-images," the "images of condemnation," not just because

³⁶WA 52:250,36-251,6.

³⁷LW 42:99-115.

they are horrifying in themselves, but because they assail and fill humans with horror. In opposition to these "images of condemnation" there are three different images, the "images of grace." They have their cause of cognition in Holy Scripture and their center at the cross of Christ, which means to see death in light of the death of Christ, sin in light of the grace of Christ, and hell in light of the redemption through Christ.³⁸

The conflict of images is nothing but the conflict between our own human experience and the divine revelation in Scripture and in the gift of the sacraments. The wrestling, however, consists in whether a person clings to the images that assail his conscience: whether he is tied-up, even knocked out by them, or whether he beholds the picture of Christ and imagines it, impresses it on himself; also whether it is presented to and impressed on him from word and sacrament in caring for the dying:

Similarly [as foreshadowed in Judges 7:16 and following], death, sin, and hell will flee with all their might if in the night we but keep our eyes on the glowing picture of Christ and his saints and abide in the faith, which does not see and does not want to see the false pictures. Furthermore, we must encourage and strengthen ourselves with the Word of God as with the sound of trumpets.³⁹

The biblical testimony, to which Luther returns time and again, shows how the perception of the image of Christ is intimately connected to the formation of the Christian through word and sacrament in the deepest layer. In the beginning, God created man in His own likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). In this consists his dignity, which is not the result of development and behavior, but of God's act. Man is created by God like God, but he himself is not God. However, Exodus 20:4-5 says: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image — any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them."

Thus, man, created by God in the image and likeness of God, shall not make for himself an image of God out of the things created by God.

³⁸We are familiar with the process unfolded here from the tenth stanza of Paul Gerhard's "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" (*The Lutheran Hymnal* 172): Be thou my Consolation / My Shield, when I must die; / Remind me of Thy Passion / When my last hour draws nigh. / Mine eyes shall then behold Thee / Upon Thy cross to dwell / My heart by faith enfold Thee. Who dieth thus dies well.

³⁹LW 42:106.

Rather, the relationship between God and man lies in the word of God and in the speaking to God thus made possible (Deuteronomy 4). The word of God rules out making Him visible in artifacts and experiences; a fact often overlooked and forgotten when one talks about "just words" and looks for concretizations. The fall of man from God through the violation of His commandment entails man putting himself into God's place to "be like God" (Genesis 3:5) and results in separation from God.

It is testified of Christ, the Son of God made man, that He is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation" (Colossians 1:15; 2 Corinthians 4:4); He is "the brightness of his glory and the express image of His person" (Hebrews 1:3). Here the relation between image and formation comes to a full circle when we not only reencounter the origin of creation in the person of Jesus Christ, in His word and work, but when the salvific will of God is carried out through the renewing gift of the Spirit: "For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29).

Thus, in the image of Christ what is formed anew and shaped in the Christian through the work of Christ becomes visible. This happens in baptism, concerning which Romans 6:3-5 says:

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of his death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection.

Our likeness with Christ is accomplished by being "grafted" in him through baptism.

With the image of Christ and the formation of Christians a reality is addressed that cannot be seen when God's word is merely perceived as a text of antiquity; when the sacraments are solely understood as passage rites; and when the communion between God and man is reduced to the purely symbolic. Consequently, human existence is often perceived only within the boundaries of birth and death. The trivialization of death and advocacy of euthanasia – both common in contemporary culture – are an inevitable consequence of the incorrect proclamation of Christ's victory

over sin, death, and devil, as well as the resurrection of the dead and the eternal life.

The image of Christ and the formation of the Christian take as their starting point that the word of God is engraved in and received by the heart in faithful regularity. This happens only in listening to God's word and in speaking with God in prayer. In caring for the dying it becomes apparent whether a formation of heart and conscience, of soul and mind has taken place through the images in the contemplation of Christ from His word. This is the foundation, content, and result of true pastoral care through word and sacrament.

In light of this, it certainly becomes clear that the true care of souls is not only about the limited realm of inwardness, but about the whole human being in soul and body. The biblical understanding of salvation always encompasses body and soul, external and internal health concurrently. Who focuses on the empirical corporeality will always live according to the principle: a maximum of joy and contentedness and a minimum of pain and suffering. The theological and also the medical wisdom of earlier times held a different view, as the observations of a doctor in a monastery, taken from the Chronicle of Lorsch from about A.D. 800, show where a key passage reads, "A disease can be quite salutary when it breaks open the heart in its hardening; and very dangerous is a health that simply seduces man to indulge in his vices further."⁴⁰

Luther as Pastor for Livonia

Finally, several writings from the vast realm of Luther's pastoral care will be mentioned briefly, namely, those he wrote to the Christians in Riga, Tallinn, Tartu, and to all Livonian Christians.⁴¹ The Reformation

⁴⁰Translated from Heinrich Schipperges, *Die Kranken im Mittelalter*, third edition (München, Germany: Beck, 1993), 13.

⁴¹Leonid Arbusow, *Die Einführung der Reformation in Liv-, Est- und Kurland* (Leipzig: Heinsius, 1921; reprint Aalen: Scientia, 1964); Janis Matulis, "Die ersten Schritte der Reformation in Riga," in *Luther und Luthertum in Osteuropa: Selbstdarstellungen aus der Diaspora und Beiträge zur theologischen Diskussion*, edited by G. Bassarak and G. Wirth (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983), 354-362; Rudolf Keller, "Luther als Seelsorger und theologischer Berater zerstreuter Gemeinden," in *Kirche in der Schule Luthers: Festschrift für D. Joachim Heubach*, edited by B. Hägglund and G. Müller (Erlangen: Martin-Luther-Verlag, 1995), 58-78.

had already started to spread in this area by 1521. Individual pastors and city council members entered into correspondence with Luther, a portion of which has been preserved. However, I would like to highlight three writings that were written to all the Christians in Livonia on specific issues.

The first, in chronological order, is a letter written in 1523, "to the chosen dear friends of God, to all Christians in Riga, Tallinn, and Tartu in Livonia, my dear sirs and brethren in Christ, from Martin Luther."⁴²

This is a doctrinal letter that takes into consideration what is already being taught and preached in the Baltic congregations. The letter begins as follows:

I have learned from written and oral sources, dear sirs and brethren, how God the Father of our Lord and Savior has begun working his miracles also among you and visits your hearts with his merciful light of truth; additionally, he has blessed you so much that you sincerely embrace it with gladness as a veritable Word of God, as it is in truth, which many among us here do not want to hear or tolerate; rather, the richer and greater the grace is God offers to us here, the more insanely princes and bishops strive against it, they blaspheme, condemn, and persecute until they have imprisoned many; most recently, they have burnt two by which they have sent Christ new martyrs from our days to heaven. This is why I can joyfully call you blessed who, like the Gentiles in Acts 14, receive the Word at the ends of the world with all pleasure.⁴³

Then, section after section, the message of the gospel is unfolded:

This, then, you have heard and learned that whoever believes that Jesus Christ through his blood, without our merit, has become our Savior and the Bishop of our souls according to the will and the mercy of God the Father, that the same faith without any works certainly appropriates and receives Christ in just the same way as faith believes; for, of course, Christ's blood does not belong to you or to me because we fast or read but because we thus believe, as Paul says in Rom. 3:28: "We conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." This faith gives us a glad, peaceful heart

⁴²WA 12:147-152.

⁴³WA 12:147,7-148,4.

toward God and must prevail in love because it sees that it is God's will and the merciful inclination of his goodness toward us that Christ deals with us in this way. This, then, is to come to and to be drawn to the Father and to have peace with God through Christ, to expect death and all accident with a certain and joyful mind. Where this faith is absent, there is blindness, no Christendom, nor any spark of God's work or favor.⁴⁴

Not some private teaching is proclaimed here, but rather the foundation and content of the Christian faith of all ages and what constitutes the difference between the true church and the false church.

The second writing, "(T)o all dear friends in Christ in Riga and Livonia," is an exposition of Psalm 127: "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. . . ."⁴⁵ Psalm 127 deals with the life in the family, with work, and with the order of the political life in the city and the country. Several precepts given in the exposition follow.

First, Luther reminds his addressees how important it is to prepare schoolteachers and pastors. They have an important role to play in the formation of the youth and in the introduction to the foundations of human social life. For where the consciences are not formed, there the political community falls apart, unless it is held together by force — all this is also part of our present experience.

King Solomon, the author of Psalm 127, unites in his personality the enlightenment through the Holy Spirit and the experience of daily government.⁴⁶ He has, as Luther puts it, "experienced in many ways how vainly unbelief burdens itself with worries that it might take care of the belly, although everything depends on God's blessing and guarding. For where God does not bless, there no labor helps; where he does not guard, there no worry helps."

This is why the exposition focuses on the question of how worry and work are related to each other. The Psalm reads, "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so he gives his beloved while they sleep" (Psalm 127:2). How, then, does God's action relate to what humans do? Solomon, Luther says, does want to confirm

⁴⁴WA 12:148,21-149,2.

⁴⁵WA 15:360-379.

⁴⁶WA 15:363,12-17.

working, but at the same time refute worry and stinginess. The error lies in the presumptuous imagination that we could bodily sustain and uphold ourselves by our labor. The labor

does not do it; God has to do it. Therefore, labor that you do not labor in vain. For you labor in vain when you worry and trust in your labor that it may sustain you. You are to labor indeed, but the sustaining and the preserving belong to God alone. This is why you have to keep these two—laboring and house-building or sustaining—as far apart from each other as are heaven and earth, God and man.⁴⁷

Luther points out with a great number of examples from history how the human quest for wealth and power is frequently enough thwarted by God's inscrutable ways. This holds above all for the preservation and fall of entire nations that, once risen to power, soon collapse again. We know this also from our own times. Everything, however, that people do for the sustenance of their lives and the preservation of their community is placed under the will of God. This is why Christians should know that the toils of their work are under the will and the providence of God. This does not lead to indifference, but is specified in a surprising way:

You have heard now how the political authority has to watch, be industrious and do everything that pertains to its office, shut the gate, preserve doors and walls, put on harness, furnish supplies, in short, just act as if there were no God and they had to save and govern themselves, just as the head of the house is to labor as if he wanted to sustain himself by his labor.⁴⁸

Yet what does give God His beloved while they sleep? This means,

he very well lets them labor and be industrious, yet in such a manner that they do not worry nor be impudent, but walk away joyfully and do not burden themselves, commend it to him and live well in a quiet way and with their heart at rest, just as one who sleeps securely and sweetly and does not undertake anything and who is nevertheless kept well and alive.

