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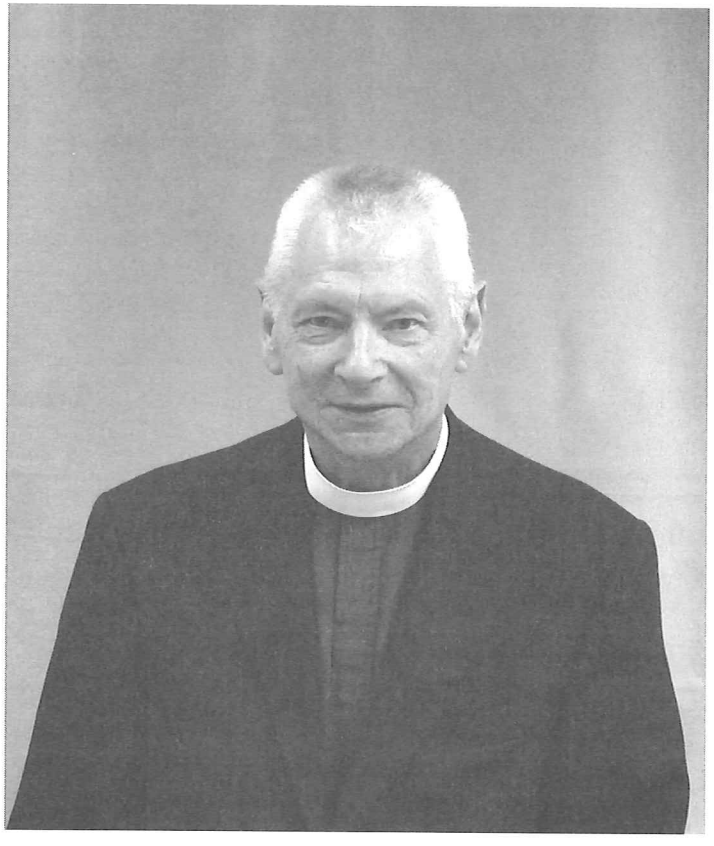

Kurt Erik Marquart

1934–2006

We apologize for the error that occurred in printing the photo of Dr. Marquart in the July/October 2006 issue of CTQ *(page 194).*

The Editors

CTQ 71 (2007): 3–28

The Challenge of History: Luther's Two Kingdoms Theology as a Test Case

Cameron A. MacKenzie

The task of historical theology is interrogation—to ask questions of the past by investigating the writings of theologians and the experiences of the Church for what they can teach today. Even when the historian does not explicitly justify his work by asserting its contemporary relevance, nonetheless it always reflects the concerns of his own times. What motivates the historian now determines the course of his work; if he wants anyone to read it (let alone publish it), it has to reflect the interests of today even as it presents the record of yesterday.

This truism has special relevance when studying great men, especially great thinkers, and particularly in a seminary like ours that has committed itself to historic continuity with the Church through the ages. For we have pledged ourselves not only to the Scriptures but also to the creeds and confessions of our church. When we consider contemporary questions, therefore, we look for answers in these documents and also in those who wrote them as well as in those who confessed them in succeeding times and generations. The result is that theology in a church like ours always has a strong historical dimension to it. We want to know what the Scriptures, the Confessions, Martin Luther, and C. F. W. Walther all had to say, for example, about worship practices and sexual practices, about war and politics, about the role of women in the Church.

Obviously, this presents great opportunities for historical theology, but also great challenges since we are often asking questions that our predecessors never answered; or, if they did, they were answering them in far different contexts. As a result, the perennial temptation is to read the evidence selectively in a way that may very well answer the question but does so by distorting the history. The distortions can be deliberate but usually are not. Instead, they simply reflect the tyranny of the present over the past.

An example of such historical distortion that is frequently present in the literature of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has to do with Church

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and state relationships, namely, how are these two God-given institutions connected and how should they interact? Appropriately enough, Luther and the Confessions are usually cited by synodical sources when discussing such relationships, but not so appropriately they are often cited partially and sometimes tendentiously. A good illustration of this is the 1995 report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), entitled *Render Unto Caesar . . . and Unto God: A Lutheran View of Church and State*.[1] In many respects, this is a very fine piece and I have no particular objection to its conclusions. Indeed, as a matter of full disclosure, I must admit to having been a member of the CTCR when it was adopted. But in reviewing this statement, I was struck by how much it demonstrates the challenges of employing history in the service of theology.[2]

Now, as one might expect from a document that treats political questions, it makes extensive use of Luther's "two kingdoms" or "two governments" theology and cites especially his 1523 treatise, *Temporal*

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[1] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), *Render Unto Caesar . . . and Unto God: A Lutheran View of Church and State* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1995).

[2] Other works that reflect the same view of history that I criticize in this paper include "The Separation of Church and State," *The Lutheran Witness* 45 (1936): 3–4, 18–19, 35–36, 50–51: "There is no disagreement regarding the proposition that Lutherans teach the separation of Church and State" (p. 3); Theodore Hoyer, "Church and State" in *The Abiding Word: An Anthology of Doctrinal Essays*, ed. Theodore Laetsch, vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 562–607: "Luther knew what the right relation between Church and State is. Had he been able, he would have organized a Church like ours, congregations like ours. . . . Not until the United States of America was established did the world see a land in which this right and natural and Scriptural relation between Church and State exists—separation" (p. 590); C. F. Drewes, "Luther and Liberty," *Theological Quarterly* 13 (1909): 89–101: "He [Luther] also stood for total separation of Church and State, for a free and independent Church and a free and independent State, for freedom of conscience and worship, and *against* all external force and violence in matters religious" (p. 89); C. F. W. Walther, "Earthly Authorities II: 26th Western District Convention, St. Paul's Church, Concordia, Mo., Beginning Oct. 14, 1885" in *Essays for the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 2:270–289: "During its initial period . . . the Lutheran Church held firmly to the doctrine that the government has neither the right nor the power to assume control of the church" (p. 281); and J. Sohn, "Der Staat, die Bibel, und das Papsttum," *Verhandlungen des Kanada-Distrikts der Synode von Missouri, Ohio u. a. St.*, 1909: "Before Luther's thoughts concerning the right form of an independent church of Jesus Christ could be realized, the princes infringed the rights of the church and so forced upon the church the consistory. . . . But here in America we find the right form of the church . . . as Luther had conceived it" (p. 29).

Authority: To What Extent It Should be Obeyed,[3] for in this work Luther distinguishes quite clearly between the Church and the state by ascribing discrete functions and the means for carrying them out to each one. The CTCR document then argues that the Lutheran Confessions operate with this same distinction and quotes the Augsburg Confession (*CA* XVI; *CA* XXVIII, 1-14) and the Apology (Ap XVI, 2-3) in support. In none of this does *Render Unto Caesar* distort the evidence, but it is also true that it does not present all the evidence as it attempts to articulate "a Lutheran view of Church and state."

Many historians share the perspective of *Render Unto Caesar* that Luther's "two kingdoms" theory is of critical importance in understanding his attitudes toward the state.[4] It is also true that his 1523 treatise is one of Luther's most deliberate expositions of his thinking in this area and thus an important document for revealing Luther's theology.[5] In this work, Luther argues that God relates to human beings in two very different ways: one is through the Church for the sake of eternal life and the other is through the state for this life. Both institutions find their origins and authority in God.[6]

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[3] Unless otherwise noted, citations of English translations of Luther in this essay are from Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works*, 55 vols. (Phildelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986); hereafter cited as *LW*. For the original language texts, see Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [*Schriften*], 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883-1993); hereafter cited as WA. For Luther's *Temporal Authority*, see *LW* 45:81-129; WA 11:245-280.

[4] See, for example, J. W. Allen, *A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, rev. ed. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1957), 20-22; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 2:14-17; Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, eds., *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought, 100-1625* (Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 581-584; and *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, 4 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), s.v. "Two Kingdoms."

[5] Luther referred to the significance of his 1523 treatise in later works. See *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved* (1526) (*LW* 46:95; WA 19:625,14) and *On War Against the Turk* (1529) (*LW* 46:163; WA 30.II:109,16-19). For a discussion of its significance, see also Per Frostin, *Luther's Two Kingdoms Doctrine: A Critical Study* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1994), 50-51.

[6] "God has ordained two governments: the spiritual, by which the Holy Spirit produces Christians and righteous people under Christ; and the temporal, which restrains the un-Christian and wicked so that . . . they are obliged to keep still and to maintain an outward peace." *LW* 45:91; WA 11:251,15-18. There is an extensive body of literature regarding the "two kingdoms." For a basic bibliography, see Donald K. McKim, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (Cambridge: Cambridge

With respect to his spiritual rule, God deals with people by means of the gospel, that is, he calls them into his service by the message of Christ, crucified and raised for the sake of sinners. Responding in faith by the power of the Holy Spirit, believers enter into a new relationship with God that is based upon the righteousness of Christ imparted to them as a gift—free and comprehending all that they need to become one with God, namely, the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Thus liberated from bondage to the law, its punishments, and its threats, believers lead a life of love directed both toward God and their fellow men. Transformed by the Holy Spirit, they willingly expend themselves in service to those who need them. Thus, in God's spiritual kingdom, he creates a people for himself whose lives are characterized by faith and love.[7]

This is not the only way, however, that God relates to humanity; indeed, Luther believed that only a relatively small portion of humanity ever experiences his spiritual rule. In his mercy God also exercises temporal authority over mankind, a rule for this life and for regulating the things of this life. On account of man's sinfulness, people would continually tear each other apart if God had not appointed some means to control them. Therefore, in order to rule sinners in this world and to check the worst outbreaks of evil, God has instituted government. Here not the gospel but the law prevails, known not only from the Scriptures but also by reason and from nature; this authority is coercive, for God authorizes those who govern to use force in punishing the wicked and promoting the good.[8]

University Press, 2003), 309–310. Especially helpful analyses are Per Frostin, *Luther's Two Kingdoms Doctrine*, and Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 43–82. Bernhard Lohse summarizes the 1523 treatise and later discusses the concept of the two kingdoms more comprehensively in *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 153–157, 314–324.

[7] "[T]hese people need not temporal law or sword. . . . They would serve no purpose, since Christians have in their heart the Holy Spirit, who both teaches and makes them to do injustice to no one, to love everyone, and to suffer injustice and even death willingly and cheerfully at the hand of anyone." *LW* 45:89; WA 11:249,36–250,4.

[8] "All who are not Christians belong to the kingdom of the world and are under the law. There are few true believers . . . . For this reason God has provided for them a different government beyond the Christian estate and kingdom of God. He has subjected them to the sword so that, even though they would like to, they are unable to practice their wickedness . . . . In the same way a savage wild beast is bound with chains and ropes so that it cannot bite and tear as it would normally do, even though it would like to." *LW* 45:90; WA 11:251,1–11.

Unlike many medieval theologians and papal defenders in Luther's time who placed the state under the Church as the temporal is subordinate to the spiritual,[9] in this treatise Luther distinguished sharply between the two and contended that each had its own unique responsibilities as instituted by God. To spiritual authority God assigned matters connected with the soul and entrusted it with his word; to temporal authority he assigned everything that has to do with human beings relating to one other in the affairs of this life. In Luther's experience, however, the two authorities often neglected their proper spheres in order to interfere in that of the other.[10]

In spiritual matters, Luther found no place for law or coercion or government, but in the affairs of state he also found no place for the gospel. Indeed, if each form of authority does not keep to its own sphere and employ its own means, the result will be the corruption of both and the failure of each to accomplish the purposes for which God had established them in the first place. Laws and coercion in spiritual affairs mislead people into false belief or hypocrisy, burden consciences, and destroy souls.[11] Gospel in temporal affairs unleashes sinners and leads to rebellion and uproar.[12] Therefore, failing to distinguish the two kingdoms and to assign to each its proper competence and means results in both temporal and spiritual calamity.

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[9] Perhaps the most extreme expression of this idea is Boniface VIII's *Unam Sanctam* (1302). In more moderate forms, even sixteenth-century supporters of the papacy like Francisco de Vitoria and Robert Bellarmine persisted in it. See Robert Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450–1700* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1999), 78–81. For the Middle Ages, see Joseph R. Strayer, ed., *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982–1989), s.v. "Two Swords, Doctrine of."

[10] "For my ungracious lords, the pope and the bishops, are supposed to be bishops and preach God's Word. This they leave undone, and have become temporal princes who govern with laws which concern only life and property. . . . They are supposed to be ruling souls inwardly by God's word . . . . Similarly, the temporal lords are supposed to govern lands and people outwardly. This they leave undone. . . . [T]heir temporal rule has sunk quite as low as that of the spiritual tyrants. For this reason God so perverts their minds also, that they rush on to the absurdity of trying to exercise a spiritual rule over souls." *LW* 45:109; WA 11:265,7–18.

[11] "Where temporal authority presumes to prescribe laws for the soul, it encroaches upon God's government and only misleads souls and destroys them." *LW* 45:105; WA 11:262,10–12.

[12] "If anyone attempted to rule the world by the gospel and to abolish all temporal law and sword . . . what would he be doing? He would be loosing the ropes and chains of the savage wild beasts and letting them bite and mangle everyone." *LW* 45:91; WA 11:251,22–27.

Given these basic assertions regarding the two kingdoms in Luther's *Temporal Authority*, one can readily see how easy it is to read the confessional documents from the same perspective as found in *Render Unto Caesar*.[13] Against the Anabaptists, the Augsburg Confession affirms the divine institution of government for the sake of this life—"It is taught among us that all government in the world and all established rule and laws were instituted and ordained by God for the sake of good order"—and permits Christians to serve in government offices in which they would "render decisions and pass sentence according to imperial and other existing laws, punish evildoers with the sword, engage in just wars, [and] serve as soldiers" (*CA* XVI, 1-2).[14]

Later, also as cited in *Render Unto Caesar*, the Augsburg Confession uses "two kingdoms" theology to describe the office of bishop and to correct medieval corruptions:

> Many and various things have been written in former times about the power of bishops, and some have improperly confused the power of bishops with the temporal sword. Out of this careless confusion many serious wars, tumults, and uprisings have resulted because the bishops, under pretext of the power given them by Christ . . . have . . . presumed to . . . depose kings and emperors according to their pleasure. (*CA* XXVIII, 1-2)

Instead of interfering in the temporal realm, the bishops, according the Augsburg Confession, are to exercise spiritual power by spiritual means:

> Our teachers assert that according to the Gospel the power of keys or the power of bishops is a power and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments. . . . Inasmuch as the power of the church or of bishops bestows eternal gifts and is used and exercised only through the office of preaching, it does not interfere at all with government or temporal authority. Temporal authority does not protect the soul, but with the sword and physical penalties it protects body and goods from the power of others. (*CA* XXVIII, 5, 10-11)

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[13] *Render Unto Caesar*, 34-41.

[14] Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from the Lutheran Confessions are from Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959). For the original language versions of the Lutheran Confessions, see *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 11th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992).

Finally, the *Render Unto Caesar* citations from Article 28 conclude with the insistence that "the two authorities, the spiritual and the temporal, are not to be mingled or confused, for the spiritual power has its commission to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments. Hence, it should not invade the function of the other, should not set up and depose kings . . ." (*CA* XXVIII, 12–13).

Now, none of these citations is inappropriate in a document that addresses questions of Church and state; nor are the additional citations from the Apology (Ap XVI, 2–3, 4, 6) also used by *Render Unto Caesar* inappropriate since they too make the case that Church and spiritual authority are one thing while the state and temporal authority are entirely different.[15]

There *is* a problem, however, with the treatment of this topic in *Render Unto Caesar*, and that is the part of the story that the document chooses not to tell. Of course, one cannot expect a CTCR document to encompass all of Luther's writings that pertain to Church and state, but is it enough to cite only the evidence that appears most congruent with modern American notions of separating Church and state when presenting an ostensibly "Lutheran" view of the question? Is it not also important to know that, both before and after his treatise of 1523, Luther encouraged and relied upon the territorial rulers of his day to reform the Church and thus to establish Lutheranism as the replacement for medieval Catholicism?[16] Is it not also relevant to point out that, subsequent to 1523, Luther came to the conviction that godly rulers should suppress false religion because it was blasphemous and subversive of the social order?[17] Such data may not be helpful in answering *our* church/state questions, but it is integral to Luther's own theology and that of the Lutheran Confessions with respect

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[15] *Render Unto Caesar*, 41.

[16] See, for example, Luther's 1520 *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (*LW* 44:123–217; WA 6:404–469), which is discussed below. He came to this position on account of the failure of church authorities to reform the church and he referred to the territorial rulers as "emergency bishops." Nevertheless, he relied upon government to effect the Lutheran Reformation. See Lewis W. Spitz, "Luther's Ecclesiology and His Concept of the Prince as *Notbischof*," *Church History* 22 (1953): 113–141, and James M. Estes, "Luther on the Role of Secular Authority in the Reformation," *Lutheran Quarterly* 17 (2003): 199–225.

[17] See, for example, his 1530 interpretation of Psalm 82 (*LW* 13:42–72; WA 31.I:189–218), which is also discussed below. For a good analysis of how Luther came to this conclusion, see Estes, "Luther on the Role of Secular Authority," and Eike Wolgast, *Die Wittenberger Theologie und die Politik der evangelischen Stände: Studien zu Luthers Gutachten in politischen Fragen* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1977), 64–75.

to the "two kingdoms." Luther drew the line between them at a far different place from that of our own contemporary institutions.

Render Unto Caesar states that Luther "acquiesced" in the assertion of authority by the princes to carry out church visitations and that he "permitted" them to take control of the church in Germany while also asserting that Luther "recognized that temporal power, with its coercive powers, was fundamentally ill-suited for preserving and protecting the Gospel."[18] The implication then is that institutional Lutheranism somehow took shape in sixteenth-century Germany in opposition to Luther's fundamental ideas regarding Church and state. But this is hardly the case. Luther was active, not passive, in soliciting help from the princes, and he offered a theological rationale for doing so.[19]

Furthermore, with respect to the Confessions, besides the citations to which *Render Unto Caesar* refers, is it not also relevant to the topic of "a Lutheran view of Church and state" to include Melanchthon's appeal to Emperor Charles in the Apology? There Melanchthon wrote,

> It is your special responsibility before God to maintain and propagate sound doctrine and to defend those who teach it. God demands this when he honors kings with his own name and calls them gods (Ps 82:6), "I say, 'You are gods.'" They should take care to maintain and propagate divine things on earth, that is, the Gospel of Christ. (Ap XXI, 44)

Similarly, a few years later, when Melanchthon penned his Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, he included this statement regarding Christian rulers:

> Especially does it behoove the chief members of the church, the kings and the princes, to have regard for the interests of the church and to see to it that errors are removed and consciences are healed. God expressly exhorts kings, "Now, therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth" (Ps 2:10). For the first care of kings should be to advance the glory of God. (Tr 54)

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[18] *Render Unto Caesar*, 18 and 36.

[19] This is discussed in John Witte, Jr., *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 108–113.

Even Luther, in the Preface to the Small Catechism, tells pastors and preachers to warn those who refuse to learn the Catechism "that the prince is disposed to banish such rude people from his land" (SC Preface, 12).[20]

Such statements provide important evidence for understanding the "two kingdoms" theology in its original historical context. Far from excluding rulers from concerns about the Church or simply "acquiescing" to some sort of power grab by the state over the Church, Luther and his colleagues insisted that Christian rulers have a positive obligation to use their authority on behalf of the Church. Indeed, contra *Render Unto Caesar*, they believed that temporal authority in Christian hands was well-suited for "preserving and protecting the Gospel."[21]

In the course of the Reformation, the first Lutherans resorted again and again to temporal authorities in order to advance the cause of true religion, as is evident in the charter of Lutheranism itself, the Augsburg Confession. In addition to what *Render Unto Caesar* cites from Articles XVI and XXVIII regarding "two kingdoms" theology, there is more evidence. For one thing, any interpretation of what the Augsburg Confession has to say about Church and state must take into account the political nature of the document itself. After all, it was seven territorial princes and the mayor and council of two imperial cities who presented the Augsburg Confession to the diet of the Holy Roman Empire in the first place. Unless the confessors were perpetrating a fraud or were deluding themselves, they did not understand their own description of civil government in Article XVI—which dealt with good order, enforcing the law, punishing the wicked, and engaging in just wars—in such a way as to preclude them from participating in a council called by the emperor for the purpose of restoring religious unity in his realm. Nor did they understand it as precluding them from presenting a statement of their faith in such a context, "setting forth how and in what manner, on the basis of the Holy

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[20] At the same time that Luther was acknowledging that "we cannot and should not compel anyone to believe," he justified compulsory religious instruction on the grounds that "anyone who desires to reside in a city is bound to know and observe the laws under whose protection he lives." SC Preface, 13.

[21] *Render Unto Caesar*, 36. According to James M. Estes, in 1521 Melanchthon was already arguing for a positive role for government in the care of religion but Luther only gradually came to this conviction; nevertheless, by the end of his life he had endorsed Melanchthon's view. See "Luther on the Role of Secular Authority," 221, and "The Role of the Godly Magistrates in the Church: Melanchthon as Luther's Interpreter and Collaborator," *Church History* 67 (1998): 468. For a more comprehensive treatment of both men together, see his *Peace, Order and the Glory of God: Secular Authority and the Church in the Thought of Luther and Melanchthon, 1518–1559* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

Scriptures, these things are preached, taught, communicated, and embraced in our lands, principalities, dominions, cities, and territories" (*CA* Preface, 8).

Although written principally by theologians, the Augsburg Confession is a declaration by temporal authorities of what they have established as true religion in their territories.[22] Thus, whatever the two kingdoms theology meant for Luther and his contemporaries, it did not mean excluding temporal authority from the affairs of the Church. In fact, it meant quite the contrary, for the main use of this theology in the Confessions is not to separate the state from the Church but the Church from the state.

Going back again to Article XXVIII of the Augsburg Confession, one can see that the confessors apply their teaching only to an aggressive Church and not to the state. For after maintaining that "the two authorities . . . are not to be mingled or confused," the document proceeds only to indict spiritual authority for invading the sphere of the other (*CA* XXVIII, 12). It "should not set up and depose kings, should not annul temporal laws or undermine obedience to government, should not make or prescribe to the temporal power laws concerning worldly matters" (*CA* XXVIII, 13).

Even at this point, however, while insisting that church officials not presume to interfere in the affairs of state, the document concedes that the same man may exercise authority in both realms as was still true of many bishops at the outset of the Reformation. One might have thought that the confessors would insist that such arrangements be terminated on the basis of two kingdoms theology, but that was not the case. The Augsburg Confession is content with asserting that when bishops exercise temporal authority, they do so by human arrangement only and may not claim that such authority is intrinsic to the office of bishop: "In cases where bishops possess temporal authority and the sword, they possess it not as bishops by divine right, but by human, imperial right, bestowed by Roman emperors and kings for the temporal administration of their lands. Such authority has nothing at all to do with the office of the Gospel" (*CA* XXVIII, 19–20). So even when a bishop employs it, temporal authority remains temporal and therefore subject to the oversight of other temporal

[22] For historical background to the Augsburg Confession, see *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* s.v. "Augsburg Confession"; Wilhelm Maurer, *Historical Commentary on the Augsburg Confession* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 3–57; Franz Lau and Ernst Bizer, *A History of the Reformation in Germany to 1555* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), 74–83; and Johann Michael Reu, *The Augsburg Confession: A Collection of Sources with Historical Introduction* (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1930).

authorities, the princes, who must see to it that justice is done and that peace prevails even in episcopal realms. Nevertheless, distinguishing the two kingdoms does not demand excluding the clergy from the exercise of political authority. Only when they claim that such power is inherent in their church offices do they violate the confessional teaching.[23]

But what about temporal authority? If Luther and the Confessions insist upon restricting church authority to spiritual matters even if church officials can by human arrangement also wield the temporal sword, do they insist that temporal authority restrict itself to temporal matters? The answer is yes—but a highly qualified yes. For when God has placed temporal authority into the hands of Christians, rulers need to exercise that authority in the interests of the Church.

One often misses this feature of Luther's thought by relying too much on Luther's 1523 treatise on temporal authority. Although clearly revealing Luther's basic convictions about Church and state, one should also remember that he was addressing a political situation in which the enemies of the gospel were everywhere in power. Prior to its composition, various political entities had taken steps to suppress Luther, his followers, and their message. In May of 1521, the emperor had issued his Edict of Worms declaring Luther an outlaw and ordering his books to be burned; in January of 1522, the Imperial Council of Regency had condemned religious innovations like communion in both kinds and clerical marriage; and, in November of 1522, Luther's neighbor, Duke George of Saxony, had issued a decree commanding his subjects to turn in their copies of Luther's German New Testament.[24] No wonder, then, that in his treatise Luther was insistent that temporal authority has no power over faith or conscience and that the believer is free to disobey temporal authority when it orders compliance to false religion:

> If your prince or temporal ruler command you to side with the pope, to believe thus and so, or to get rid of certain books [presumably Christian ones], you should say, "It is not fitting that Lucifer should sit at the side of God. Gracious sir, I owe you obedience in body and property . . . . But if you command me to believe or get rid of certain books, I will not obey;

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[23] See also Luther's letter to Melanchthon (July 21, 1530) in which he discusses this very point: "I want to keep the persons separate, just as the governments, even though the same man can represent both persons, and the one Pomer can be a parish pastor and a householder. . . . So the same man, Conrad von Thüngen, is duke of Franconia and bishop of Würzburg, even though the duke of Franconia cannot be bishop of Würzburg." *LW* 49:383–384; WABr 5:492,19–24.