⁴⁷WA 15:367,2-7.

⁴⁸WA 15:372,25-373,4.

He calls back to mind Psalm 55:22: "Cast your burden on the Lord, and he shall sustain you," and 1 Peter 5:7: "Cast all your care upon him, for he cares for you." The point here is only the worrisome care, the stinginess, and the unbelief, not the labor itself.⁴⁹ This clearly shows that the vanity of worry is not about the necessity of work, but about the faith that puts its trust not in itself, but in God. Faith does not depend on the success of one's work; also, it does not shatter in view of the failure of one's efforts; rather, it is carried by the promise from the word of God that "all things work together for the good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28).

Finally, the third text is Luther's epistle "To all beloved Christians in Livonia with their pastors and preachers, grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ."⁵⁰ This letter is related to letters by John Bugenhagen and Melchior Hoffman. The reason for all three epistles are enthusiastic movements, which lead the congregations into unrest and division. Confusion was creating tension and prompted the complaint, "'No one knows what he should believe or with whom he should side,' and the common demand for uniformity in doctrine and practice."⁵¹ First, Luther calls back to mind 1 Corinthians 11:29: "For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you." Thereby it is made clear that where the truth of the word of God is proclaimed, there will inevitably be contention about the truth; and this begins in each one of us through the struggle between the flesh of sin and the Spirit of Jesus Christ, between the old and the new man within us. Such conflicts are, therefore, part of the effect of proclamation, and it is consequently impossible to avoid them.

However, Luther says that such conflicts cannot be countered by coercion because this would replace the freedom of faith out of the power of the Holy Spirit by coercive laws. Luther's pastoral admonition points to the example of the Apostle Paul:

Therefore, we will deal with factions in our time as St. Paul dealt with them in his. He could not check them by force. Nor did he want to compel them by means of commands. Rather, he entreated them with friendly exhortations, for people who will not give in willingly

⁴⁹WA 15:374,27-31.

⁵⁰LW 53:45-50 (45).

⁵¹LW 53:46.

when exhorted will comply far less when commanded. Thus he says in Philippians 2 [1-4]: "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing through strife or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." Then he adds the example of Christ, who in obedience to the Father made himself the servant of all.⁵²

Thus, in the midst of their divisions the congregation is led back to what it is through Christ and what it sees in Christ's example.

Yet the consequence of this admonishing contemplation is by no means indifference; rather, Luther explicitly warns against the abuse of freedom.⁵³ The clarity of the teaching is not compromised by being considerate of existing customs. Yet it has to become clear that the congregation is edified by it, and this takes place through the untiring teaching of God's Holy Scripture, for in it God Himself is active. Thus this epistle ends:

Receive this my sincere exhortation kindly, dear friends, and do your part to follow it as well as you can. This will prove needful and good for you and be to the honor and praise of God, who called you to his light. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ, who has begun his work in you, increase the same with grace and fulfil it to the day of his glorious coming, so that you together with us may go to meet him with joy and remain forever with him. Amen.⁵⁴

⁵²LW 53:46-47.

⁵³LW 53:47-48.

⁵⁴LW 53:50.

Paul's Use of the Imagery of Sleep and His Understanding of the Christian Life: A Study in the Thessalonian Correspondence

Piotr J. Malysz

Introduction

The imagery of sleep remains one of the most universal and enduring metaphors in human culture. Its prevalence can be explained not only by the fact that sleep, as a physiological function of the body, is characteristic of all of God's animate creation, but also by the very nature of sleep, which easily lends itself to a variety of interpretations. Some of these can be neutral or positive, as is, for example, the metaphorical understanding of death as sleep—though even in this context there can appear a streak of negativity, nostalgia, or helplessness. Others may suggest laziness, lack of caution, or the absence of watchfulness.

In the multiple and diverse references that it makes to sleep, the Bible is no different. It needs to be said, however, that the Jewish use of the metaphor is somewhat different from the Greek one, as is evident, for instance, in Paul's epistles to the church at Thessalonica.¹ In fact, in the Thessalonian correspondence, the apostle draws quite heavily on both of these traditions to paint a picture of the Christian life as an existence rooted in the fact of the cross and governed by the eschatological reality of Christ's second coming. This paper seeks to demonstrate that it is precisely by bringing out and playing on the euphemistic, as well as negative, meanings of the verbs *καθεύδω* and *κοιμάω* (sleep) that Paul unites all the various elements of his description into a coherent whole.

Background

Scholars agree that several factors occasioned the writing of 1 Thessalonians, all of which were, in one way or another, related to both Paul's hasty departure from Thessalonica (Acts 17:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16) and his failure to provide the new church with the fullness of

¹This paper was originally written for a class on 1 & 2 Thessalonians, taught by Dr. Charles Gieschen at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, in the Winter Quarter of 2000. I would like to thank Dr. Gieschen for all his helpful comments.

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apostolic instruction. Hence the apostle's desire to revisit in order to "supply what is lacking in [the Thessalonian] faith" [καταρτίσαι τὰ ὑστερήματα τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν] (1 Thessalonians 3:10).² Paul's departure naturally gave rise to accusations of taking the line of least resistance after the manner of numerous itinerant philosophers of the day — accusations that portrayed the apostle and his companions as interested not only in easy living at others' expense, but, worse still, in perverting the established social and cultural order. It was probably for the latter reason that the founding of the congregation was soon followed by an outbreak of prejudice, and perhaps, even persecution. Finally, not without significance for the composition of 1 Thessalonians, were certain undesirable doctrinal developments concerning the Lord's παρουσία that arose within the congregation following the death of some of its members, possibly in the persecution itself.³ Written from Corinth around A.D. 50, the epistle addresses all these pressing issues, with particular emphasis on the link between Christian life and eschatology, at the same time being a very positive reaction to Timothy's report about the state of the Thessalonian church (1 Thessalonians 3:6).⁴

Textual Issues

The focus of this paper will be primarily on chapters 4:13-5:11, which form the core of Paul's first letter to the church at Thessalonica, and in which the apostle employs the imagery of sleep. Where necessary, however, references will be made to other parts of the epistle and to

²All the quotations from 1 and 2 Thessalonians are the present author's own translation. The remaining biblical citations are from *The Holy Bible. New International Version*.

³This suggestion was put forth by F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 327-328, cited in Karl P. Donfried, "The Cults of Thessalonica," *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985): 349.

⁴F. F. Bruce (*1 & 2 Thessalonians* [Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1982], xxxv) gives this dating of 1 Thessalonians. Karl P. Donfried dates the epistle to A.D. 41-44. See Karl P. Donfried and I. Howard Marshall, *The Theology of the Shorter Pauline Epistles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 12.

2 Thessalonians as well, which followed not long after the first letter.⁵ It should be kept in mind that 1 Thessalonians forms a coherent whole, rather than being a collection of disparate remarks on the apostle's part or a redaction of various sources. Presupposed here is Paul's authorship of both the epistles, as well as their fundamental unity.⁶

The apostle uses two different verbs, the basic meaning of both being that of sleeping. The first, κοιμάω, appears in verses 13-15 of chapter 4, where it is the equivalent of "to have died in the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:14). Here Paul assures his addressees that those "who are alive and are left remaining until the Parousia of the Lord will most certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep" (15). The dead will not miss out. In the *paraenetic* section of chapter 5, the verb changes to καθεύδω, the discussion itself retaining the eschatological focus. Here the imagery is more complex, as other metaphorical elements are added to it. Thus Paul speaks of the day of the Lord coming "like a thief at night" (2). The Christians, however, are not "in darkness" (4) or "of the night" (5) to be surprised by the coming of that day. Nonetheless, the apostle exhorts them to refrain from sleeping and to stay awake (6). The section concludes with the statement, "God has not destined us for wrath, but for the possession of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live with Him" (9-10), followed by a command to "comfort one another and to build each other up" (11).

The New Testament evidence, as well as extra-biblical sources, shows that the verbs, καθεύδω and κοιμάω, are synonyms, with both appearing in virtually the same contexts.⁷ Both are used, for example, to denote

⁵The issue of the order of the Thessalonian letters has little bearing on this paper's subject matter. For a detailed discussion and a review of arguments, see Bruce, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, xxxivff.

⁶While it is recognized that 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 constitutes a *paraenetic* section, this does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that it is a later, post-Pauline interpolation; compare Bruce, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 107-108. Obviously stylistic unity is of secondary concern for Paul; who is more interested in the unity of message. It is the message that determines his choice of stylistic devices.

⁷Compare Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, second edition (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 259; Walter Bauer and others, editors, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 388, 437.

sleep (καθεύδω: Matthew 8:24, Mark 4:38, Mark 13:36; κοιμάω: Matthew 28:13, Luke 24:45) and death (καθεύδω: Matthew 5:39; κοιμάω: Matthew 27:52, John 11:11, Acts 7:60, Acts 13:36, 1 Corinthians 7:39, 1 Corinthians 15:6, 20). There is, however, one significant exception: neither verb is used in reference to Jesus' death. Jesus did not fall asleep—He died for the life of the world and was raised from the dead (1 Thessalonians 1:10) that He might be "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" [ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων] (1 Corinthians 15:20).⁸

Interpretation

It is in the resurrection that the new being and life of the Christian find their indestructible foundation. Everything that Paul addresses in his epistles is ultimately motivated by the reality of Christ's resurrection. Longnecker observes: "when Paul spoke about the fact of the Christian's resurrection hope, about events and relationships having to do with that hope, and when he exhorted his converts to preparedness, he did so on the basis of Jesus' resurrection and teachings."⁹ Put differently, the resurrection is "the irreducible basis of the gospel."¹⁰ It underlies God's gracious call and election, because it is only in the risen Jesus that one finds rescue from the coming wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

As is to be expected, the reality of Christ's death and resurrection, received "not merely in words, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit, and in much conviction" (1 Thessalonians 1:5), separates the Christian community from "the others" [οἱ λοιποὶ] (1 Thessalonians 4:13; 5:6)—from the rest of the world, which remains under God's eschatological wrath. The moment of coming to faith, whether by baptism or through hearing the word, constitutes a watershed in a person's life. Here the atonement, as it is appropriated through faith, becomes absolutely pivotal. Since it is out of the context of God's impending wrath that the believers have come, it seems necessary first to consider the

⁸Bruce opines that no euphemism was used for the death of Christ not because it would have been inappropriate in the context of death by crucifixion (such a euphemism was used, for example, to describe the death of Stephen in Acts 7:60, ἐκοιμήθη), but rather to stress the reality of His death, and thus also the divine miracle of the resurrection (1 & 2 Thessalonians, 97).