[24] *LW* 45:77–78, 84 n. 11.

for then you are a tyrant and overreach yourself, commanding where you have neither the right nor the authority."[25]

At a time when Luther had come to believe that temporal rulers were "generally the biggest fools or the worst scoundrels on earth" and that "therefore, one must constantly expect the worst from them and look for little good, especially in divine matters which concern the salvation of souls,"[26] the reformer had every reason for delineating a theory of government that would restrict political authority as much as possible to the earthly realm. And so he did. In fact, in this treatise, when Luther wrote about the unlikely case that a ruler is a Christian—which he described as "the most precious token of divine grace upon that land"[27]—even then the prince should not use force against false teachers and heretics. That is the job of the bishops who are to employ God's word. "God's word must do the fighting," Luther contended. "If it does not succeed, certainly the temporal power will not succeed either, even if it were to drench the world in blood."[28]

Even if a Christian prince is not supposed to use violence against false teachers, that does not mean he should avoid using his authority to advance the Christian religion. This is only hinted at in this treatise, but it is an important part of Luther's understanding of temporal authority in the context of the two kingdoms. When in Part 3 of his treatise Luther turned to the situation of a temporal ruler who is a Christian, he argued that such a ruler should exercise his authority in a Christian manner, that is, motivated by love, he should devote himself to the well-being of his people. The scope of love in Luther's description is comprehensive, "[Works] are done in love . . . when they are directed wholeheartedly toward the benefit, honor, and salvation [*Heil*] of others, and not toward the pleasure, benefit, honor, comfort, and salvation of self."[29] Although Luther did not here elaborate on all the possible works of love that rulers could do for their subjects, he hardly envisioned a situation in which a Christian prince would not use his power in the interests of the Church.

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[25] *LW* 45:111–112; WA 11:267,1–8.

[26] *LW* 45:113; WA 11:267,31–268,3.

[27] *LW* 45:113; WA 11:268,13–14.

[28] *LW* 45:114; WA 11:268,24–26.

[29] *LW* 45:118; WA 11:272,3–5. Although Luther's term for "salvation" can mean prosperity more generally and not just eternal salvation, the point of my argument is that Luther used a comprehensive term and not one that must be construed narrowly as physical well-being only.

Quite the contrary. Both before and after his 1523 treatise, Luther called upon rulers to advance the cause of true religion in their lands.

In one of his more important, earlier writings, his *Address to the Christian Nobility* (1520),[30] Luther created a theological framework for relying upon the princes to reform religion in their territories. Frustrated by the failure of the bishops and the papacy to undertake needed changes, Luther articulated a doctrine of the priesthood of all believers in this work. This means that all of the faithful—clergy and laity alike—enjoy the same status before God and are recipients of the same blessings and same spiritual privileges. What distinguishes them from each other is vocation, a God-given calling by which they exercise their talents and responsibilities in the service of others. Although ordinarily it is the vocation of clergy to reform the Church, when they fail to do so and instead erect obstacles to the proclamation of the gospel, lay Christians have the right and duty to take the necessary steps.[31]

As Luther envisioned it at the time he wrote *Address to the Christian Nobility*, what Christendom needed was a Church council to take up the issues that were plaguing the Church. Over against the papacy that claimed the exclusive right to summon such a council, Luther asserted that all believers have this right. "When necessity demands it," he wrote, "and the pope is an offense to Christendom, the first man who is able should, as a true member of the whole body [of the Church], do what he can to bring about a truly free council."[32] But who in the Church could actually do it? Knowing that the first several councils in church history were summoned by emperors, Luther had no trouble in relying upon the Christian princes: "No one can do this so well as the temporal authorities, especially since they are also fellow-Christians, fellow-priests, fellow-members of the spiritual estate, fellow-lords over all things. Whenever it is necessary or profitable, they ought to exercise the office and work which they have received from God over everyone."[33]

Even though this work was written well before Luther's first-hand experience with the princes at the Diet of Worms, namely at a point when he still had confidence that many of them were Christians, nonetheless he

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[30] *LW* 44:123–217; WA 6:404–469.

[31] The classic discussion of Luther's doctrine of vocation is Gustaf Wingren, *The Christian's Calling: Luther on Vocation* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1957), but see also Althaus, *Ethics*, 36–42, and Kenneth Hagen, "A Critique of Wingren on Luther on Vocation," *Lutheran Quarterly* 16 (2002): 249–273.

[32] *LW* 44:137; WA 6:413,27–29.

[33] *LW* 44:137; WA 6:413,29–33.

was still operating with a distinction between temporal and spiritual authority inasmuch as there were some items that he thought the princes could change on their own while there were other points that church authorities had to address in a church council.[34] Nevertheless, for our purposes, the main point is that Luther believed that rulers *who were Christian* had an obligation to use their temporal power for the sake of the Church.

Luther was still thinking this way in 1524 when he had to deal with Andreas Carlstadt who, after his failures in leading the reform movement in Wittenberg while Luther was in hiding at the Wartburg, had broken with Luther. In fact, Carlstadt left Wittenberg in order to become a parish pastor in Orlamünde. This meant not only abandoning his post at the university but also ousting the lawful incumbent in Orlamünde. For Luther, this was a matter that involved the temporal authorities who were responsible for such arrangements, so he called on the elector to intervene and he charged Carlstadt with violating the rights of the prince. In other words, at a time very close to his composition of his treatise on temporal authority, Luther was relying heavily on that authority for the support of church offices. Moreover, in Carlstadt's activities Luther began to see a connection between what he viewed as false teaching and social disruptions.[35]

Then, during the Peasants' War, this connection became all the clearer. False religion—itself an indication of the devil's activities—led to rebellion and violence. Writing in 1525 against Carlstadt, who was *not* advocating bloodshed, Luther explained that his erstwhile colleague was nonetheless encouraging rebellion:

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[34] For example, Luther urged the secular authorities to abolish payment of annates, appointment to benefices by Rome, and obtaining the bishop's cloak from Rome, but at the same time he maintained that the local bishops—not the temporal rulers—should administer benefices and consecrate other bishops. *LW* 44:156–158; WA 6:427–429. See Hermann Sasse, "Church Government and Secular Authority according to Lutheran Doctrine," in *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters*, vol. 1, trans. Matthew C. Harrison et al. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 190–192.

[35] See especially Luther's *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, Part I (1525), *LW* 40:100–117; WA 18:85–101. Already in a letter to George Spalatin (Wittenberg, March 14, 1524), Luther talked about having to arraign Carlstadt before the prince if he did not return to his duties in Wittenberg. *LW* 49:73; WABr 3:254,15–17. For Luther's dealings with Carlstadt in these years, see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985–1993) 2:157–172.

If it were really true, and I could believe, that Dr. Karlstadt does not intend murder or rebellion, I would still have to say that he has a rebellious and murderous spirit . . . as long as he continues with wanton image breaking and draws the unruly rabble to himself. I well see that he neither strikes nor stabs, but since he carries the murderous weapon and does not put it aside, I do not trust him. . . . By the murderous weapon I mean the false interpretation and understanding of the law of Moses. Through it the devil comes and the masses are aroused to boldness and arrogance.[36]

A Christian prince could hardly be indifferent to those whose teaching encouraged disrespect and disobedience for constituted authority. For Luther, therefore, this came to mean not only opposing heretics by teaching and preaching the word of God, but also by using the sword to suppress and punish them. Thus, after the Peasants' War, Luther saw an inexorable tie between heresy and rebellion; and therefore heresy—*like other crimes*—had to be addressed by the Christian prince. In the light of his experience, Luther could not maintain his position of 1523, that the ruler should not oppose heresy. Not however because it was heresy, but because of its social consequences, Luther believed that the state must suppress false teaching.[37]

Initially, Luther was careful to distinguish between what a prince does as the holder of temporal authority and what a *Christian* prince may do to advance the interests of the Church. Government activity in support of the Christian religion presupposes a Christian ruler.[38] This is evident in Luther's preface to the *Instructions to the Visitors*,[39] which marks a milestone in the development of the territorial Lutheran churches in

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[36] *LW* 40:105–106; WA 18:88,22–30.

[37] Wolgast, *Die Wittenberger Theologie*, 64–75.

[38] This is the point of Melanchthon's remark about kings in his Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 1537: "Especially does it behoove *the chief members of the church*, the kings and the princes, to have regard for the interests of the church and to see to it that errors are removed and consciences are healed." Tr 54, emphasis added. C. F. W. Walther made this a major argument in his 1885 essay on Church and state in defense of the proposition that "during its initial period . . . the Lutheran Church held firmly to the doctrine that the government has neither the right nor the power to assume control of the church." Walther, "Earthly Authorities II: 26th Western District Convention," 277–284. But this is unconvincing, seeing that the power that Christian rulers exercised on behalf of the Church was their power *as rulers*, not as members of the Church.

[39] *LW* 40:269–320; WA 26:195–240. While Melanchthon wrote the *Instructions*, Luther's preface, written at the request of Elector John of Saxony, showed his support for them. *LW* 40:266.

Germany. In 1527, Elector John the Constant authorized an official visit of the churches in his domain. This obligation traditionally belonged to the bishops who were exercising their authority to supervise the faith and morals of the people in their dioceses. With the ongoing opposition of the hierarchy to the Reformation, the evangelical princes, led by John, began to carry out such episcopal functions for the sake of their people.[40]

Already by that time, Luther had long been importuning the elector to use his authority on behalf of the church. In October of 1525, for example, Luther had written the elector to request his help in maintaining the pastors and parishes of Saxony. Otherwise, Luther wrote, "in a short time there will not be a parsonage, a school, or pulpit functioning, and thus God's Word and worship will perish."[41] The matter might be temporal—finding the money to pay the preachers—but the consequences were certainly spiritual. One of Luther's friends and disciples, Nicholas Hausmann, apparently was the first to urge Duke John to conduct a visitation, but it was a suggestion with which Luther heartily concurred in a letter to the elector in November of 1525: "Your Electoral Grace should have all the parishes in the whole territory inspected."[42] Once again, Luther was concerned with financial support of the ministry, but it was for the sake of the gospel, he wrote, that "thus a true ministry of the gospel would be given to the people, whom the pastors ought to nourish."[43]

Duke John sent teams of visitors into the parishes of Saxony in 1527–1528 to inquire not only into the material well-being of the parish but also into the doctrine being taught and the life being lived in the name of the Christian faith. Melanchthon wrote up instructions for the visitors that specified parameters for their inquiry, including what people were being taught about religion, and Luther wrote a preface to justify the entire initiative.

In his preface, Luther was clear that the visitation derived not simply from the fact that Elector John exercised temporal authority but that he was a *Christian* with temporal authority. Given the condition of the

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[40] For the story of the visitation, see Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 2:259–273, and Karl Trüdinger, *Luthers Briefe und Gutachten an weltliche Obrigkeiten zur Durchführung der Reformation* (Münster Westfalen: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1975), 68–77.

[41] Martin Luther to Elector John, Wittenberg, October 31, 1525. *LW* 49:135–136; WABr 3:595,44–46.

[42] Martin Luther to Elector John, Wittenberg, November 30, 1525. *LW* 49:138; WABr 3:628,7.

[43] *LW* 49:139; WABr 3:628,27–28.

Christian Church in Germany—"confused, scattered, and torn"—Luther maintained that he and his colleagues "would like to have seen the true episcopal office and practice of visitation re-established because of the pressing need," but they lacked the requisite call and authority to do so.[44] Therefore, they appealed to the elector as a Christian to use his authority in this cause:

> Preferring to follow what is certain and to be guided by love's office (which is the common obligation of Christians), we have respectfully appealed to the illustrious and noble prince and lord, John, Duke of Saxony, . . . our most gracious lord and prince, constituted of God as our certain temporal sovereign, that out of Christian love (since he is not obligated as a temporal sovereign) and by God's will for the benefit of the gospel and the welfare of the wretched Christians in his territory, His Electoral grace might call and ordain to this office [of visitor] several competent persons.[45]

Luther did not understand the visitation as something that a ruler *as ruler* was obligated to do, but he did think that Christian love obligated a *Christian* ruler to use his authority on behalf of the gospel. Given the circumstances, Luther called on his prince to sponsor the visitation and expressed the hope that this would "become a happy example which *all other German princes* may fruitfully imitate."[46]

Significantly, Luther also justified the visitation by referring to the temporal disadvantages of religious dissent in the prince's territories: "While His Electoral grace is not obligated to teach and to rule in spiritual affairs, he is obligated as temporal sovereign to so order things that strife, rioting, and rebellion do not arise among his subjects."[47] It was for this reason, Luther argued, that Constantine summoned the Council of Nicaea: "since he did not want to tolerate the dissension which Arius had stirred up," so he constrained them "to preserve unity in teaching and faith."[48] Similarly then, the elector needed to take steps for the preservation of such unity. After all, argued Luther, "the devil has become neither pious nor devout this year, nor will he ever be so. So let us be on guard and anxious to keep . . . the spiritual unity in the bond of love and peace."[49] Indirectly

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[44] *LW* 40:271; WA 26:197,15–16.
[45] *LW* 40:271; WA 26:197,19–29.
[46] *LW* 40:272, emphasis added; WA 26:198,5–199,2.
[47] *LW* 40:273; WA 26:200,28–31.
[48] *LW* 40:273; WA 26:200,32–34.
[49] *LW* 40:273; WA 26:201,4–7.

but still necessarily, a ruler who is Christian maintains temporal peace by establishing religious unity in his lands.

Once Luther became convinced that religious dissidents threatened the peace, he abandoned his 1523 position about a ruler tolerating false believers. Instead, Luther came to rely upon the state to suppress heresy and false doctrine. A good example of Luther's new thinking in this regard comes from his 1530 interpretation of Psalm 82,[50] in which he once more distinguished the two kingdoms but insisted nevertheless that godly rulers should advance true religion.[51] That also raised the following question, "Since the . . . rulers . . . are to advance God's Word and its preachers, are they also to put down opposing doctrines or heresies . . . ?"[52] While admitting that "no one can be forced to believe," Luther sketched four situations in which Christian government should suppress heretics on account of the temporal consequences of their teaching.[53]

First of all, there were heretics who explicitly advocated disobedience to temporal rulers and the abandonment of secular callings. "These teachers," maintained Luther, "are immediately and without doubt, to be punished by the rulers, as men who are resisting temporal law and government (Rom. 13:1, 2). They are not heretics only but rebels."[54] In Luther's second instance, he equated heresy with blasphemy and blasphemy with crime. He wrote, "Rulers are in duty bound to punish blasphemers as they punish those who curse, swear, revile, abuse, defame, and slander."[55] With no modern sensitivities regarding "freedom of speech," Luther held that government should punish words directed against God as well as those against men.[56] While still maintaining that a person can *believe* what he wants, Luther argued that he cannot *teach* what he wants. False teaching, Luther thought, is a crime against the community in which it occurs: "For

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[50] *LW* 13:39–72; WA 31.I:189–218.

[51] "For if God's Word is protected and supported so that it can be freely taught and learned, and if the sects and false teachers are given no opportunity and are not defended against the teachers who fear God, what greater treasure can there be in a land?" *LW* 13:52; WA 31.I:199,7–11.

[52] *LW* 13:61; WA 31.I:207,33–36.

[53] *LW* 13:61; WA 31.I:207,35–36.

[54] *LW* 13:61; WA 31.I:208,4–8.

[55] *LW* 13:61; WA 31.I:208,18–20.

[56] For Luther, blasphemy included contradicting "an article of faith clearly grounded in Scripture and believed throughout the world by all Christendom." *LW* 13:61; WA 31.I:208,11–15. Although it is not completely clear which doctrines Luther had in mind, he explicitly mentioned the divinity of Christ, the resurrection of the body and everlasting life, and the vicarious atonement. *LW* 13:62; WA 31.I:208,22–28.

by so doing, he [a false teacher] would take from God and the Christians their doctrine and word, and he would do them this injury under their own protection and by means of the things all have in common. . . . He who makes a living from the citizens ought to keep the law of the city, and not defame and revile it; or else he ought to get out."[57]

Luther's third circumstance makes the rulers actual judges over doctrine. This is the case when papist and Lutheran preachers are preaching against one another and both claim the Scriptures, but there is no possibility of either side leaving off the debate. Then, Luther advised, "Let the rulers take a hand. Let them hear the case and command that party to keep silence which does not agree with the Scriptures."[58] Thus, the temporal authorities will actually adjudicate a *doctrinal* dispute. So how did Luther justify this apparent "mingling" of the kingdoms? On account of the temporal consequences of such division: "It is not a good thing that contradictory preaching should go out among the people of the same parish. For from this arise divisions, disorders, hatreds, and envyings which extend to temporal affairs also."[59]

It is similar in Luther's fourth case—when two sets of preachers are publicly clamoring over items not found in the Scripture such as "tonsures, holy water, the blessing of herbs, and similar unnecessary things."[60] The authorities should order both sides to keep the peace, "for love and peace are far more important than all ceremonies."[61] If this doesn't help, then the rulers must take the next step and order that side to be silent which would bind men's consciences and insist on ceremonies as necessary to salvation.

Throughout this discussion, therefore, Luther made it clear that the temporal authorities are to maintain law and order against anyone who threatens it in the name of religion. Again, the reformer insisted that "anyone may read what he likes and believe what he likes," but he may certainly not advocate it by unauthorized preaching and secret ceremonies.[62] "All Christians are priests," Luther said, "but not all are pastors. For to be a pastor one must be not only a Christian and priest but must have an office committed to him. This call and command make

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[57] *LW* 13:62; WA 31.I:208,32–37. Luther also advanced this opinion in his Preface to the *Small Catechism*, paragraph 13.

[58] *LW* 13:63; WA 31.I:209,24–26.

[59] *LW* 13:63; WA 31.I:209,28–31.

[60] *LW* 13:63; WA 31.I:209,34–35.

[61] *LW* 13:63; WA 31.I:210,3–4.

[62] *LW* 13:64; WA 31.I:210,11–12.

pastors and preachers."[63] Those who preach without such authorization are "sure emissaries of the devil."[64] They should be turned over to the authorities for, in Luther's thinking, their purpose is "to start a rebellion, or worse, among the people."[65]

In this entire discussion regarding the need for a Christian ruler to suppress false teaching, one can see that Luther connected such false teaching to the proper sphere of temporal authority. Far from opposing state intervention in the affairs of the Church, Luther demanded it, while at the same time maintaining the two kingdoms framework. Obviously, this could play into the hands of rulers looking for opportunities to enhance their own powers. By involving temporal authority so heavily in ecclesiastical affairs, Luther went far toward making the institutional Church a protectorate of the prince.

This is not the whole story. For Luther was not only concerned that Christian princes act on behalf of the Church; he was also troubled by temporal rulers who overstepped the bounds of their authority to act unjustly or to interfere with the work of the Church. As we have already seen, in his 1523 treatise Luther placed clear limits on the obedience owed to temporal authority. Since temporal authority has no power over faith or conscience, the believer must disobey when the ruler makes demands of his people that violate the word of God.[66] Perhaps even more significantly, Luther went beyond simple disobedience in such cases to recommend actually resisting an unjust government, but not by force. Rather, he wrote, "By confession of the truth [*sondern nur mit Bekenntnis der Wahrheit*]."[67] One should not use violence against a superior, but one should speak out

[63] *LW* 13:65; WA 31.I:211,17–20.

[64] *LW* 13:65; WA 31.I:211,26–27.

[65] *LW* 13:66; WA 31.I:212,4–5.

[66] *LW* 45:111–112; WA 11:267,1–8. Interestingly, Luther extended the obligation to disobey beyond the strictly religious, at least in one instance, to the command of a ruler to fight an unjust war. If a ruler is "in the wrong," then his people are not bound to fight on his behalf, for "it is no one's duty to do wrong; we must obey God (who desires the right) rather than men (Acts 5:29)." *LW* 45:125; WA 11:277,28–31. See also *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved*, where Luther repeated this advice. *LW* 46:130–131; WA 19:656,21–657,10.

[67] *LW* 45:124; WA 11:277,3–4. Later, convinced by jurists, Luther would agree that in the Holy Roman Empire lesser magistrates had the right to use force in order to protect their subjects from a tyrannical emperor. See Wolgast, *Die Wittenberger Theologie*, 165–185, and Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 2:411–415.

against unjust and wicked rulers. In this matter, Luther definitely practiced what he preached.[68]

When, for example, the Peasants' War was brewing, Luther publicly rebuked the princes for their sins against their subjects. He wrote, "You [princes] do not cease to rant and rave against the holy gospel . . . . In addition, as temporal rulers you do nothing but cheat and rob the people so that you may lead a life of luxury and extravagance. The poor common people cannot bear it any longer."[69] Although Luther had no use for rebellion by the people, nonetheless he saw it as inevitable that God would punish tyrants with violence and bloodshed. "Both Scripture and history are against you lords," he warned them, "for both tell how tyrants are punished. Even the heathen poets say that tyrants seldom die a dry death, but are usually slain and perish in their own blood."[70] This he ascribed to God's judgment upon their wickedness.

Throughout his career, Luther leveled some of his harshest attacks against princely enemies of the Reformation.[71] He used the two kingdoms theology to do so. For example, in his *Vindication against Duke George's Charge of Rebellion* (1533), he rejected the accusation that he was advocating insurrection among the Duke of Saxony's subjects, but contended instead that he had counseled obedience *except* when the duke overstepped the limits of temporal authority to interfere with the faith of his people.[72] At that point, Duke George no longer had authority but had become an "apostle of the devil [*des Teufels Apostel*]."[73] Still Luther did not counsel insurrection. The faithful were to disobey an unjust command—in this case

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[68] According to Gordon Rupp, "The passages in which Luther criticizes the crowd are far outnumbered by those in which he delineates the vices and temptations of the Princes." *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 304

[69] *Admonition to Peace*, *LW* 46:19; WA 18:293,29–34.

[70] *LW* 46:41; WA 18:329,29–32.

[71] See, for example, *Against Hanswurst*, *LW* 41:185–256; WA 51:469–572. The title alone was an insult to Henry of Braunschweig. In a table talk, Luther accused George of Saxony of having committed the sin against the Holy Ghost. *LW* 54:60; WATR 1:168,26–28 (no. 388).

[72] *Verantwortung der aufgelegten Aufruhr von Herzog Georg*, WA 38:96–127. Although it is not available in *LW*, there is a modern German version in *D. Martin Luthers Sämmtiliche Schriften, herausgegben von Dr. J. G. Walch*, neue rev. stereotypausg., 23 vol. in 25 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1880–1910) 19:1826–1841. For background to this work, see Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 3:65–70.

[73] WA 38:99,19–20. In this work Luther explained why George was truly an "apostle of the devil" who enjoyed the same "honor" as Pilate, Herod, and Judas.

to receive communion in the old way (one kind)—and then accept the punishment of exile that the authorities were imposing.

Luther also continued using two kingdoms theology to rebuke princes who dared to interfere with preaching. In the late 1530s, for example, Luther accused some rulers of intruding temporal authority into the realm of the Church by mandating what the preachers should preach. In a 1538 sermon on the "cleansing of the temple" in John 2, Luther discussed the two kingdoms again, this time distinguishing between the "fisted sword [*das Faustschwert*]" given to princes and the "oral sword [*das mündliche Schwert*]" given to preachers of the gospel.[74] Once again, Luther insisted that the two swords "must be kept apart and separate, so that the one does not infringe on the province of the other," and he charged the Anabaptists, Thomas Müntzer, the pope, and the bishops with grasping at the temporal sword.[75] He also warned the princes against interfering with their spiritual counterparts, and he protested those rulers who wanted to control the Church's message: "The civil governments—the princes, kings, the nobility in the country, and also the judges in the villages—take it upon themselves to wield the oral sword and to tell the pastors what and how to preach and how to administer their congregations."[76]

As in 1523, Luther had in mind primarily temporal authorities who were not really Christian at all, since he referred to princes who were "expelling from the church . . . the true teachers and preachers."[77] "Stern edicts and mandates," Luther wrote, "are nailed to all the church doors, ordering the laity to receive Holy Communion only in one kind and commanding the clergy to preach what pleases them."[78] Even so, however, it is important to note that the line Luther drew between temporal and spiritual authority in

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[74] *LW* 22:225; WA 46:735,1–3.

[75] *LW* 22:225; WA 46:735,5–8.

[76] *LW* 22:225–26; WA 46:735,10–13. In 1543, Luther also complained about the mixing of the kingdoms when the secular authorities of a now reformed ducal Saxony were setting up regulations for church discipline. See Martin Luther to Daniel Greiser, Wittenberg, October 22, 1543. WABr 10:436. Also Lau and Bizer, *A History of the Reformation in Germany*, 133; Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 3:294–295; and Eric W. Gritsch, "Luther and the State: Post-Reformation Ramifications," in *Luther and the Modern State in Germany*, ed. James D. Tracy, Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies 17 (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1986), 53. In a table talk from 1545, Luther complained about government authorities who were giving orders regarding ceremonies, apparently unacceptable ones. WATR 5:647–648 (no. 6407), and WATR 5:617–618 (no. 6354).

[77] *LW* 22:227; WA 46:737,6–7.

[78] *LW* 22:227; WA 46:737,8–10.

this work has to do with preaching and teaching and not with the support and protection of the Church. After all, these remarks occurred roughly contemporaneous with Luther's preparations for the publication of the Schmalkald Articles, which he had written upon the request of his prince for presentation at a meeting of the Schmalkald League that temporal authorities had organized to defend the Reformation.[79]

Nevertheless, Luther's language in his 1538 sermon was categorical; the problem he cited was not bad rulers but mixing the kingdoms. Quite simply, princes should not confuse the two realms by instructing preachers in what to preach. Luther concluded his admonition in emphatic fashion:

> After the abolition of the Law [of Moses] the secular emperors, kings, and princes were entrusted with the sword of iron, and the oral sword was assigned to the apostles and to us preachers. This distinction must remain intact . . . . *But if the princes continue to jumble the two, as they are now doing, then may God in His mercy shorten our lives that we may not witness the ensuing disaster. For in such circumstances everything in the Christian religion must go to wrack and ruin. This is what happened in the papacy when the bishops became secular princes. And if the secular lords now become popes and bishops and insist on sermons that defer to their wishes, then let the devil preach to them; for he preaches too. But let us pray that neither the spiritual nor the secular realm abuses its office that way!*[80]

Luther's highly charged language demonstrates his willingness to speak truth to the powerful. For him, "mixing" the kingdoms did not occur when rulers promoted and protected preachers of the gospel nor when preachers rebuked temporal rulers for transgressing the legitimate bounds of their authority. As far as Luther was concerned, "two kingdoms" theology was no reason for silence in the face of wickedness in high places.