⁹Richard N. Longnecker, "Paul's Early Eschatology," *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985): 92.

¹⁰Bruce, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 97.

pagan lifestyle as depicted by Paul in his Thessalonian correspondence, before a description of the Christian life proper can be offered.

Under the Wrath to Come

As it emerges from the pages of 1 Thessalonians, the pagan life is an existence permeated with uncertainty, ambivalence, and ignorance. Although the pagan world is under the divine wrath, this wrath, as a tangible reality, is only eschatological. In the here and now it manifests itself as the absence of hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13), especially concerning those who have died. "Hopes are for the living; the dead are without hope," writes Theocritus.¹¹ Likewise, Plutarch, in a letter to a friend who has lost a son, urges reason as the best cure for grief – after all, all people are mortal. A similar appeal to reason is found in Seneca, who scolds a friend for an unbecoming and excessive display of grief.¹² Thus, even though the metaphor of death as sleep was very common in ancient Greco-Roman literature, it denoted a sleep from which there was no awaking.¹³ Hardly a source of comfort, the word "sleep" embraced the whole ambivalence of human life and death – it was an attempt to avoid confrontation with the harsh reality by hiding behind a euphemism.

In extreme cases, this overpowering and fatalistic lack of hope led to a nihilistic or abusive attitude towards the present, with self-gratification as the focal point of all human action. Through a figurative use of the verb "to sleep," Epictetus gives the following piece of advice to Epicurus, known for his pessimism regarding human society: "Lie down and sleep, and follow the pursuits of a worm of which you judge yourself worthy; eat and drink, mate, go to the privy, and snore."¹⁴ This does not mean, however, that morals were loose everywhere, that there was no structure to society, or that the prevalent self-seeking prevented any kind of meaningful human interaction. Peace and security were not totally absent. Usually it was recognized that, despite fate's arbitrariness, life still had to go on. The most widespread approach to life seems to have

¹¹Idyll 4.42, cited in Bruce, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 96.

¹²Plutarch, *Letter to Apollonius* 103F-104A; Seneca, *Epistle* 99.2. Both are mentioned in Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1998), 63.

¹³Bruce, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 96.

¹⁴Diss., II, 20, 10, cited in Albrecht Oepke, "καθεύδω," Gerhard Kittel, editor, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament [TDNT]*, volume 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 432.

combined the Stoic resignation to one's unalterable fate with the Epicurean enjoyment of the present moment—an approach that was given its classic expression in Ode XI by the Roman poet Horace (source of the adage *carpe diem*, “seize the day”):

Ask not, Leuconoe (we cannot know), what end the gods have set for me, for thee, nor make trial of the Babylonian tables! [referring to the calculations of the Chaldaean astrologers] How much better to endure whatever comes, whether Jupiter allots us added winters or whether this is last, which now wears out the Tuscan Sea upon the barrier of the cliffs! Show wisdom. Strain the clear wine; and since life is brief, cut short far-reaching hopes! Even while we speak, envious Time has sped. Reap the harvest of to-day, putting as little trust as may be in the morrow!¹⁵

In general, the law written upon the hearts of men made it possible for them to form meaningful social units and to interact with each other with a view to common good. The “peace and security,” however, were rather deceptive (1 Thessalonians 5:3), built as they were upon fallible human institutions and philosophies and holding out no eschatological hope. Against this, Jesus’ warning, of which Paul may have been aware, sounds forth with particular force: “in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:38-39).

It was in the religious cults of the day that the ambiguity and ambivalence of existence—the lack of hope—were manifested in the most radical fashion. Donfried enumerates a number of deities whose worship was popular in Thessalonica.¹⁶ Among those the most prominent were Isis, Serapis, Dionysius, and especially Cabirus, all of which focused on fertility and involved grave immorality and ritualistic prostitution (sometimes in an attempt to propitiate the deity, at other times, as an expression of the overarching self-centered worldview). Once the popularity of the various Eastern cults is taken into consideration, it becomes obvious that it is not without deeper theological motivation that

¹⁵*Carmina*, Liber Primus, XI. The translation by C. E. Bennett comes from Horace, *The Odes and Epodes* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952), 33.

¹⁶Donfried, “The Cults,” 337-342.

the apostle Paul implicitly refers to the pagans as being "of the night and of darkness" (1 Thessalonians 5:5). This designation is not a mere metaphor. That adherents of the cults are the real referent is strongly supported by Paul's scathing criticism of immoral behavior. The pagans are driven by "passionate lust" [ἐν πάθει ἐπιθυμίας] (1 Thessalonians 4:5), they do not abstain from fornication [πορνεία] (1 Thessalonians 4:3), and have no control over their bodies, especially the sexual parts.¹⁷ One must remember that in mystery religions the night was usually the time of the enactment of the cultic ritual.¹⁸ The night was the time of drunkenness, either as ritualistic activity or as an attempt to deal with the oppressiveness of reality, to forget. It was under the cloak of darkness that sexual laxity was at its most rampant.

All in all, Paul attributes the depraved behavior of the pagans to the fundamental lack of the *true* knowledge of God (1 Thessalonians 4:5). Behavior is here merely a symptom of the underlying ambivalence of existence. But the latter, too, is, in fact, little but symptomatic of the Greco-Roman perception of the divine realm. On the one hand, the ancients worshiped a whole pantheon of gods. Conceived anthropomorphically, those were identifiable and approachable, but, at the same time, they were not free from passions, partiality, and self-interest. Invoked primarily for the sake of their gifts, they could not, however, be objects of unconditional trust, driven as they were by the incessant desire to secure their own divine position. In keeping with their mutability and definite origins, they lacked constancy, not to mention omnipotence and omniscience. On the other hand, though the Greco-Roman religion did have a concept of a yet higher—and immutable—power, *Moirai*, in its unrelenting and inexorable unchangeableness, fate was neither spiritual, nor personal, let alone ethical, and thereby could not be the object of religious devotion. The only answer to the dark heartlessness of fate was resignation. Holding out no hope for the future and without a perceptible direction, this

¹⁷For a discussion on the meaning of σκεῦος (1 Thessalonians 4:4), see, for example, Donfried, "The Cults," 342. A more extensive argument to the same effect is found in Torleif Elgvin, "'To Master His Own Vessel': 1 Thess 4.4 in Light of New Qumran Evidence," *New Testament Studies* 43 (October 1997): 604-619.

¹⁸Interestingly enough, all the commentaries consulted do not make the connection between darkness and immorality other than a purely metaphorical one. Against the view that sees the use of "darkness" in purely rhetorical terms, it must be emphasized that the figurative use is here based on fact.

fatalism lies at the root of life's ambiguity. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that, with no true knowledge or trust in God, neither can there be love of the truth in the pagans' lives (2 Thessalonians 2:10-11). This significant absence, too, must lead to depravity. Consequently, the darkness is not only physical or spiritual but also, if not primarily, cognitive. In a futile flight from the oppressive and hopeless reality, the pagans fall back on that very reality, as they delude themselves with man-made peace and security. They are asleep. They will most certainly not escape the suddenness of the coming destruction and wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

To Serve the Living and True God

It is out of the hopeless existence only for the present moment that the Christians have been called. As has been said, God's call into a Christ-like life grounded in the reality of His death and resurrection constitutes a watershed in the life of believers. They have not been called into uncleanness, but into sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:7). Note that in the Old Testament, sanctification is inseparably linked with the *cultus*—only the holy ones can approach God. Its basic idea is that of separation, of being set apart for God. Hence the Thessalonians can no longer serve idols, the gods of the night, but the living and true God (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Along the same line, Raymond Collins observes that "The faith of the Thessalonians . . . denotes an essentially new condition of existence within the Thessalonian community which stands in contrast to a previous mode of being"¹⁹—it is an existence of "perseverance through hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 1:3). In contrast to paganism, the Christian life takes on an unambiguous future orientation.

As those who have received the Spirit of God (1 Thessalonians 4:8; 1:5), the believers are no longer in darkness. "But you, brothers," writes Paul, "are not in darkness that the day [of the Lord] should overcome you like a thief. For you are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness" (1 Thessalonians 5:4-5). Two different aspects of the sonship of light can be seen in this description.

First of all, the Thessalonian Christians are no longer ignorant about the future (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Light implies knowledge (cognition) and

¹⁹Raymond F. Collins, *Studies on the First Letter to the Thessalonians* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1984), 213.

certainty. It is because of this knowledge that comes from faith that the congregation will not be surprised when the day of the Lord comes. Faith and knowledge are reciprocal concepts, with one informing the other.²⁰ Interestingly, as E. Lövestam observes, the phrase υἱοὶ φωτός is not identical with υἱοὶ ἡμέρας.²¹ The latter has a purely eschatological meaning: the day of the Lord is still to come (2 Thessalonians 2:2-3). Yet, as the sons of light, the Thessalonians have nothing—no night—to fear. For them the future is linked to the present by means of a divine disposition.²² Thus, the eschatological reality has, in a sense, dawned already. Though “the mystery of lawlessness is already at work” (2 Thessalonians 2:7), the church at Thessalonica finds itself under God’s eschatological mercy. They already are “the sons of the day,” whereas the unbelieving world remains under God’s eschatological wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9). For the pagans, the day of the Lord, when it comes, will be nothing else but endless night.

The strong sense of hope that Christians have cannot remain without practical implications, especially regarding the death of community members. Paul is very emphatic here: faith cannot be based on ignorance “about those who have fallen asleep” in such a way that the Christians’ display of grief is a practical denial of any real foundation to their hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Those who have died have truly fallen asleep. Here again Paul takes a metaphorical expression—widely used for euphemistic purposes to avoid the brutal reality and the offensiveness of the term “death”—and, similarly to his treatment of the term darkness, employs it in a sense that is far less figurative. Those who die in the Lord die in the certain hope of a resurrection at His second coming. In view of the event of the cross, this sleep cannot but lead to an awakening. Thus it is truly rest, and as such, it warrants no excessive grief. The sorrow of Christians is “unlike other sorrow for it is embraced by hope.”²³

²⁰Collins, *Studies on the First Letter*, 226. Ronald A. Ward (1 & 2 Thessalonians [Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1973], 110) argues that darkness stands for “moral and spiritual estrangement from God” rather than ignorance. This view is only partially right in that it discounts the cognitive aspect of faith, whereby trust in God is, and must be, firmly grounded in His own self-disclosure.

²¹Cited in Joseph Plevnik, *Paul and the Parousia: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1997), 110.

²²Collins, *Studies on the First Letter*, 249.

²³Gary W. Demarest, *1, 2 Thessalonians, 1, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1984), 83.

But it is not merely in their attitude to death that the Christians are guided by a firm eschatological perspective. The sonship and knowledge of the light are not simply cognitive. The hope concerning the future is not simply a state of the mind. Rather, the whole of the Christian life in the here and now is informed by the knowledge and the hope in such a way that the two cannot but become active qualities, always at work in the person who believes. To be a son of light, therefore, means to believe in the Lord and to trust in Him in all future *and present* things, even in the midst of lawlessness and suffering (1 Thessalonians 3:3, 7). To put it yet another way, to be a son of light means to lead a sanctified life, where sanctification, as Collins points out, is a *nomen actionis*, denoting a process rather than a goal.²⁴ A life of sanctification is one lived in agreement with God's will (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

In the *paraenetic* section of 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul makes it abundantly clear that the sanctified life is one of being awake. There is no place for sleep in it. For this figurative understanding of the verb "to sleep," the apostle is indebted to the Jewish tradition, as well as to some of the end times sayings of Jesus. Thus the Old Testament portrays God as the One who does not sleep (Psalm 121:4).²⁵ The righteous man, too, is represented as staying awake. Of course, sleep is inevitable; yet, even while asleep, a man of God meditates on the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:7; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2; Proverbs 6:22). Likewise, Jesus Himself rises early in the morning to pray, and even devotes whole nights to prayer (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12). In this context, Albrecht Oepke notes that the early Christian community viewed the sleepiness of the disciples in the garden as almost demonic.²⁶ This having been said, it needs to be noted that it is not sleeping in the literal sense of the word that is the real fault. The Gospels, for example, present us with a picture of Jesus asleep in a boat in the midst of a raging storm (Matthew 8:24; Mark 4:38; Luke 8:23)! Similarly, in the Parable of the Ten Virgins, all the virgins were asleep: both the wise and the foolish ones (Matthew 25). What is the real fault, therefore, is not sleep as much as the attitude of spiritual and ignorant sleepiness. Sleep is here contrasted with being awake and watchful [γρηγορέιν].

²⁴Collins, *Studies on the First Letter*, 309.

²⁵This is in contrast to the gods of the ancient Greek mythology, who were capable of human-like sleep; compare Oepke, "καθεύδω," *TDNT*, 433.

²⁶Oepke, "καθεύδω," *TDNT*, 436.

Consequently, a life of sanctification is a life of watchfulness, a life of being awake—it is an existence “of the day,” rather than “of the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:5). What this means is that the Christian no longer spends his or her life in pursuit of mindless pleasure, but rather leads a life of service to others. The behavior of the apostle Paul and his companions during their stay at Thessalonica is a case in point. “For you remember, brothers,” Paul reminds the Thessalonians, “our labor and hardship: we worked night and day so as not to be a burden to anyone, as we proclaimed the gospel of God to you” (1 Thessalonians 2:9; compare 2 Thessalonians 3:8). Similarly, the Thessalonian Christians, as imitators of the apostles and of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:9), are encouraged to “lead lives worthy of God, who calls you into His kingdom and glory” (1 Thessalonians 2:12). The paradigmatic Christian life is characterized by “work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:3). It is a life of “holiness, righteousness, and blamelessness” (1 Thessalonians 2:11) and, if need be, also a life of suffering, for faith looks to and has as its model the suffering and death of Jesus (1 Thessalonians 3:1 and following).

Unlike the night, the day is the time of sobriety, and Paul exhorts his addressees to stay awake and remain sober (1 Thessalonians 5:6). Only then will they be able to maintain their focus on the Lord and to express it in faithful and loving service to the community. Those who are insubordinate, disorderly, and who refuse to work [ἄτακτοι] are to be admonished (1 Thessalonians 5:14) and, if necessary, shunned and refused means of subsistence (2 Thessalonians 3:6). The day has a future orientation, a *vocational focus*, as it leads to yet another day; the night encourages self-seeking in its short-sighted emphasis on the present moment. It makes one vulnerable to temptation (compare Luke 22:46), be it idleness, drunkenness, or immorality. As such, the night truly is spiritual sleep, and it will lead one to spiritual death under God's wrath. Darkness—the Thessalonian Christians are to remember—provides a false sense of peace and safety; in reality, it only darkens and blinds the heart. A life of darkness is a life of sleep deceptive in its security—when the destruction comes with all its suddenness, nobody will escape and nobody will be spared. The darkness of the Lord's Day will not be nearly as enjoyable as that of cultic ritual, for example.²⁷ “Therefore,” writes

²⁷Compare Amos 5:18-20: “That day will be darkness, not light. It will be as though

Paul, "let us not sleep like the others. . . . Since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on a breastplate of hope and love, and a helmet of the hope of salvation" (1 Thessalonians 5:6, 8).²⁸ Only through the watchfulness of the faith will the Christians be ready for the day of the Lord. "[I]t is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you,'" writes Paul to the Ephesians (5:14). One should note that the apostle's language in 1 Thessalonians suggests familiarity with Jesus' end times discourses. It was Jesus who warned that the day of the Lord would descend like a thief upon the sleeping world (Matthew 24:43; Luke 12:39; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 3:3; 16:15). Jesus Himself encouraged watchfulness. "[K]eep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come," He cautioned His disciples (Matthew 24:42). In the Book of Revelation (16:15), the Risen Lord says, "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake."

Paul concludes the *paraenetic* section with the following statement: "God did not destine us for wrath, but for the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we might live together with Him" (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10). Most commentators agree that here the apostle returns to his discussion of the Parousia in chapter 4. Those who have died—fallen asleep—in Christ will live with Him in the same way as those whose toil is not yet ended and who remain awake, waiting for the Lord's return. All Christians, dead or alive, are equal before Christ. In his epistle to the Romans (14:9), Paul affirms, "Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the living and the dead." Interestingly enough, Paul does not change the verb *καθεύδω* back to *κοιμᾶω*, which he used in reference to the faithfully departed. For one thing, this proves the synonymy of the two verbs. It is not, however, a mere stylistic attempt to avoid repetition on the apostle's part, as most interpreters seem to suggest. On the contrary, Paul uses the verb *καθεύδω* to bring together the two separate strands of his discussion: contextually the verb refers back to the discussion of chapter 4, while at the same time being an extension

a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light—pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?"

²⁸Compare Romans 13:12 "The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light."

of the imagery of spiritual sleep found in chapter 5. It is quite likely that in so doing Paul desired to make a justification statement that would crown his entire exposition of both the Lord's second advent and the Christian life. Ultimately, and this is what all Christians are to keep in mind, salvation is not by works, but proceeds from God's gracious election in Christ. It is a gift of God's grace through faith.

Unfortunately, this interpretation is rejected by a number of commentators who claim it is unlikely for Paul to have made a statement violating his strong emphasis on Christian living. Bruce states, for example, "It is ludicrous to suppose that the writers [*sic*] mean, 'Whether you live like sons of light or like sons of darkness, it will make little difference: you will be all right in the end'."²⁹ This view, however, is too restrictive in that it isolates 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 from the rest of the epistle, and the rest of Paul's theology, for that matter.³⁰ Moreover, it should be noted that this sort of argument is later countered by the apostle himself in his letter to the Romans, "Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" (Romans 6:15). Because the Thessalonian Christians have been called out of darkness, they no longer have anything to do with it. Voluntarily to plunge back into it would be to reject God's salvation. But this does not mean that there is no forgiveness for those who out of weakness fall into sin. On the contrary, there is forgiveness for the weak-hearted, for those who have little hope, or for those who have trouble exercising self-control (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Concluding his second epistle, Paul insists that the idlers are not to be treated as enemies (2 Thessalonians 3:15). Thus, in a conscious attempt to preserve the integrity of justification, rather than fostering un-Christian behavior, Paul caps his whole discussion with a wonderful statement of the gospel. Even those who happen to fall asleep have forgiveness in Christ.

²⁹Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 114. So also Ward, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 113.

³⁰Those who hold this view would perhaps be surprised to find themselves reflecting Nietzsche's sentiment that Paul's idea of God who justifies the undeserving destroys the received (propitiatory) idea of the divine: "deus, qualem Paulus creavit, dei negatio." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, in *The Twilight of the Idols; The Antichrist*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth, United Kingdom: Penguin Books, 1990), 175. Despite numerous contemporary attempts to marginalize the role of justification in Paul's theology, Nietzsche seems to have understood Paul's message very well—even if only to reject it, as well.

Conclusion

In his Thessalonian correspondence, Paul presents the newly founded church with a depiction of the Christian life amidst the unbelieving world. Yet, despite all the rich facets that the discussion entails, the apostle, in a truly masterful way, never loses sight of the resurrection grounding and the unequivocal future focus of Christianity. He manages to achieve this unity, in part at least, by employing the imagery of sleep in a variety of ways, drawing on both the Greco-Roman and the Jewish traditions. With regard to the former, he successfully counters the prevalent deterministic philosophies of the day and transcends the mere euphemistic character of the term "sleep," as he underscores the crucial element of Christian hope. Death for the believer truly is sleep. Paul then goes on to present the Christian life as one of watchfulness in a series of exhortations that remain very much in keeping with the Jewish perception of sleep. In so doing, he reacts with particular force and clarity of argument to cultic immorality, so widespread in the Thessalonica of the first century. Finally, by once again appealing to the imagery of sleep, he unites all the strands of his discussion into a coherent whole, crowned with a justification statement that firmly puts the focus on the cross. It is through the cross that all sleepiness is forgiven. It is through the cross that the dead are now asleep only to wake up to eternal life at Christ's second advent.