Once again, Luther was probably thinking about Duke George of Saxony in this sermon when he railed against princes who insisted on obedience while interfering with preaching and administering the sacraments.[81] When George died the very next year and his brother, Duke Henry,

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[79] Written at the end of 1536, the Schmalkald Articles were published in 1538. See William R. Russell, *The Schmalkald Articles: Luther's Theological Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 18–19. Although Russell's main point is that Luther wrote these articles in view of his impending death, he still recognizes the role of the elector in requesting a statement from Luther for potential use at a church council. For the political circumstances surrounding their composition, see also Lau and Bizer, *A History of the Reformation in Germany*, 123–131.

[80] *LW* 22:228, emphasis in original; WA 46:737,24–738,3.

[81] *LW* 22:227 n. 20.

succeeded him, Luther adopted an entirely different tone regarding political intervention into the affairs of the Church.[82] In fact, he wrote to the new ruler of ducal Saxony about his duty to abolish the mass. Referring both to the Old Testament kings and to Christian rulers like Constantine and Theodosius, Luther argued that the princes and lords of his day were just as responsible for maintaining true religion in their territories as their predecessors.[83] Duke Henry proceeded to follow Luther's advice by authorizing a visitation; for this he used Melanchthon's instructions with a slightly altered version of Luther's introduction, in which the reformer commended the duke for taking steps to spread the pure Christian doctrine and prayed God that his actions would be an example for all the other German princes to follow.[84] Later, Luther wrote again to the duke about measures to follow. It was not enough, he said, to do away with abuses. One also had to examine the teaching of the pastors, install capable people, and pay them. Luther wrote that "the furtherance of the Gospel and the maintenance of the Church are the highest worship of God, to which especially princes and potentates are commanded."[85] Clearly, Luther still did not see a ruler's promoting true religion in his territory as a violation of the "two kingdoms" theology that he had described in his sermon just the year before.

Furthermore, Melanchthon's new version of the Augsburg Confession, the so-called Variata, that he prepared for the evangelical princes and which they employed as their platform at the Colloquy of Worms (1540),[86] still included the "two kingdoms" theology of the first version in Articles XVI and XXVIII. Although Melanchthon modified the confession in other respects to accommodate a new situation, apparently he felt compelled by none of the political changes since 1530 to amend what he had previously written about the scope of each kingdom or the dangers of mixing them.[87]

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[82] For Luther's role in Duke Henry's reformation, see Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 3:287–295, and Trüdinger, *Briefe und Gutachten*, 87–92.

[83] Martin Luther to Duke Henry, Wittenberg, July, 1539. WABr 8:482–84.

[84] WA 26:197, note regarding the omission of l. 26 (that the prince is not obligated to act as a temporal ruler but only out of Christian love) in a still later printing, and WA 26:198–199. The second version does not appear in *LW* but it is in the St. Louis edition 10:1632–1633.

[85] Martin Luther to Duke Henry, Wittenberg, July 25, 1539. WA 8:507,38–40.

[86] *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, s.v. "Augsburg Confession."

[87] For the text of the Variata, see *Die augsburgische Konfession*, ed. Theodore Kolde (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Pertes, 1896), 170–224. Melanchthon revised Article XVI slightly, but he still affirmed that the government (*politia*) is an ordinance of God in which one is free to participate and which one must obey unless sin is commanded.

However, in Article XXVI, "The Marriage of Priests," Luther's associate directly asserted the responsibility of rulers for the Church with these words:

> It belongeth not to the bishops alone, but also to the godly princes, and most of all to the Emperor, to understand the Gospel in its purity, to judge of doctrines, to be watchful that no godless opinions be received or confirmed, and to make every effort to abolish idolatry. . . . The proper gifts that kings are to bestow upon the Church are to search out true doctrine, and to see that good teachers be set over churches; to pay attention to the correct decision of ecclesiastical controversies; not to take away godly doctrine, but to raise it up and propagate and defend it; and rightly to order and maintain the peace of the Church.[88]

Of course, from Melanchthon's (and Luther's) point of view this statement described what the evangelical princes were actually doing; now in his revised version of the Augsburg Confession, Melanchthon stated that such tasks belonged also to the emperor. Indeed, Melanchthon wrote, Christ "required [*requirit*]" them of the emperor in response to the Church's need.[89]

Clearly, such a statement constitutes just one more piece of evidence that, throughout the Reformation period, no one understood the two kingdoms theology as requiring a Christian ruler to refrain from establishing authentic Christianity in his state. Indeed, quite the opposite, temporal rulers were supposed to support and maintain the Church.

Obviously, then, the first Lutherans drew the line between the two kingdoms in a far different way from what we know today as the separation of Church and state in the United States. For Luther, temporal

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Melanchthon also revised Article XXVIII, but all of the beginning paragraphs regarding the distinction of the two powers and the necessity of not mixing them ("*Non igitur commiscendae sunt potestates, ecclesiastica et civilis*") remain essentially the same. For an English version of the Variata, see Henry D. Jacobs, ed., *The Book of Concord: or, the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church with Historical Introduction, Notes, Appendixes and Indexes*, (Philadelphia: G. W. Friedrick, 1893) 2:103–147.

[88] Jacobs, *The Book of Concord*, 144; Kolde, *Die augsburgische Konfession*, 2:207–208.

[89] Jacobs, *The Book of* Concord, 144; Kolde, *Die augsburgische Konfession*, 2:208. Similarly, at the conclusion to Part One, the doctrinal articles, Melanchthon urged the emperor to follow the examples of Constantine and Theodosius in the summoning of a church council and described the emperor's duties with these words: "We desire that Caesar both may undertake the care of the Church when reformed, and may restrain the unjust cruelty." Jacobs, *The Book of Concord*, 123; Kolde, *Die augsburgische Konfession*, 2:189. See also Lau and Bizer, *A History of the Reformation in Germany*, 95

rulers who promoted true religion even to the point of punishing heretics were not mixing the kingdoms but those who took measures that inhibited the gospel were. In our times, therefore, we cannot really use this instance of historical theology very effectively as a model for structuring our relationships between Church and state. Luther and the Confessions help us to identify the essential functions of each but do not permit us to draw the conclusion that we must rigorously separate them. While clergy *must* preach the gospel and administer the sacraments, they *may* also exercise temporal power by human arrangement. While rulers *must* use their power to punish evildoers and to protect the lives and property of their people, as Christians they *should* also use their authority to establish and care for the Church in their lands. If then we wish to use the two kingdoms theology as the first Lutherans conceived it, we must do so very modestly. We can be clear about what both Church and state must do. Depending upon circumstances and institutional arrangements, however, each may do a great deal more.

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From Divine Sovereignty to Divine Conversation: Karl Barth and Robert Jenson on God's Being and Analogy

Piotr J. Malysz

Tautologically speaking, God is that to which theology seeks to give expression. Contemporary Christian theology, no less and perhaps even more than the theology of ages past, appears by and large to be preoccupied with speaking of God as God, with letting God be God. It conceives of this task, however, in its own peculiar way. This should come as no surprise. Theology in general, regardless of what it considers its objectives specifically to consist in, can never afford to lose sight of its context without degenerating into sterility. Consequently, contemporary theology remains acutely aware of the post-Enlightenment criticism of the older metaphysics, especially the latter's naïve construal of humans' epistemological relation to their world. It likewise cannot ignore the sweeping socio-political and cultural changes that have radically altered the face of Western societies. Neither can it simply overlook the history of confessional divisiveness, which has accompanied, and not infrequently spurred, the theological enterprise since its inception—divisiveness often brought about by the elevation of theological constructs to the status of inviolable and absolute truth. Hence, contemporary theology's preoccupation with idols, as it seeks to prevent human concepts from taking the place of the divine. In today's world, theology seems to have taken it upon itself to assure that God is spoken of as *God*; theology sees its task as that of *letting* God be God. Inconsistently, in this task it presumes to know what or who God is, even as it denies that any such idolatrous hypostatization is possible.[1] This denial results from the fact that *being* has

[1] Interesting in this context is Jacques Derrida's statement, "Indeed it must have been possible to speak [about God] in order to allow the question 'How to avoid speaking?' to arise." A proponent of the radical silencing of God-talk and cessation of God-thought, Derrida criticises apophaticism for its inability to do justice to God: on the one hand, it pushes God beyond the boundary of thought, but on the other, seeking to do justice to the curious prevalence of the lexeme, it, nonetheless, feels compelled to speak about God. See "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 99. Cf. Eberhard Jüngel: "[W]e counter the obvious thesis, so frequently advanced today, of the origin of the question about God in the radical questionableness of human

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become a suspect category; language has been exposed as inherently fallible, but silence is not an option. Eberhard Jüngel has diagnosed the contemporary situation pithily: "At the end of the history of metaphysics, God appears to have become unthinkable," while at the same time being "talked to death . . . silenced by the very words that seek to talk about him."[2]

Whatever it is that specifically drives the currently fashionable hypertrophic hyper-apophaticism,[3] this study will not attempt to present the latter's genealogy. Rather, having set forth the broader context, the goal will be to analyze a much less trendy contemporary alternative. Keeping seriously in mind human proneness to idolatry, I hope to give an account of how God can, nevertheless, be thought without falling into the inconsistency of both presuming to know God and simultaneously denying his thinkability. In particular, this paper seeks briefly to compare Karl Barth's and Robert W. Jenson's doctrines of God, with special emphasis on their ascription of being to God, as well as human epistemic and linguistic capacity to give expression to this divine being.[4] For all the far-reaching affinity between Barth and Jenson, it will be demonstrated that, while the former avoids the potential charge of idolatry by rigorously maintaining God's sovereign lordship over being, knowledge, and language, Jenson organically joins the three categories by exegeting the manner of God's being, as it is spoken of in the church's confession, in terms of divine narrativity and drama. He thus arrives at a more elegant understanding of the difference/distance between God and humanity in terms of conversational distance-nearness.

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existence with the phenomenologically more obvious assertion: God can be asked about only because there has already been talk about him." *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute Between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 248.

[2] Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, vii.

[3] In the words of Karl Barth: "a stream of formless inundation." *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomsonn, 14 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936–1977), II/1, 232. Hereafter, abbreviated to *CD*, followed by the volume number/part number and page reference.

[4] For an attempt to couch the doctrine of God with no recourse to the (idolatrous) concept of being altogether, see Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991). Marion's concerns do, to some degree, overlap with those expressed in this paper, even though, as will be seen, neither Barth nor Jenson seek a wholesale rejection of the category of being, but rather its theological reconstitution.

I. Sovereignty: Karl Barth

Spectatorship and the Idol of Being

A systematic theologian who was keenly aware of the paths trodden and blind alleys explored by his predecessors, Barth voices his deep suspicion of the concept of being, in particular when it is exalted into the "criterion of all things" (*CD* II/1, 243). On the one hand, it is undoubtedly correct that theology must let God be God by systematically giving expression to God's actuality and, in so doing, must also underscore the actuality of the world as the work of God, who actually is the world's creator. In other words, theology as speech about God must seriously take into consideration the reality of both God and the world. But therein lurks the danger. For, on the other hand, as *human* speech about God, theology always runs the risk of illicitly and simplistically concluding from divine and human actuality to "a being common to God and man which finally and properly establishes and upholds the fellowship between them" (*CD* II/1, 243). In Barth's opinion, this conclusion on the part of the theologian cannot but show itself to be arbitrary and self-absorbed. Proceeding chiefly and in the first place through the concept of being creates the illusion that God's actuality is being upheld, whereas, in fact, it is the human actuality that inevitably becomes the standard of all else. And knowledge of God which takes as its starting point the being of humanity can only be empty speculation rooted in deceitful self-autonomy: "Our supposed idea of God, the object of our most intimate feeling, will always be the idea of the world and in the last resort of man. It will always be our own reflection, the hypostatization of our thought and speech" (*CD* II/1, 228; cf. 63, 71–72). In short, epistemically to privilege the idea of shared being (however this sharing is envisioned) is to misunderstand both God and humanity.[5] Let us look at the nature of this misunderstanding further.

Barth blames seventeenth-century Protestant Orthodoxy—both Lutheran and Reformed—for uncritically borrowing the concept of being from medieval scholasticism, thus unwittingly laying the foundation for the naturalistic and anthropomorphic reductionism to which the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment eras subjected the doctrine of God. In his discussion of Andreas Quenstedt's view of analogical speech about God,[6] Barth notes that Quenstedt (1617–1688)—who otherwise

[5] "God is not God if he is considered and conceived as one in a series of like objects" (*CD* II/1, 15); "Man cannot and must not know himself apart from God, but together with God as his 'opposite'" (*CD* II/1, 10). More examples appear below.