Theological Observer

An Appeal for Charity with Clarity: Observations and Questions on Terms and Phrases in Need of Clarification

The ongoing theological discussions in synod will benefit from a close look at key words in two documents and a related synodical resolution. When the stakes are as high as they have become, we do well to pay careful attention to the words we use and to remember that charity and truth are still closely related. The documents referred to in this essay are (1) a CTCR study, "The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship" (hereafter TLUoCF) in *Convention Workbook: Reports and Overtures, 61st Regular Convention, LCMS, 375-387*; (2) a subsequent report (also called "response"), which summarizes discussions of the study at the district level and is titled "The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship: A Report on Synodical Discussions" (hereafter "Report") in *Workbook, 48-51*; and (3) Resolution 3-07A of the 2001 synodical convention in *Convention Proceedings: 61st Regular Convention, LCMS, 137-138*.¹ In this essay, selected passages from the documents are excerpted and related to comments and questions regarding the meaning of key terms.

The Terms: Their Contexts, Meanings, and Implications

A critical term in the discussions is "fellowship." The documents leave no question about its meaning: "Historical doctrinal differences among Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic churches remain and tragically go to the very heart of the Gospel that creates and preserves church unity" ("Report." *Workbook, 50*; IV. B., paragraph 1). "... LCMS pastors and congregations agree as a condition of membership in the Synod not to take part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of those of mixed confessions" ("Report." *Workbook, 50*; V. A., paragraph 1).

It is clear that "fellowship" refers to engaging in religious activity with others who profess a Christian faith. The "Report" makes no reference to participating in any kind of religious event with those outside that body, for example, Jews, Unitarians, Muslims. "Fellowship" is always understood in this way, as *church* fellowship in an inter-Christian context. "TLUoCF" is even more explicit:

¹All documents are also available on the LCMS Web page. Page numbers refer to printed documents; section numbers/letters should be used to locate citations in the PDF Web documents. Addresses of documents on LCMS Web page (or access from pull-down menu on the home page): "The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship" ("the study") at www.lcms.org/ctcr/docs/pdf/flwshp2k.pdf; "TLUoCF: a Report on Synodical Discussions" at www.lcms.org/ctcr/docs/pdf/chfellfinal.pdf; 2001 LCMS Convention-list of resolutions (see 3-07A on 42 of 155) at www.lcms.org/convention/2001finalres.pdf.

“‘fellowship’ describes a wide range of activities among Christians” (TLUoCF. Workbook, 375; paragraph 1).

“Worship” is also a key term in that it denotes a public religious act. It is defined in “historic LCMS understanding” as “any occasion in which the Word of God is preached and prayer is made to Him by a fully authorized church worship leader” (Report. *Workbook*, 50; V. A., paragraph 2). Clearly, an “occasion” sponsored by a civic entity can include worship activities, in which case the kingdom of the left intrudes into the Kingdom of the Right. Thus, if a civic event is publicized as a worship service, includes religious acts (prayer, spiritual songs, and/or homiletical content), and features worship leaders who are not or do not consider themselves Christian, “fellowship” guidelines do not apply; that is, Christians do not participate. The First Commandment is clear on such matters, as are other biblical mandates (see also below).

In regard to the question of participating in a pastoral capacity in a civic event with non-Christians, some confusion has arisen about the implications of the following statement: “Without such a restriction [i.e., a directive not to mention Jesus in a prayer], a Lutheran pastor may for valid and good reason participate in civic affairs such as an inauguration, a graduation, or a right-to-life activity” (“Report.” *Workbook*, 50; V. B., paragraph 2).

Mention in the fellowship “Report” of a “restriction” on using the name of Jesus in a prayer does not at all imply that a Christian (layman or pastor) would participate in prayer or worship on a platform with those who call on false gods as long as there is no restriction on using the name of Jesus. Such a restriction might well occur in any civic context in which sponsors of an event perceive that mention of Jesus’ name might offend non-Christians in attendance, for example, a political gathering to which the organizers invite a pastor to offer a prayer or invocation but do not want to risk alienating any political supporters, or a high school graduation at which the principal or school board is concerned that the name of Jesus would offend some students or parents.

It is important to note that, commonly, *a* pastor (not several pastors) is asked to serve as the spiritual representative at an event. (Even civic leaders can be sensitive to “fellowship” issues.) Note also the typical “civic affairs” cited; the religious act (a prayer or invocation) is incidental to the primary agenda.

Several of the most contentious terms in the continuing crisis are “cases of discretion,” “once-in-a-lifetime situations,” and “exceptions.” In the “Report” (“Cases of Discretion”) we read, “We do not want to fall into the trap of case-law rigidity by setting down rules for every conceivable situation. At the same time, the exception should not become the rule, lest the truth of the Gospel be compromised” (“Report.” *Workbook*, 51; V. B., paragraph 4).

Such an observation suggests that we would like to have it both ways, but the second statement raises serious questions. An exception assumes a standard. If the gospel is “compromised,” is it not the “exception” that does just that (indeed,

may be anticipated to do so)? Wherein does the "compromise" lie if not in the "exceptional" participation, pastorally justified as a "case of discretion" in an "exceptional" context? If participating *more* than once can compromise the gospel, is not that precisely why one does not participate in the "exceptional" event in the first place? If the gospel can be compromised in a fellowship context, in an inter-religious context—civic or otherwise—the risk is unthinkable high and is to be avoided; a Christian does not participate. It is also important to note that in the "Report," "once-in-a-lifetime situations"² is an expression referring to fellowship, specifically to "pastors . . . equally committed to LCMS *fellowship* principles [emphasis mine]" ("Report." *Workbook*, 50; V. B., paragraph 3). It does not apply to participation in inter-religious events.

What is the implication of the phrase "case-law rigidity"? Does it preclude the use of helpful, typical examples for guiding practice? Similarly, the term "proof-texting" has been used pejoratively in related discussions. Yet, is not a matrix of relevant passages, for instance, Romans 16:17, 1 Corinthians 10:14 and following, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, and others cited in the document the foundation for practice in worship relationships? On what is pastoral judgment based if not on clear scriptural mandates such as these? While "consultations" with counselors and presidents may be helpful and "on-the-spot decisions" occasionally necessary, they do not obviate the need for the counsel of Scripture, nor can they be in contradiction to Scripture.

Furthermore, we read that a "pastor may question even his own decision and wish he had taken another course of action" ("Report." *Workbook*, Part V. B., "Cases of Discretion," paragraph 5). To be sure. If one has sinned against the First Commandment, does any amount of "consultation" or, in rare cases, the fact that it required a pastoral "on-the-spot decision" justify the offense? What is needed then is an attitude of humility and contrition and a readiness to admit poor judgment, despite one's good intentions, and to ask forgiveness for the offense. Even more to the point, given the high risk of ambiguous or false witness inherent in many "exceptional" public circumstances, is the trusty saw: When in doubt, just say no. Red flags are red for good reason. A conscience formed from Scripture is a reliable guide; first concerns and initial hesitations are often "spot on" and most useful for "on-the-spot" decisions, especially in regard to public pastoral acts that give public witness. If charity is to prevail, we first acknowledge that love for God (Matthew 22:37-38) precedes and is the source of charity toward the brother and the neighbor.

²Even in the context of fellowship, the potential for the "Gospel [to] to be compromised" can be considerable when a nebulous "once-in-a-lifetime" situation is multiplied by some 6-7000 active pastors.

Resolution 3-07A

Probably most debated is the intent of the fourth Resolved in Resolution 3-07A: "commend for use and guidance to build that unity where it is still lacking." Speaking directly to this Resolved are the closing paragraphs of the "Report":

The desire of some for a *more detailed examination* of scriptural and confessional passages cited in the [study] . . . is a positive sign. Obviously LCMS members want the Synod's fellowship principles and practices to be firmly grounded on their biblical and confessional foundations. Encouraging *continued study* does not mean that the LCMS has no position on fellowship. . . . For the sake of our unity in the pure doctrine of Christ, we ask God to bless our church *as we continue to study this issue* [emphases mine] ("Report." *Workbook*, 51; A concluding word on the responses).

The full Resolved reads as follows: "Resolved that we commend this study³ and response⁴ for continued use and guidance to build that unity where it is still lacking" (*Proceedings*, 137).

We see that the "Report" closes with a clear emphasis on "*more detailed examination*" and "*continued study*," even imploring God's blessing "*as we continue to study this issue* [emphases mine]." The verbal context is quite clear. Thus, the fourth Resolved of Resolution 3-07A "commend[ing]" the study and response for "use and guidance" — given also the unresolved questions cited in the "Report" — is best understood as "use and guidance" for "*continued study*," as the "Report" itself urges. That is to say: Disagreements have been noted, summarized, and even responded to in some degree; now there is need for further study aimed at accord (concord). We are not yet (no longer) "walking together" in fellowship doctrine and practice. Do we need further evidence than the sad events of the past two years? Indeed, we regretfully observe that using a proof text — "once-in-a-lifetime situations" — from the "Report" as a guide for practice has resulted in greater disunity within the synod. It is fair to ask if those who claim that the resolution "commends" both documents as guides for practice also endorse using

³The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship (Office of the President and CTCR of the LCMS).

⁴The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship: A Report on Synodical Discussions.

"Study" refers to this initial CTCR document (a term it uses of itself), although in other Resolveds and Whereases the "study" is generally referred to as the "document." In the third Resolved, "study" refers to the "document"; yet in the second Resolved, "study" refers to the act of studying the "document." Also, the term "Report" is part of the title of the "Response," i.e., the account of discussions, rather than of the title of the more formal document, which, as noted above, is called the "study." Inconsistent and counter-intuitive language is not helpful in important documents and resolutions.

a phrase from the "Report" on district discussions on fellowship to defend participation in inter-faith events sponsored by either civic or religious entities.