[6] *CD* II/1, 237–243.

maintains a strong Lutheran emphasis on the theological centrality of the doctrine of the justification of *sinners* through *faith* in the *cross*—inadvertently and inconsistently makes not a single reference to God's gracious self-disclosure in Christ as fundamentally constitutive of the knowledge of God. Instead, Quenstedt first rejects, and rightly so, the *analogia inequalitatis* and the *analogia proportionalitatis*, only, however, to affirm humans' natural mode of knowing God on the basis of the *analogia attributionis* construed as an intrinsic property. The analogy of inequality is not a viable mode of predication because it assumes that the analogans and the analogatum are both species of the same genus, which can never be true of both God and humanity. Similarly, the analogy of proportionality, which consists in the similarity of two or more entities through the agreement of some of their determinations and the disagreement of others, is unacceptable as an expression of humans' status vis-à-vis God and their knowledge of him. By contrast, the analogy of attribution expresses a similarity between two objects, whereby what they share in common is primarily and properly possessed by the one and is only derivatively, through dependence, *either* ascribed to or apprehended by the other (in the analogy's extrinsic variety) *or* possessed by the other (i.e., intrinsically present). By opting for the intrinsic interpretation of the analogy of attribution, Quenstedt, according to Barth, posits a knowledge of God which the creature, in that it exists, possesses in itself apart from God's revelation, despite the creature's alleged sinfulness.[7] Even when Quenstedt is led to distinguish, on the strength of his view of analogical predication, between humans' relative being and God's absolute being, this being is "without question identical in God and in us" (*CD* II/1, 241). Put differently, being has emerged as the fundamental and constant category in which both God and humans participate.[8] The fact of this participation cannot but be known to humanity. As a result, the being of God is in fact knowable and accessible to human beings apart from God, through self-examination. Unfortunately, this situation not only presents the subsequent reality of God's special revelation with an epistemic straightjacket but, at best, essentially falsifies the character and import of God's revelation and, at worst, makes the latter redundant.

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[7] "[R]evelation is not necessary to make us participants of the truth of God. We are so already, to the extent that we are, if only relatively, what God is absolutely" (*CD* II/1, 241).

[8] "[T]he criterion of all truth . . . is not God at all, but the being in which God and man—the former absolutely, the latter relatively—participate" (*CD* II/1, 241).

Thus, for Barth, Quenstedt's doctrine of analogy is, in fact, coextensive with the Roman Catholic doctrine of the analogy of being, to which—because of its seeming Christological indifference—Barth refers in no uncertain terms as "the invention of Antichrist" (*CD* I/1, x; II/1, 82). In that, by proceeding from human being, it posits being as the overarching category, the *analogia entis* necessarily raises a host of speculative issues that then must lead to other questions concerning the transition from possibility to actuality. Put differently, the *analogia entis* must first deal with abstract considerations before it can be applied.[9] Abstract resolutions, however, can be little more than arbitrary. Thus Barth recognizes that the general question of God's knowability can be posed. But such a question can have only a human point of departure: "a preconceived idea about the transcendence and supramundanity of God" (*CD* II/1, 15), "even [about] God as the incomparably real being"—preconceived, because this idea is grounded in the claim that, "[a]s himself a being, man is able to know a being as such . . . [and thus] all being" (*CD* II/1, 84). In the end, therefore, the question whether God is knowable will likewise have only a human answer, or rather will lack an answer altogether. Any decision concerning the knowability of God, rooted in general epistemological considerations, leads to doubt, for as such it necessarily arises as only one possibility among many. This situation is hardly remedied by radically separating God and humans within the conceptually delineated spectrum of being through qualifying their respective being as absolute and relative, or through ascribing to God transcendence, supramundanity, or incomparable reality.[10] When all is said and done, the product of human

[9] Cf. *CD* II/1, 84.

[10] Jüngel points out that the *late* Barth's suspicion of the *analogia entis* did not consist in the analogy's seeming relativization of the qualitatively infinite difference between God and humans. Rather, Barth feared that the *analogia entis* "would not do justice to the difference between God and man by overlooking the *nearness* of God." *God as the Mystery of the Word*, 282. If my interpretation of Barth's understanding of the *analogia entis* is correct, then what Jüngel seems to overlook is that Barth's fear had an even deeper motivation. Its source was not so much the analogy's inability to account for God's nearness, but rather the analogy's arbitrary radicalization of the separation between God and humans in an attempt to save God from the multiple possibilities, the ambiguity and the abstraction inherent in the analogy's speculative structure.

This renders a part of the Roman Catholic defense of the *analogia entis* simply misdirected. For example, the allegation that "Aquinas' analogy does not rest on a preconceived epistemology, but remains valid both in a natural and in a revealed epistemology" misses the point that it is rather the epistemology's arbitrariness, abstraction and revelation-neutral character that Barth finds objectionable. Barth's own epistemology is, in a sense, very much a pre-conceived one—more on this below. Likewise, to say that "Aquinas' analogy does not destroy the infinite qualitative

questioning after the possibility of knowing God is a certainty always and everywhere riddled with uncertainty, a knowledge which knows God—even in his lordship, even in his creatorship—only as ambiguous and so as ultimately unthinkable.[11] When the question whether God is known is asked, there can be no actual answer but a persistent question mark that leads to self-deception or despair.[12]

In keeping with his criticism of Quenstedt, Barth's denial of the natural knowledge of God through the concept of being appears to be largely hamartiological in character. To ask after the possibility of knowing God cannot but be self-serving: "the attempt of man to answer the riddle of his own existence and of that of the world, and in that way to master himself and the world" (*CD* II/1, 85).[13] Barth is emphatic: in knowing God, we can never be mere "spectators . . . on neutral ground" (*CD* II/1, 26, 81), seeking to assure God's Godhood, seeking to know God as the god whose definition we have already arrived at on the basis of, and from within, our existence, regardless of how different, even infinitely different, from us we might have made him. Neither can we act interestedly, in "the attempt to preserve and affirm [ourselves—which] is not only the possibility but the deepest reality of [human] existence" (*CD* II/1, 135). In brief, to ask *whether* God exists is to misconstrue God and to render him arbitrary; at bottom it is to misinterpret oneself, to distort one's being, and so, by departing from the wrong place, to arrive at a vacuum, an idol,[14] characterized by being and transcendence.

The Lord Who Knows Himself and Gives Himself to Be Known

What then is Barth's alternative? According to the Swiss theologian, in coming to know God, we do not proceed from the establishment of a

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difference between God and man, because it simply asserts the priority of God over man with respect to the perfections of both God and man" is to overlook the fact that it is the positing of this "infinite qualitative difference" and of the "priority of God over man" as a defense against indeterminacy that leads Barth to reject the *analogia entis*. For the Roman Catholic citations, see Battista Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology*, 2nd ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), 169–170. The question whether or not Barth really understood *Aquinas* is beyond the scope of this article.

[11] Cf. *CD* II/1, 70, 80.

[12] Cf. CD II/1, 91.

[13] Our analogies (e.g., of lordship) "do not point us to God, but to ourselves, to our God-alienated souls, to our threatened life on this side of death, to a merely possible lordship set in the sphere of our choosing" (*CD* II/1, 76).

[14] Cf. *CD* II/1, 86.

possibility to the identification of an actuality—an enterprise which is necessarily arbitrary and open to questioning. Rather, "[k]nowledge of God can always proceed only from the knowledge of his existence in the twofold sense that we always have this knowledge and that we must have it from God Himself in order consequently to know him" (*CD* II/1, 39). It is the actuality of God—more specifically, of God's self-disclosure—that unambiguously determines its own possibility.[15] This proposition underlies not only Barth's entire ontology,[16] but is also of fundamental epistemological significance. It asserts that "[t]he knowability of God can be known only in the real knowledge of God" (*CD* II/1, 65). Consequently, we do not ask whether God is known, but only *in what manner* and *how far* he is known.[17] We shall now look at these questions in light of Barth's criticism of the concept of being and of the doctrine of analogy as it was elaborated by Roman Catholic and Protestant scholasticism.

Because it is rooted in God's revelation, "[t]he knowledge of God," holds Barth, "takes place, not in a free choice, but with a very definite constraint . . . the constraint of God's Word" (*CD* II/1, 7). Therefore, only where this word is proclaimed in faithfulness to the biblical witness does the possibility of knowing God present itself. And there is only one such place: the church of Jesus Christ. "The Gospel of the Church of God is . . . of necessity a defined, circumscribed and limited message . . . It explains, *not an idea of God*, but His name revealed in His deeds" (*CD* II/1, 20, emphasis added). The actuality of the church is itself a revelatory deed of God, the work of his Word—the church exists solely through the proclamation of Jesus Christ. Thus, the actuality of the church is itself a witness to the actuality of God's revelation and the corresponding possibility of knowing God. In short, for Barth, true knowledge of God arises from the church and serves the church.[18]

Now, because the church exists thanks to the gospel and by proclaiming the gospel (even though the gospel, and within it God himself, is that which the church makes available), God in his revelation remains the Lord of the Church. Put differently, in the church's confession, God gives himself as an object to be known by humans: "Biblical faith lives upon the

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[15] "Where the actuality exists there is also the corresponding possibility" (*CD* II/1, 5).

[16] So Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming*, trans. John Webster (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 33.

[17] Cf. *CD* II/1, 4-5, 63. Hence, Barth notes, the doctrine of the knowledge of God cannot be considered as an independent prolegomenon to the systematic-theological task; rather, it is an intrinsic part of the doctrine of God itself (cf. *CD* II/1, 32).

[18] Cf. *CD* II/1, 63, 180.

objectivity of God" (*CD* II/1, 15). But he remains, at the same time, the subject and the sole initiator of this knowledge of himself: "Biblical knowledge of God is always based on encounters . . . in which God exercises in one way or another His Lordship over man" (*CD* II/1, 23). This manner of God's being known by humans as the subject of his own objectivity is of tremendous significance for the interpretation not only of Barth's understanding of the divine–human relationship, but also of God himself. As the subject of his knowledge, "God is known by God, and what is more, by God alone" (*CD* II/1, 233; cf. 65–66, 183), Barth avers. But as the object of his knowledge, God gives himself to be known by humans, who in his objectivity come to know him as the subject. This is the content of God's revelation; this is the church's proclamation—beyond it there is no God but an ambiguous and endless string of impossible possibilities. To show how easy it is to relapse into this abstraction in interpreting Barth's principle "God is known only by God," we may take as an example one of Barth's Roman Catholic critics who maintains that the principle necessarily breaks down. "If it is false, somebody else besides God knows Him. If it is true, there is at least another being besides God, namely Karl Barth, that knows something about God."[19] Against such a one-sided construal of God's self-knowledge and human knowledge of God, Barth holds, in keeping with his emphasis on actuality, that God's "revelation is characterised as revelation of the *truth* beside which there is no other and above which there is none higher" (*CD* II/1, 51, emphasis added). How is one then specifically to unpack the principle that God alone knows himself and, at the same time, believe that God can himself be truly known in what the church witnesses to?

To answer this question, we must continually remind ourselves to keep God's actuality as our premise. The church's witness is to Jesus Christ as the man in whom God has become a human being. Now, if the man Jesus is God and in him God truly knows himself, this actuality means that such self-knowledge is possible for God, and therefore must exist as an actuality already in God himself. It means, therefore, that God simply *is* the Father, whom Jesus, as the Father's eternal Son, proclaimed. In short, God corresponds to himself—is himself—in his revelation. To express this correspondence, Barth distinguishes, therefore, between God's primary and secondary objectivity: "God is objectively immediate to himself [primary objectivity], but to us He is objectively mediate . . . clothed under the sign and veil of other objects different from Himself. His secondary

[19] Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology*, 162 n. 3.

objectivity is fully true for it has its correspondence and basis in His primary objectivity" (*CD* II/1, 16). It must be noted at this point that the distinction between God's primary and secondary objectivity does not mean that they can ever be separated, that the subjectivity and objectivity of God can ever be considered, let alone exist, apart from each other. Rather, both are a fact of God's revelation.[20] Their togetherness is inseparably enclosed within one proposition: *God reveals himself* (that is, gives himself to be known), *as the Lord* (that is, as none other than God), who, as God, alone knows himself, and so can give himself to be known. In this way, the humanity of Christ is not accidental or external to God's very being and self-knowledge.

To press further the issue of the inseparability of God's secondary and primary objectivity, one must place Barth's assertion, "God is known by God," side by side with his affirmation of divine sovereignty, "God ultimately wills Himself," he wills his glory. This "willing is primarily a determination of the love of the Father and the Son in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost" (*CD* II/2, 169). In this apparent self-seeking, the seeking of his glory,[21] God desires, however, to find himself together with a particular man, identifiable by a name and a story. Only as this theanthropic totality does God's willing constitute God's primal decision: "[i]n this primal decision God did not remain satisfied with His own being in Himself" but rather "has caught up man into the sovereign presupposing of Himself" (*CD* II/2, 168, 176). So much so that the Logos, the second mode of divine subsistence, is and remains a stopgap if "it" is considered without the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. What this means is that God's being is decision (*CD* II/2, 175), a decision for otherness, for creatureliness made in the loving freedom of God. Consequently, just as God's self-willing is not a self-seeking, neither does God's self-knowledge have the form of closed unknowability. On the contrary, both will and knowledge represent and implement God's openness to the creature, the permanence of which is underwritten by God's (and therefore no one else's) free (and therefore committed) initiative. For it is in willing himself that God eternally comes to know himself. And so, on account of his loving decision, God does not know himself without humanity: "the only begotten Son of God and

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[20] So Jüngel: "precisely in order to understand the objectivity of God *in his revelation*, Barth infers from this objectivity a 'primary objectivity' of God in God's innertrinitarian being, differentiated from God's objectivity in revelation. [But] Barth understands this 'innertrinitarian inference' . . . as *itself knowledge of revelation* (and not metaphysical speculation!)." *God's Being is in Becoming*, 63; emphasis added.