It is true that a resolution to recommit "TLUoCF" (the "study") to the CTCR and synod at large for additional study failed. (Take note that the "Report" / response document was not included in this motion.) However, even a cursory reading of the defeated resolution (*Proceedings*, 138) reveals the intent of its framers and the reason for its defeat. The Whereas take issue with the content of the CTCR study, stating, for example, that "numerous questions and concerns remain unresolved, . . . including the study's own commitment to a genuinely Lutheran understanding of church fellowship." Demonstrating their disagreement with this judgment, the delegates defeated the resolution to recommit and, with their negative votes, supported "TLUoCF" (the "study"). It is no leap of logic to conclude that the delegates who subsequently passed Resolution 3-07A understood their action as again endorsing "TLUoCF" and that the inclusion of the "Report" ("response"), in the fourth Resolved was hardly given passing notice. If one were to judge the intent of Resolution 3-07A fairly *in the context of the defeated motion*, that intent would be to endorse "TLUoCF." Thus, if any document might be understood as commended to guide practice, it would be "TLUoCF" (the "study"), not the "Report on Synodical Discussions."

In effect, ultimately, Resolution 3-07A paired a comprehensive CTCR study on fellowship (with its exhaustive scriptural and confessional apparatus) with a less formal summary of responses to and discussions of that study—a mix of documents most unusual for a church body to adopt (or even "commend") as a basis for practice, truly an "odd coupling." There is much that is useful and informative in the "Report"; a goodly portion of it, however, is simply descriptive of fellowship concerns in the post-modern cultural milieu. Thus, by its very nature and purpose, it lacks the characteristics, style, and tone of a document framed to guide practice. In any case, the "Report" also deals only with fellowship, that is, religious activities with other Christians. As noted above, the section entitled "Cases of Discretion" has already been misapplied to worship activities outside that context and has proven to be far more open to misinterpretation than the framers or delegates could have foreseen. The devil is in such details.

Finally, one might reasonably ask what "commend," as opposed to "adopt," means in the context of scriptural and confessional practice. Do we not "commend" for study and "adopt" for practice? Or did "commend" here simply mean that there was not agreement enough to "adopt"? Precision in language is critical. We dare not jeopardize the unity that we have in Christ by sounding an uncertain or tentative trumpet in these crucial matters. In the midst of such uncertainty, as the Resolved itself notes "unity . . . is still lacking" (an accurate observation), but unity is not likely to be attained by premature application or misapplication of statements or guidelines on which consensus is lacking.

What Does This Mean? (A Theological/Practical Postscript)

In the sea of relativism that is our pluralistic American culture, we take seriously the charge to "make disciples . . . , teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." Even as the message of the gospel includes (is directed to) all people, just as surely it excludes those who exclude themselves by rejecting its unique and distinctive saving message. Jesus Christ, in His particularity and revealed fullness, is, and will remain, an offense to many (see John 15:18-21 and Matthew 5:10-12). We can expect nothing different. These words of Jesus remind us of the futility of engaging in "public relations" in well-intentioned efforts to make the message of sin and grace, of law and gospel, culturally acceptable or attractive. By the same token, despite what we might consider good intentions, we avoid giving the public impression that Christians are but another branch of one (more-alike-than-different) multi-religious family of sincere believers. The pressures to adjust the message of the gospel to the culture are subtle, and we are not always aware when we succumb to them. In our personal relationships with others we attempt to be "all things to all men . . . for the sake of the gospel, that [we] may share its blessings" (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). In pluralistic public circumstances, however, love is best expressed by not obscuring important distinctions—or the saving message of the gospel—by "once-in-a-lifetime" or "exceptional" public displays that imply or give witness to believers and unbelievers alike a unity (or an equality or approval of beliefs) that does not exist. For the only unity we have is grounded in "one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who rules over us all and works through us all, and lives in us all" (Ephesians 4:4-5).

Addendum:

Since this essay was written and submitted for publication, the CTCR has responded to a question posed by a dispute resolution panel regarding the practical application of the documents commended by Resolution 3-07A.

Panel Question: "Would offering a prayer by an LCMS pastor in a 'civic event' in which prayers would also be offered by representatives of non-Christian religions be in and of itself a violation of the paragraph under 'Section V point B. Cases of Discretion' in the CTCR document 'The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship,' a document adopted by the 2001 Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod 'for continued use and guidance?' [Take note that the document referred to is the "report" of district discussions of the "study." As noted above, it was "commended," not adopted, by Resolution 3-07A.]

CTCR Answer: "No. Section V, B. does not explicitly address the issue of 'offering a prayer by an LCMS pastor in a "civic event" in which prayers would also be offered by representatives of non-Christian religions.'" The CTCR is presently considering assignments with respect to this issue, including the formulation of guidelines for participation in civic events and the definition of 'civic event.'" (Adopted February 18, 2003.)

That is, the CTCR clearly states that the paragraph in the document commended by Resolution 3-07A does *not* apply to such a situation. Even more important than the one-word answer is the reason given. In essence, the CTCR said: No, the document does not prohibit such participation because the document is not relevant to events which include non-Christian participants. In other words, the "cases of discretion" clause cannot be used either to prohibit *or* to *permit* participation in such events. "Cases of discretion" may relate to fellowship among Christians, but not to offering a prayer in an event involving non-Christians.

David O. Berger

Why Are There Small Churches?

A widespread way of thinking is that some churches are small because they do not want to grow. The argument usually goes, a church is not going to grow unless its members want to grow, plan to grow, and work to grow. Churches that are small year after year are churches that do not want to grow. That is one way of thinking, though I do not subscribe to it.

Jesus did not say "grow churches" to the Eleven, but they were to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching. Some hold that if a congregation is baptizing and teaching, it will grow. Then they conclude that if a congregation is not growing, it is not doing the Lord's work. There are several fallacies in this argument.

First, growth is not to be used as a measure by which to judge a pastor or a congregation. The Bible does not say a servant of God is judged by the number of new converts or members. However, God does hold ministers accountable for how and why they teach. God will not judge one on the basis of the results (Ezekiel 3:16-19). God judges His servant by what he does, not the results.

The second fallacy is thinking that growth in numbers is an assured result of faithfully proclaiming the gospel. This is simply not so. Jesus told the parable of the farmer who went out to sow his seed. The crowds did not understand the parables. Jesus says as much, "This is why I speak to them in parables: 'Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.' In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes'" (Matthew 13:13-15). Jesus told his disciples not to be disheartened when many people would be indifferent or even reject their preaching (Matthew 13:18-22).

Even after we have sown the good seed of the gospel, there are times when it does not bear fruit. We should not think that gospel is not powerful or that we have failed in our sowing. The gospel is "the power of God for the salvation of

everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16), but not everyone believes. Jesus ends the explanation of this parable with the assurance that some will hear and bear much fruit (Matthew 13:23). Still, the harsh reality is that most people will reject God's word outright or will fall away soon after hearing it. We are commanded to continue to preach (2 Timothy 4:2-5).

Numerical growth is not the measure of a good and faithful pastor. Faithful ministry does not always produce growth. Churches that are proclaiming the gospel to their community may reach a few new people each year and not grow, simply because people are moving out of the community. Some churches, faithful in reaching out with the gospel, may not even gain one new member in some years.

Apart from the results, we must be more earnest in preparing for our sermons, Bible studies, and personal evangelism. However, our expectations must be more realistic. We should spend our time preparing ourselves to be good witnesses and not worrying about the growth. God can handle that very well on His own. Growth is not bad. The love of growth is the root of unrealistic expectations. Unrealistic expectations lead to self-incrimination and the temptation to take short cuts by reducing time for instruction or avoiding controversial topics. These same expectations can lead to burnout or even the loss of one's own faith.

The third fallacy is thinking that by human techniques we can make the church grow. The word "church" can be understood in two ways. It can mean the body of all believers, all those with the Holy Spirit who put their faith in Christ's atonement for sins. "Church" can also mean all those who are connected with a Christian congregation. Human techniques can make the number of people connected with a Christian congregation increase, but only God can make a person a believer. Is it possible that by making the worship more entertaining more people will come? Yes, certain people will be attracted, and as long as their expectations are met, they will remain. If the gospel is preached, a few of them might become believers, but many will not. In the Philippines, the missionaries helped poor families, many of whom attended church for that reason, but only a few became believers. They were called "rice Christians." They were willing workers and regular in attendance, but some never appreciated the gospel.

The pastor's responsibility is to be a faithful proclaimer of God's word and that should be foremost in worship. The service is not the time to show everyone how clever or humorous one is. It is a time to bring people to the knowledge of their sin and point them to Christ the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Through God's word, He will make the church grow.

The Apostle Paul recognized that it is God alone who makes the church grow. He wrote "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow" (1 Corinthians 3:5-6). God's ministers will be judged and rewarded for their efforts and not by the results.

There is no comfort here for those who neglect their calling as a minister of the gospel. What must be emphasized is that pastors of churches that do not grow are not necessarily guilty of neglecting their calling.

Why, then, are there small congregations? My answer is that there are people who are separated from larger flocks by distance, language, or culture. There are small churches because these people are not served by the larger congregations. Paul McCain, in a letter from Concordia Publishing House, quoted J. R. R. Tolkien in *The Fellowship of the Rings*, "Such is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere." "The eyes of the great" are focused on large numbers, leaving "small hands" to serve small congregations. By our standards, a congregation of four hundred members seems more important than a congregation of forty. But the Lord does not think that way (Matthew 18:12-14). The Lord wants every individual to be served with His word. We are called by God to serve those who are in remote areas or separated for other reasons.

We should not be ashamed because we serve small churches. We are doing the Lord's work. If it is the Lord's work, we dare not consider it less than important and noble. It deserves our best effort. Here is a small church pastor who has a heavenly view of his work. He said, "When I am asked, 'How many attend worship at your church?' I answer, 'Well, let's see. There were angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven and some of our members too . . . I'd say it is in the millions.'"

There are many small congregations without resident pastors. This does not mean that they are not being served. Some are part of a dual parish, but the pastor does not live in their community. In other cases, they are vacant. Their pastor has taken a call to another parish, retired, or passed away. I know it is not always possible, but it is important for every congregation to have a resident pastor. I wish I could support this statement with verified studies and statistics, but I do not know of any study that has examined the effect of not having a resident pastor in the community. I have noticed some things from my own experience of serving three vacancies in New Hampshire—one of them for fourteen months—and dual parishes in the Philippines and in New Mexico for a total of ten years.

The absence of a resident pastor has resulted in some lay leaders becoming more active and taking responsibility for some work in the church. The active members are also more appreciative of the pastor and his work. The members who suffer most are the youth and the weaker members on the fringe of the church. It is much harder to instruct and assimilate new members into the church. The church without a resident pastor has far less influence in the community, especially if the pastor is a long distance away. Before entering the seminary, I worked at a mine in Climax, Colorado. Our little congregation in Leadville was served by a pastor who lived in Salida, sixty miles down the Arkansas valley. Generally, he came to Leadville on Friday afternoon and left at 9:00 A.M. Sunday,

after worship. That was the only time he was in town. I remember the night I was called to the hospital to baptize a premature baby. I did not feel at all prepared for the task. This is the way it is in many communities without a resident pastor. The members do their best, but it is not a good situation.

There will always be small churches. They will be a source of frustration for church leaders, because they are not as efficient as large self-sustaining churches. They seem to sap manpower and funds from more promising mission fields. Sometimes the larger churches just do not want to be bothered with small church problems. I cannot blame them for that. This makes it important for those serving small churches to make a special effort to encourage and support other small church pastors. Small church ministry is a specialized ministry. It is different. It requires more ingenuity and self-reliance. We cannot expect all those who have served larger churches and risen to leadership in our church to understand the challenges of those in small congregations.

But we must also work with our brothers and sisters in the larger churches. Matt Andersen used this analogy: The Synod is like concrete, made up of rock, smaller gravel, and sand all bound together with cement. The strength of the concrete would be sacrificed if any element were to be left out. Churches in smaller communities train the youth who will later move to larger cities and churches. Smaller churches are generally more interested and cooperative in joint circuit projects, like summer camps, Reformation and mission rallies, and workshops.

Why are there small churches? Maybe it is because the Lord can accomplish things in small churches that He cannot do in larger churches. The family atmosphere of the small church provides more support for the family structure. It is easier to apply God's word to specific situations, rather than being more general. There are greater opportunities to know and address the problems people are having.

Let us rejoice that God has called some of us to serve small churches!

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Book Reviews

***The Letter to Philemon.* By Joseph A. Fitzmyer. The Anchor Bible Commentary. Volume 34C. New York: Doubleday, 2000. 136 pages.**

Fitzmyer has provided an excellent resource for the scholar and pastor eager to research the intricacies of the small, but significant, book of Philemon. The author has included lengthy bibliographies, thorough indices, and a fresh translation complete with commentary. The survey of scholarly opinions is both broad and fair, presenting the strengths and weaknesses of the differing positions. The work draws on both biblical and secular parallels to shed light on every aspect of the text, from the connotations of the vocabulary to the cultural background.

The book also summarizes a fruitful argument regarding the relationships between the Apostle Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus. Fitzmyer argues convincingly in favor of P. Lampe's proposal, that Onesimus sought out Paul in order to plead for his intercession as an *amicus domini*. Onesimus has not run away from Philemon to run into Paul, his master's teacher. Rather, as a slave who has fallen into his master's disfavor, he visits a man who has influence with his master in order to gain a fresh start in his place in the home. To illustrate that this option stood available to slaves in the ancient world, Fitzmyer marshals evidence from Roman jurisprudence and private letters. It also fits well with what is known of ancient customs of patronage.

It is telling that the biblical text most cited in this commentary is Galatians 5:6, "faith formed by love." Taken as an interpretive key for Philemon, it focuses on the faithful and grace-filled response that Paul's letter would elicit from the Christian master. One would do well to add John G. Nordling's articulation of the vicarious and intercessory role taken on by Paul as the true christological center of the book. Still, those who approach Philemon with a Lutheran hermeneutic will find themselves indebted to Fitzmyer, who both generously quotes the good doctor of Wittenberg and does not hesitate to define grace as "the divine favor by which Christians are saved . . . not relying on their own deed or merits" (90). Christ is clearly identified as the motivation for Christian life.

This commentary invites the reader to deeper reflection on the cruciform shape of the Christian life. Without turning the letter into a sounding board for Christian or Pauline views on slavery, Fitzmyer highlights the central theme of faith transforming inter-Christian relationships in its grateful response to Christ's love. The distinctions of the created order persist, but the formation of a new brotherhood in Christ opens eschatological possibilities of mutual love, acceptance, and service. There is enough grist in these twenty-five Scripture verses that one might imagine a parish pastor developing little Philemon into a several week Bible study or a vibrant Advent series.

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Mark: Images of an Apostolic Interpreter. By C. Clifton Black. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001. 327 Pages.

D. Moody Smith has struck upon an interesting idea. Instead of presenting yet another commentary series on the books of the Bible, why not instead put together a series of books based upon the individuals who wrote and were written about in those books? This he does in the series *Studies on Personalities in the New Testament*. The goal of the series is to spark the imagination of today's students, so that they begin to see the New Testament characters as flesh-and-blood people, with real-life challenges and distinct personalities. By encountering the various personalities of the New Testament, students are further invited to enter into the world of Jesus and the early church. So far, the series includes books on Herod, Mary the Mother of Jesus, James the Brother of Jesus, as well as Peter and John, among others.

C. Clifton Black's *Mark* is a fine example of what this series has to offer. To be sure, Mark is a somewhat shadowy figure, known as an evangelist, a friend of Peter and Paul, and perhaps also the young man who fled away naked at the time of our Lord's betrayal. Black seeks to fill out this sketchy portrait. From the beginning, Black offers a justification for his work, arguing that critical scholarship has often unduly doubted the traditions and stories about Mark. Although Black has by no means shed himself of the tenets of critical scholarship, he is at least critical of it, and desires to "give full weight to the traditions associated with Mark" (11).

In the first chapter, Black draws from the book of Acts, and adroitly pictures Mark as a "Wayward Attaché," the son of a wealthy patroness of the church who caused the breakup between Paul and Barnabas (25). As Black demonstrates, however, Mark's name is redeemed in the New Testament letters, where again and again he is depicted as a "Beloved Junior Partner" to the two great apostles. It would seem that, like his mentor Peter, he faltered, but he also recovered.

The book continues to read like a mystery novel, as Black uncovers evidence of Mark's legacy in the early church. Adroitly, the author leads us through a recounting of Papias' remarks concerning Mark, especially concerning the assertion that he served as "Peter's interpreter" (83). Justin Martyr's and Irenaeus' comments on Mark's role as an evangelist are also recorded and evaluated.

We should also note that this book can be plain fun, especially in its attention to detail. Black makes particular note of the early-third century writer Hippolytus who labeled the second evangelist "Mark the stumpy-fingered" (116). Through church history this sobriquet became Mark's title, and may refer either to fingers too small for his hand, to the story that he cut off his own thumb in order to make himself ineligible for the priesthood, or to the fact that his gospel is, in fact, somewhat truncated. In any case, it is a joy to see the early church fathers struggle to make sense of things, even as we do.

In sum, C. Clifton Black has offered for us a winsome, well-researched

exploration into the personality of Mark. If it leads readers to look into the New Testament and early-church writers for themselves, it will have provided a useful service.

Peter J. Scaer

Introducing the Reformed Faith: Biblical Revelation, Christian Tradition, Contemporary Significance. By Donald K. McKim. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001. 261 pages. \$27.95.

To most Lutherans, "Reformed" refers to those Christians whose theology grew out of the Protestant, though not the Lutheran, Reformation. Although unintentional, they often classify Calvinists and Zwinglians, Arminians and Wesleyans into one generic and indistinguishable category. Dr. Donald McKim, an articulate theologian, prolific author, and gifted editor, provides an indispensable resource for understanding the peculiarities and distinctive emphases of Reformed theology in light of contemporary and ecumenical perspectives.

In his introduction, McKim places Reformed theology into its larger biblical and historical context. This common Christian perspective leads naturally into the Reformation claim of participating in an evangelical and catholic heritage. Orthodox and confessional Lutheran readers will recognize how we share many similar Protestant perspectives on the biblical foundations and historical backgrounds of Christian doctrine and also on some common contemporary concerns as McKim sets them forth in this richly readable reference resource.

McKim examines the biblical, historical, and (if unique) Reformed perspective on fifteen key doctrines of the Christian church in nineteen clearly organized and carefully expounded chapters. He provides a wealth of material on Scripture, Trinity, creation, providence, humanity, sin, person of Christ, work of Christ, Holy Spirit, salvation, church, baptism, Lord's Supper, Christian life, and the reign of God—along with an introductory chapter on being a "confessional" Calvinist. In his three final chapters, he describes the distinctive emphases of the Reformed faith, giving answers to "some common questions," and even offering a "Catechism of Christian Faith and Life," which he prepared with the hope that others might adopt or at least adapt it. This book has helpful study questions at the end of each chapter, fifty pages of notes, an index of non-English terms used in the book, an index of names, and a well-prepared subject index.

One of the particular emphases that grows out of reading this book is the oft-forgotten fact that Calvinism is a distinct form of Protestant theology. Strongly influenced by Luther and Calvin, Reformed theology has been significantly modified by later reformers, who provided it with peculiar facets and distinguishing features. While giving characteristic Reformed perspectives on Christian doctrines, McKim shies away from several unique, yet controverted Calvinistic topics, particularly predestination and millennialism. He admits that

there are a variety of millennial views held among teachers in the various Reformed churches. He only adverts to the distinctive double-predestinarian view held by most Calvinists, yet spends almost no time on explaining this teaching's historic foundation in Reformed perspective. This is somewhat disappointing, since he is rather thorough in so many other areas.

The nuanced position of John Calvin as he differed from other Protestants on the Lord's Supper, especially Luther and Zwingli, in light of their rejection of the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, is addressed unequivocally. McKim forthrightly articulates Calvin's exceptional, albeit not always comprehensible, explanation of Christ's spiritual presence in the sacrament. Christ is "spiritually present, though not physically or locally present," notes McKim (150). His multi-page presentation on this topic is remarkably careful, yet the subtle distinctions and lucid commentary only underscore the subtle vagaries that have haunted Calvinists since the sixteenth century. Of these ("Sacramentarian") distortions the formulators of the Book of Concord said, "Many important people were deceived through their magnificent, alluring words (FC SD VII 6)." So it can still be seen in contemporary ecumenical circles when one Lutheran body affirmed the *Formula of Agreement* with several Reformed denominations a few years ago.