[21] Cf. *CD* II/2, 142, 178.

therefore God Himself . . . has become the bearer of our flesh, and does not exist as God's Son from eternity to eternity except in our flesh. Our flesh is therefore present when He knows God as the Son the Father, when God knows Himself. In our flesh God knows Himself" (*CD* II/1, 151). In short, the being-in-willing of God is the foundation of the historical *existence of humanity;* at the same time the self-knowledge of God underlies the possibility of *our knowledge of God* as the one who loves us in his freedom. There is in Barth an "*intrinsically* divine basis of God's revelation" (*CD* II/2, 97, emphasis added).

Because, in God's knowledge of himself in our flesh, God's being and his revelation—if they are truly to be God's being in the actuality of his revelation—are inseparably conjoined, these two must be explicated further and explicitly through the lens of the Son's assumption of the flesh into his divinity.

Since we have been implicitly following the order of coming to the knowledge of God, let us begin with revelation. According to Barth, "[r]evelation means the giving of signs . . . revelation means sacrament" (*CD* II/1, 52). Now, since God reveals himself uniquely in the humanity of Jesus by knowing himself in it, "[t]he humanity of Jesus Christ as such is the first sacrament, the foundation of everything that God instituted and used in His revelation as a secondary objectivity both before and after the epiphany of Jesus Christ" (*CD* II/1, 54).[22] Briefly put, the humanity of Jesus determines the general incarnational pattern of God's self-disclosure, both in the history of Israel and of the church. This pattern is one of veiling and unveiling. God veils himself in what is "foreign and improper to Himself . . . . the conceal[ing] of His objectivity by the quite different objectivity of the creature" (*CD* II/1, 55). Yet even in this concealment "the knowledge of God is unlike all other knowledge in that its object is the living Lord of the knowing man" (*CD* II/1, 21). The reason God thus lowers and veils himself is that in his good-pleasure God desires "to be known by us according to the measure of our own human cognition . . . in a temporal way" (*CD* II/1, 61). Consequently, revelation is never identical with God himself.[23] It discloses God himself as a mystery.[24] Nonetheless, because God actually desires to be known and, on account of his good-pleasure, discloses

[22] On the construal of the pre-incarnate Logos as a 'stop-gap' for Jesus' humanity, see *CD* II/2, 96. See also Jüngel's comments in *God's Being is in Becoming*, 95, and 78–80 for a discussion of Barth's concept of God's immanent being as "ours in advance," self-consistent and self-corresponding.

[23] Cf. *CD* II/1, 211.

[24] Cf. *CD* II/1, 40.

himself in earthly temporality, God is "who He is even in the sphere of our apprehension" (*CD* II/1, 244), he "is who He is in His works" (*CD* II/1, 260). Thus we can cleave to God only by cleaving to his work that takes place in the creaturely sphere.[25] It ought to be obvious at this point that divine veiling and unveiling are not equally balanced: "the relationship between veiling and unveiling is not symmetrical equivocal, vacillating or obscure, nor is it a reversal and alternation dependent on the arbitrariness of God and man," rather, both concepts refer to the grace of the revelation of God (*CD* II/1, 236; cf. 199, 215). For Barth the simultaneity of God's veiling in unveiling constitutes a teleologically ordered dialectic of incomprehensibility amidst definiteness.[26] What all this amounts to is that, because God's self-disclosure happens in the manner of divine condescension and accommodation, it can be apprehended but not understood. Moreover, on account of both its manner and its object, the knowledge of God arising out of his self-disclosure can never exhaust the depth of God's being. Only God knows himself. Yet, despite the inexhaustibility of God's being, in his revelation God shows himself to be self-same: "The fact that God gives to us only a share in the truth of His knowledge of Himself cannot mean that He does not give Himself to be known by us as the One He is" (*CD* II/1, 52). Barth does not deny that "a further knowledge of God" is possible, but it can only be intensive in nature and so "will only lead us deeper into just this entirety of His being" (*CD* II/1, 52). In short, because God unveils himself by veiling himself, he discloses himself as God, the Lord whom the knowing humans can never objectify or possess, but who in all his self-possession gives himself to be known by them as an object.

We now move on to God's being and the way it is to be understood, as a fact of revelation, through God's secondary objectivity. God reveals his divine lordship in his being "the Father of His own eternal Son and with Him the source of the Holy Spirit" (*CD* II/1, 48). These three modes of God's actuality are disclosed in his knowledge of himself in the man Jesus, and so, in that in Christ God corresponds to himself, God is likewise actually triune in his eternal self. Triunity is an occurrence in God himself which gives strength to our knowledge of God. Consequently, in knowing God, humans can never bypass his triune being:

> The illegitimate encroachment on our part is to resist the divine encroachment when we have to do with the truth of the truth itself, and

[25] Cf. *CD* II/1, 53.
[26] Cf. *CD* II/1, 232-233.

> to ask after a truth which is superior to the openness between the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit, as if this openness were not the original and real openness, the source and norm of all others, and as if there were a higher criterion than the fact that God is God and that in His revelation is also God among us and for us. (*CD* II/1, 68).

As Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God is thus determinate, even though the possibility corresponding to the actuality of his being Father, Son, and Holy Spirit must remain hidden and inexhaustible.[27] Therefore, in this definiteness, albeit full of hiddenness and inexhaustibility, these names for the modes of God's being must not be regarded as illustrative but interpretative in nature.[28] As the words of God's self-demonstration, they give authoritative (on the authority of God's use of them) expression in human language to God's revelatory self-correspondence. In this function they thus gain a new meaning, a revelatory meaning, that can now inform their subsequent use. In sum, by so construing the doctrine of the Trinity, Barth does not reject the concept of being as a determinative, and so also constraining, category. Recall that he criticized the application of this concept to God in his discussion of the *analogia entis*, but he did so not because the concept was inherently idolatrous, as contemporary theology appears to think, but because in its application it was arbitrarily elevated to the status of an overarching category whose anthropocentric abstraction could never form the foundation of the divine-human fellowship. Here, however, Barth reclaims being in reference to God, showing its determinateness to be one of God's self-knowledge in the mutual objectivity of the Father, the Son, in whom the Father knows himself in the flesh, and their Spirit. Proceeding from God's revelation, Barth shows God's being to be one of determinate, though incomprehensible, revelation-oriented becoming.[29]

Displaced Knowers

We began our discussion of Barth's alternative to the ambiguity and arbitrariness that characterizes the knowledge of God arrived at through the *analogia entis* by pointing to the actuality of the church as the witness to the actuality of God's revelation. The existence of the church, however,

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[27] "The hiddenness of God is the inconceivability of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; of the one true God, our Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer, who as such is known only to Himself, and is therefore viewable and conceivable only to Himself, and alone capable of speaking of Himself aright, i.e., in truth" (*CD* II/1, 197).

[28] Cf. Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming*, 24.

[29] To this, see Jüngel's paraphrase of Barth's doctrine of God.

implies not only the revelatory presence of its Lord, but also the presence of the people of God, who, in him that offers himself as the object of their knowledge, know and glorify their Lord.[30] Barth's harsh rejection of the analogy of being was aimed at demonstrating that "[w]e possess no analogy on the basis of which the nature and being of God as the Lord can be accessible to us" (*CD* II/1, 75). It is so because God cannot "be added to give content and substance to what is supposed to be analogous to Him" (*CD* II/1, 76). Yet, in that the Father knows himself in the humanity of the Son, "we do not stand outside but inside [Jesus Christ] . . . . In Him the fact that God is knowable is true not only for God Himself, not only between the Father and Son, but for man, for us" (*CD* II/1, 151). Thus "God's revelation breaks through the emptiness of the movement of thought which we call our knowledge of God" (*CD* II/1, 74). In this revelation "our knowing receives the character of a very definite permission" (*CD* II/1, 243).

This permission, however, does not leave human beings indifferent. God does not allow humans to be mere spectators of his revelation, but rather discloses to them his re-creative, reconciliatory, and redemptive lordship in which they can be truly human in the truth of God himself.[31] God's revelation, as it touches sinners, brings about the sinners' displacement, moving them into a position from which they cannot only truly interpret, but also truly be, themselves: "Man in the cosmos, who is confronted with God's revelation . . . becomes, as the man confronted by God's revelation, objectively another man . . . namely one who in the whole compass of his existence can now know and has to acknowledge the might and glory of this God," who in his self-understanding no longer really exists as such or "exists only in one monstrous misunderstanding" (*CD* II/1, 110, 112; cf. 27). In God's revelation, "[m]an exists in Jesus Christ and in Him alone" (*CD* II/1, 149).

Now, because sinners are so displaced, all the prior knowledge of God they might think they had must come to naught as self-serving and idolatrous. It cannot be built on. This may initially seem strange,[32] given

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30 Cf. *CD* II/1, 180.

31 "Knowledge of God is not the relationship of an already existing subject to an object that enters into his sphere and is therefore obedient to the laws of his sphere. On the contrary, this knowledge first of all creates the subject of its knowledge by coming into the picture" (*CD* II/1, 21; cf. 39).

32 So Mondin: "I may, for instance, examine the same star with the naked eye and with a telescope. Certainly with the telescope I shall see the star much more clearly and completely, but the star always remains the same. Similarly, one may know that God

that Barth claims elsewhere that our true knowledge of God is never exhausted, that God alone truly knows himself. Note, however, that in the case of revelation, our knowledge is always correct, having God as its object—it simply may not be intensive enough. By contrast, the sinner's own knowledge, established through the analogy of being, has the wrong point of departure, because it is prior to the displacement of faith. It is extensively wrong, in that it is grounded on arbitrary and abstract determination. The sinner's knowledge is an objectless knowledge.

This, however, does not mean that believers' knowledge of God is something that becomes theirs to do with as they please. Rather, knowledge of God always happens in the humility of faith, namely, in the recognition of the lordship of the Father, who, by knowing himself in the flesh of the Son, lovingly knows the creature. Knowledge of God happens in the recognition of one's creatureliness. Now, because this knowledge is by God's gracious permission and because it is a knowledge of the Lord by the creature, it is never possessed.[33] "The knowledge of God is wholly and utterly His own readiness to be known by us, grounded in His being and activity" (*CD* II/1, 66). What this means is that "readiness on the side of man . . . can have only a borrowed, mediated and subsequent independence. It can be communicated to man only as a capacity for gratitude and obedience" (*CD* II/1, 66). Yet, because this "obedience is not that of a slave but of a child" (*CD* II/1, 36), thus, even though the knowledge of God is not possessed, it is lovingly and "continually renewed and re-established by its object" (*CD* II/1, 24). This is true gain, for—in the displacement to a position in which we can be ourselves and from which we can see ourselves in the true light of God's revelation as the revelation of our maker—we are freed from ourselves. In short, because we do not begin with ourselves, we, therefore, are not doomed to end with our puny capacity.[34] In knowing God "we are not lost in that ascending and descending movement but held—held as by the mercy of God but for that reason really held" (*CD* II/1, 75), as "God allows us our time in order that He may always have time for us, revelation time" (*CD* II/1, 62).

To summarize, in their sinfulness humans cannot know God at all because they are displaced from themselves. Nonetheless, as believers, they can know God only because he brings them, as they are in their

exists without knowing that He is triune, yet it is truly God one knows." *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology*, 160–161.

[33] Cf. *CD* II/1, 182, 188.

[34] Cf. *CD* II/1, 43.

creatureliness, to the discernment of his relational and revelatory activity. Redeemed creation is God's creation, not a godless one. Therefore, rather than annul the distance between God and itself, on account of God's constant relating to the world, it humbly upholds the infinite ontological distance between the creator and the creature.

To express this relationship of distance in nearness, Barth's alternative to the *analogia entis* as the basis of human knowledge of God is the analogy of faith (*analogia fidei*).[35] God is knowable only because he actually relates to humanity, but he is known in this relationship only through faith. Faith discerns his presence in the objects of the world and in human language—but, because it never possesses its knowledge of God, it does so only "looking back from God's revelation" (*CD* II/1, 229). This is an important qualification, for it constitutes the reason why Barth does not in principle reject the concept of the analogy of being, provided it should signify participation in being through God's gracious revelation apprehended in faith.[36] Consequently, in the first place, if being is understood as following upon the works of God,[37] then, through faith, which recognizes God's relationship to humanity, humans become extrinsic analogues of God.[38] Further, as a re-creative and redemptive displacement of the sinner, faith confesses that, just as God displaces the sinner into his divine being in order that the latter might know him as Lord, he likewise sacramentally and incarnationally claims earthly objects as vehicles of his unique objectivity. Finally, in the same manner, God lays hold of human language as the analogical medium of his revelation.[39]

Before concluding this discussion of Karl Barth, let us briefly consider this linguistic aspect of God's self-disclosure. Despite his reservations, Barth does not discard the concept of analogy because, although human words correspond to and agree with the being of God, they are never on a par with that being—"that would mean the annulment either of the deity of God or of the manhood of man" (*CD* II/1, 233). In order to preserve this revelatory distinction, Barth therefore rejects univocality, as obliterating the distinction altogether (veiling), and equivocality, as doing away with

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35 Cf. *CD* II/1, 82; "the analogy of grace and faith . . . which is made accessible to us in incomprehensible reality" (*CD* II/1, 85).