Hermeneutical foundations of Reformed doctrinal positions also become evident in McKim's writing. For example, the Reformed interpretation of the Lord's words regarding the Lord's Supper comes from a less-than-firm commitment to a grammatical-historical hermeneutic of Scripture, as McKim discloses in earlier chapters. Concomitantly, throughout the work there is a noticeably weak Christology that unwittingly separates Christ's two natures, rather than seeing the humanity and divinity of Christ as relating effectively and biblically in the shared characteristics of the whole divine-human person, Christ Jesus.

Lutheran pastors should read up a book from an articulate theologian of another denomination every year. This present work provides a helpful guide for pastors when questions turn toward the beliefs of Presbyterians, members of the United Church of Christ, and other non-Arminian Reformed churches (McKim lists the twenty-three denominations that fall under his more specific label of "Reformed"). McKim's book is a pleasure to read, review, and recommend for careful appraisal by all Lutheran parish pastors. Pastors who have opportunities to study and work with Reformed colleagues will enjoy the discussions that will inevitably arise over our confessional distinctions, as well as appreciate the resulting necessary return to the Lutheran Confessions for clarification and explication of our foundational biblical Lutheran faith.

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On My Heart Imprint Your Image: A Collection of Hymns for the Christian Year. Kathryn M. Peperkorn, soprano / Rev. John M. Berg, organ. Christ Lutheran Academy: Pleasant Prairie, Wisconsin, 2003. \$14.00.

Audio recordings of hymns and hymn settings have—thankfully—been increasing in recent years. The newly-released CD, *On My Heart Imprint Your Image: A Collection of Hymns for the Christian Year*, is distinctive among other such recordings. Whereas collections of church music and hymns recorded by choirs abound, it is unusual to find a CD of hymns as sung by a soloist.

The professional, operatic quality of Kathryn M. Peperkorn's voice is evident, as well as pitch accuracy and sensitivity to the text. The fact that Peperkorn chose to record such a collection is a testimony to the strength of Lutheran hymnody and her dedication to it. There are professional singers who would consider a collection of hymns to be beneath their capabilities. Not so here. Instead of attempting to demonstrate vocal skills with difficult arrangements or key modulations befitting a trained soprano, Peperkorn beautifully lets the hymns speak (or rather, sing) for themselves.

The instrumental accompaniment is also simple, but not simplistic. The alternate harmonizations are chosen (or improvised) by Rev. Berg with care, so they do not detract from the hymn. Christa Hegland's cello and Stacy Peterson's flute are implemented well and played skillfully. There is a variety of texture within the music by any and all combinations of organ, cello, flute, and voice. The best tracks are hymns that lend themselves to a lighter treatment, such as "Christ Be My Leader," "Abide With Me," and "Jerusalem, My Happy Home."

The biggest strength of any recording of hymns, of course, is its content. The hymns in this volume are chosen from a wide variety of sources, from early Latin sources, to Reformation chorales, English, Irish, and American hymn writers. Of course, some will always suggest that more or fewer hymns from particular genres or eras should have been recorded. More importantly, it is commendable that the selected hymns are representative of all three current hymn books of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod: *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941), *Lutheran Worship* (1982), and *Hymnal Supplement 98*. This demonstrates a discernment in hymn selection which is all too uncommon—to recognize the gift of hymnody as an ever-expanding, not static, tradition and repertoire.

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The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present. Edited by Richard Lischer. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002. 496 pages. \$29.00.

If one would like to get into the mind of a theologian and disseminate his thinking, then read the proclamation of law and gospel in one of his sermons. In

so doing, the preacher's theology is laid bare for a thorough inspection. Granted, for an investigation to assess and describe accurately any theologies woven into the preacher's declaration to his people, then more than one sermon should be scrutinized. Nevertheless, the sermon is a window into the pastor's faith and into the faith that this same pastor lifts up before his parishioners as truth.

This unique volume draws on the proclamations of fifty-two noted theologians, Christian thinkers, and preachers — both women and men — from across the ages in order to present a broad-stroke and informative collection of insights on the art of preaching. Gathering the writing of figures as diverse as Augustine, John Chrysostom, Jonathan Edwards, Gardner C. Taylor, and Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Company of Preachers* provides an insight on various preaching styles and on the various theologies of these same diverse authors. Editor Richard Lischer has distilled the vast quantity of representative sermonic material from all the preachers in order to present an "unbiased" snippet of each of them. At the end of each introduction, the source and original title of the selection is indicated as precisely as possible and, where applicable, according to the directions of the publisher holding the copyright, making it a valuable resource for a more in-depth investigation to occur.

The book is arranged in seven divisions, each covering a central component of Lischer's view of the preaching task: I. What is Preaching? II. The Preacher; III. Proclaiming the Word; IV. Biblical Interpretation; V. Rhetoric; VI. The Hearer; VII. Preaching and the Church. Lischer's main criterion for selection in this anthology is theological. Does this piece contribute to a clearer theological understanding of preaching? Much could have been chosen from the fields of rhetoric, communications, cultural studies, and history, but to have done so would have created a very different book, one that focused on the sermon's satellites rather than the integrated act of preaching itself.

In the section titled "Preaching and the Church," the reader will find discussions of the sacraments, the Holy Spirit, and theology, all of which are present within the life of the church. A thematic and historical collection such as this presents a fascinating case study in continuity and discontinuity in theology. Another example is the practice of allegory in interpretation and preaching, which is an issue that appears to have been resolved, first by the sixteenth-century reformers and later by modern, nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical methods of interpretation. Yet the debate over "meaning" in texts is far from over, as postmodern interpreters have made clear. Theological interpretation is once again displaying the riches of patristic exegesis, including allegory.

For more than a millennium it appeared that Augustine had relieved the church's agony over the use of secular rhetoric by "baptizing" Cicero in Book 4 of *On Christian Doctrine*. But the issue was revived among the Puritans, whose corrective — "plain and perspicuous" English — was itself yet another rhetoric of preaching. In the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries the concern has resurfaced in a different form, namely, the debate over technology and religious

values. Television can simulate “church” in the family rooms of millions of television viewers. How is this modern communication technique—and the preaching it conveys—to be evaluated over against traditional ecclesiology, which presupposes the fellowship of Word and Table? How has television had an impact on the Sunday sermon?

Today, both in the Missouri Synod and beyond, the question of law and gospel in preaching does not enter in the foray, at least not as pervasively as it once did. Luther’s passion for the gospel ignited the discussion, and the abiding danger of moralism—the confusion of God’s grace with the moral, religious, social, or political rectitude of its recipients—has kept the question alive in some (Lutheran) quarters. The law-gospel debate was taken up by Wesley, Edwards, Finney, Barth, and many others who attempted to define the terms and formulate their co-existence in the sermon. It continued less explicitly in Bultmann and the school of the New Hermeneutic (represented in this book by Gerhard Ebeling), and one still hears its echoes in treatises and sermons of liberation (see Oscar Romero, “A Pastor’s Last Homily”).

But on the whole, the new interest in narrative preaching has changed the terms of the law-gospel paradigm. For in narrative preaching, the mode is less proclamatory, less existentially decisive. The preacher does not explicitly rivet the hearer with God’s judgment in preparation for the gracious news of the promise. Instead, preachers such as Taylor, Lash, Craddock, and Campbell envision the sermon as a means of enrolling the listener into a larger consciousness or group. In this genre, the sermon is better defined as a narrative process than a proclamation, whose end is self-recognition, repentance, and participation in the church and her gifts. The word does not knife downward through history toward its target as much as it rises out of the shared humanity and the Christian identity of its hearers.

Finally, this brief volume reveals the various answers to the question asked by all preachers: “What are the most appropriate responses to the preached word?” Is it the life of Christian freedom in service enjoyed by one who, said Luther, is *semper justificandi*, always under the necessity of being justified? Or is it something else, from somewhere else that has crept into our own preaching? Read these examples and measure your own preaching for the sake of the clarity of the word and the proper application of that same word, for the sake of Christ’s bride and her eternal hope.

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Books Received

Benson, Clarence H. *Biblical Faith*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2003. 112 Pages. Paperback. \$10.99.

Borgmann, Albert. *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003. 144 Pages. Paper. \$14.99.

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Childs, James. M., Jr., editor. *Faithful Conversation: Christian Perspectives on Homosexuality*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003. 132 Pages. Paperback. \$9.00.

Clark, David K. *To Know and Love God*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2003. 464 Pages. Paperback. \$35.00.

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Scobie, Charles H. H. *The Ways of Our God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. 1038 Pages. Paper. \$45.00.

Thomsen, Mark and Vitor Westhelle, editors. *Envisioning a Lutheran Communion: Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century*. Minneapolis: Kirk House, 2002. 160 Pages. Paper.

TRUTH

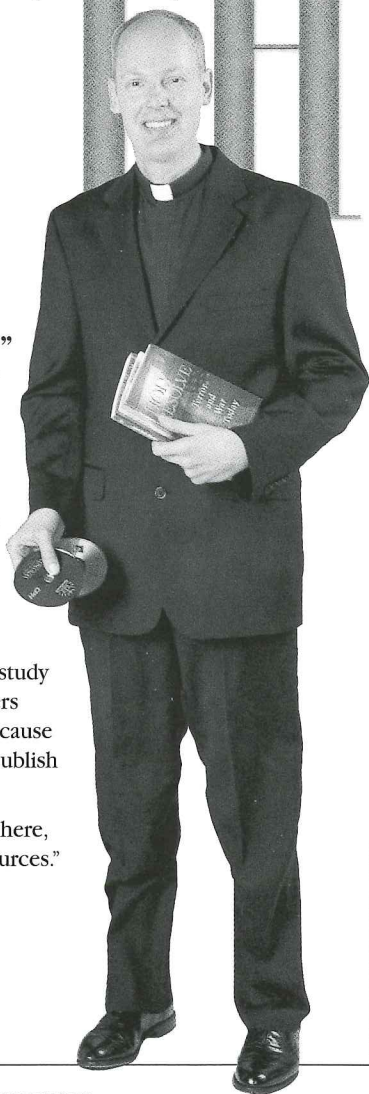
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Concordia is a very valuable partner in our ministry here, and I look forward to many more years of great resources."

*Michael P. Walther, Pastor
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