36 Cf. *CD* II/1, 82.

37 Cf. *CD* II/1, 83.

38 "What converts the creature into an analogue of God lies only in the veracity of the object known analogously in the knowledge of God, and therefore in the veracity of God himself" (*CD* II/1, 239).

39 Cf. *CD* II/1, 224–5, 229–230.

God's self-same determinateness (unveiling) in his revelation.[40] He states: "In distinction to both likeness and unlikeness 'analogy' means similarity, i.e., a partial correspondence and agreement (and, therefore, one which limits both parity and disparity between two or more different entities)" (*CD* II/1, 225).

Barth's adoption of the traditional category is, however, also an adaptation, as ought to be obvious from our discussion so far. First of all, he emphasizes that analogy as a concept is insufficient, in that, while God gives himself as an object, he is not an object among other objects to be subjected to the prior rules of analogy.[41] Analogy is further insufficient because "[t]o designate the positivity and truth of the relationship between [God and humanity] we use the concept of similarity and therefore of a partial correspondence and agreement" (*CD* II/1, 234). Yet neither "the one, entire and indivisible being of God, who has unreservedly made Himself accessible and imparted Himself to us in His revelation without reservation," nor the human being, entire and indivisible in its creatureliness and sinfulness, is calculable (*CD* II/1, 234). "For in this relationship man is confronted by God" (*CD* II/1, 234; cf. 235–236). Second, instead of the "static" doctrine of analogy based on the concept of being (nature), Barth puts forth a dynamic concept of analogy[42] revolving around God's veiling and unveiling in his revelatory relating to the world (grace). In his understanding, Barth emphasizes the fact that God, by disclosing himself through claiming worldly objects and human language and through displacing sinners, reveals that the world belongs to him as its creator and that it is rightly his own. Thus, in the same way that God's revelation discloses our creaturely inability to know God and yet makes him known to us, God's revelation also discloses our inability to speak of God and simultaneously opens up our lips. God claims and justifies human thinking and speaking, as well as upholding those who think and speak of him in humility before him. In short, God justifies the entirety of human existence in Christ.[43]

In conclusion, Barth maintains the distinction between God and humans by construing God's revelatory nearness as the actual establishment of his

[40] "We are forced to decide against the *univoce* because it conflicts with the confession of God's veiling in His revelation, and against the *aequivoce* because it contradicts the confession of His unveiling; against the one as against the other because it cannot be united with the confession of God's grace in his revelation" (*CD* II/1, 240).

[41] Cf. *CD* II/1, 226.

[42] Cf. *CD* II/1, 231.

[43] Cf. *CD* II/1, 193, 214.

lordship. As such it can never leave us indifferent. "We cannot speak of the knowability of God as an abstract possibility. For it is concretely realised by God Himself, in the Father and in the Son by the Holy Spirit" (*CD* II/1, 68). God's lordship is that of the Father, who knows himself in the human flesh of his divine Son by the Spirit that proceeds from both. It is a re-creative and redemptive lordship, whose nature is becoming and through which humans, with the totality of their existence, also become what they truly are. Specifically, God manifests his triune lordship by displacing humanity from its sinful self-deception and into participation in his grace. In this Barth shows that being is not an inherently idolatrous category, provided that its content is determined by the actuality of God's revelation. Further, God manifests his lordship by offering and upholding true knowledge of himself. Finally, he reclaims human language and endows it with the capacity to express him. In all this, the overarching principle remains that "Christology is and must remain the life-centre of theology" (*CD* II/1, 242).

Yet, despite this unparalleled christological (and hamartiological) emphasis, one is left wondering whether Barth's reinterpretation of the concepts of being and analogy through the lens of God's objective lordship has not inadvertently retained too much of the arbitrariness of the scholastic doctrine. In his attempt to conjoin God's actual knowability with the fact that it is God's knowability, does Barth not juxtapose objectivity and lordship to such a degree that conceptually they become the outermost limits of the infinite spectrum in-between? Is not lordship then simply a substitute for transcendence?[44] It is hard to escape the impression that even in the actuality of Christ, God for Barth is above all the agent of an infinite intensively-progressing withdrawal, an actuality whose nature it is to elude human grasp. If it is so, perhaps the concept of lordship merits a more thorough purging of the analogical vestiges than Barth offers, so that the Lord who gives himself, and in so doing appears to take humanity seriously, may actually be received, and also so that the displacement of humans may be true displacement across the humanly unbridgeable ontological divide. With these questions in mind, we now turn to Robert Jenson.

II. Conversation: Robert W. Jenson

Robert Jenson praises Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* for its "parade of trinitarian solutions to questions that modern theology had answered in

[44] In his treatment of the doctrine of reconciliation, Barth seems to have recognized some of this danger; cf. *CD* IV/1, 186 and IV/2, 224.

unitarian fashion."[45] At the same time, as a Lutheran more inclined to espouse the Catholic (and catholic!), rather than Protestant, answers to divisive theological questions,[46] Jenson is less interested in upholding God's revelatory lordship as an expression of the ontic and epistemic distance, even if it be only a distance in nearness, between God and humanity. It appears that for Jenson sovereignty ought not to be maintained in as rigid a fashion if one really wants to do justice to the dynamic of God's self-disclosure. Now, since God's self-disclosure is that of the Trinity, the notion of God being God over all and over everything must be given a more explicitly trinitarian form. Jenson thus differs from Barth in the way he triunely construes God's being and hiddenness, and with those the human capacity to know and speak of God. This will now be explored in more detail.

The Hidden Identity of God's Being and Work

As with Barth, the actuality of church's confessing proclamation, according to Jenson, presents humans with the possibility of knowing of God. It is so because the church not only is itself founded on Christ's work, or because in its existence Christ's original incarnational sacramentality is variously replicated. More than that, the church in its entirety is the presence of Christ himself in such a way that the *totus Christus* is Christ, as the second identity of God, together with his church.[47] The history of the church, of the entire people of God, thus serves not merely as a framework within which God can be located in a determinate way, but this history is itself God's identity: "the phrase 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit' is simultaneously a very compressed telling of the total narrative by which Scripture identifies God and a personal name for the God so specified" (I:46). In fact, the name and the narrative are identical (I:46).[48] In them God conveys himself in such a way that there is no other or higher God beyond these "temporal and 'limiting' modes of experience" (I:46). Consequently, "we are stuck with the names and descriptions the biblical narrative contingently enforces, which seem designed always to offend

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[45] Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I: *The Triune God*, Vol. II: *The Works of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 & 1999), I:154. Hereafter, abbreviated to Jenson, followed by volume number and page reference.

[46] Jenson I:viii.

[47] Cf. Jenson II:167.

[48] Cf. Robert W. Jenson, "The Hidden and Triune God," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2 (2000): 9.

somebody."[49] We are stuck with them because, even though we cannot go as far as dissolving God in his narrative identity, the syntax of these descriptions, God's eternal decision to be God in this narrative, triune way and in no other, is hidden from us. We can neither identify synonyms, nor make translations. To do so would be to depart from the actuality of divine self-disclosure into abstract speculation, from God into man-made fiction. Jenson could not be more emphatic: "God does not traffic in fiction" (I:120).

Jenson bemoans contemporary theology's preoccupation with this sort of fiction in the name of human agendas: "It can only be an occasion of bitter amusement that recent demands to bypass the name and the biblical habits of discourse and imagining and form more ideologically acceptable language directly on the abstract formulas are made, of all things, in the name of experience and concretion" (I:93). We must recall in this context Barth's frequent references to God as creator, reconciler, and redeemer. For Barth, however, these are not synonyms for God's triune name and, therefore, are not on a par with God's three modes of being. Rather, they refer to the totality of God's work, which does not exhaust the nature and being of God, despite his selfsameness in his revelation.[50] In other words, God is Father, Son, and Spirit—self-same in his primary and secondary objectivity—and only then, in the totality of his triune being, is he creator, reconciler, and redeemer, but these aspects of God's work cannot as such do justice to the depth of God's self-same triune being, to "His name revealed in His deeds" (*CD* II/1, 20). Note, in addition, that Barth conjoins the three action-designations with that of Lord, which likewise describes God in his total being.[51] The modification that Jenson introduces into this interpretation, as will be further explained below, is his emphasis that Father, Son, and Spirit are exhaustively descriptive of both God's being and work, because the two are the same. Hence, in revealing himself, God does not traffic in fiction or even the possibility thereof.

Such a strong statement of God's actuality leads Jenson to part ways with Karl Barth in regard to both God's hiddenness and the way God's being ought to be construed in relation to human being. We begin with God's hiddenness. "It is vital," Jenson underscores,

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[49] Jenson, "The Hidden and Triune God," 6. See also Robert W. Jenson, "The Father, He . . . ," in *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, ed. Alvin F. Kimel, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 95–109.

[50] Cf. *CD* II/1, 75.

[51] Cf. *CD* II/1, 75–78.

> to avoid the great contemporary denial of Nicea: the supposition that God's hiddenness is quantitative, constituted in the metaphysical distance from us. . . . God is not hidden because we can see only some of him through the metaphysical distances. He is hidden because his very presence is such as at one altogether to reveal and altogether to hide him. (II:161)

Thus far this is in accord with Barth: God's hiddenness is a correlate of his presence.[52] Jenson goes on to assert, contra Barth, that "[t]he scriptural hiddenness of God is not primarily a matter of our epistemic weakness or God's ontological uniqueness."[53] Jenson criticizes Barth for separating God's being and nature from his "encroachment." Barth does this by appropriating hiddenness primarily to the Father, who, in the humanity of the Son, unveils himself as the one who cannot be unveiled. For Barth the innertrinitarian possibility related to the actuality of God's self-disclosure in Christ means the existence of the Trinity. Nonetheless, in that the asymmetry the dialectic of divine veiling and unveiling corresponds directly to God's modes of being, Barth's doctrine, Jenson is led to conclude, "is ironically afflicted by a subtle subordinationism."[54] To avoid this, Jenson appeals to the biblical narrative in claiming that God is hidden precisely by his narratively understood triunity; specifically, "the locus of God's hiddenness is his reality as a moral agent involved with other agents, his history with us."[55] The persons of the Trinity are each both veiled and unveiled in the particular manner of each.

What this means specifically is that, in the Father's case, his Fatherhood is the ultimate fact, and because it is ultimate, there is God. The Father, as the origin of the Trinity, terminates all searching behind himself for reasons and other explanations. He is the source of all being, even of God himself. "And that God is thus in God a source of God is the [ultimately incomprehensible] possibility of God being also the source of things other than himself, of creatures, and the impossibility of there being anything other than God that is not created by him . . . because there is the Father, theodicy is finally impossible."[56] The unsearchableness of the Father also

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[52] Jenson, "The Hidden and Triune God," 6.

[53] Jenson, "The Hidden and Triune God," 9.

[54] Jenson, "The Hidden and Triune God," 8.

[55] Jenson, "The Hidden and Triune God," 9.

[56] Jenson, "The Hidden and Triune God," 9. Addressing himself to Luther's understanding of God's hiddenness, Jenson elaborates: "We cannot make God's providence morally comprehensible. We cannot justify his ways. Our praise of God will always falter if hard pressed, not because he is not good but because we cannot say so

accounts for why it makes no sense to ask about an "otherwise" in God, namely, about whether God could have revealed himself in any other way then the Father of his Son, the Suffering Servant, from whom the Spirit, as from the Father, proceeds. Now, the hiddenness of God in the Son is the hiddenness of God in human flesh: the flesh of the people of Israel and the flesh of one Israelite, Jesus.[57] Jesus Christ reveals in a determinate way the triune being of God. To acknowledge any other being, or non-being, of God is thus idolatry, but it is not idolatry to confess the being of God in the Son is of the Father. "For it is as we seek to evade the Exile and the cross that we create idols."[58] Finally, there is the Spirit, who, Jenson notes, is hiddenness almost by definition, blowing where he wills. The Spirit is God's freedom and openness to the future, in that, as the third identity of God, by his "self-giving [he] frees the Father and the Son for each other, frees the Father to find himself in the other of the Suffering Servant and frees the Son to be the Father's servant, cost what it may."[59] In sum, God's revelatory hiddenness is properly and uniquely ascribed to each of the identities of God's self-disclosure. It is a morally oriented hiddenness in the midst of which God reveals himself precisely as God.

God—The Movement of Conversation

Because for Jenson trinitarian teaching at its very core is the proper locus of God's hiddenness, the movement of God's self-disclosure as *revealing his hiddenness*, and so his Godhood, is his very identity: God reveals himself as Father, Son, and Spirit, and so he remains hidden, and in that he remains hidden, he truly is Father, Son, and Spirit—God. To understand God in any other way is for Jenson idolatrous. This is a slight change of accent vis-à-vis Barth's subtle privileging of God's unveiling (even though ultimately, through his construal of lordship, the emphasis seems to get reversed). Nonetheless, in the same way as Barth, Jenson is, therefore, led to reject any ascription of "sheer being" to God (I:211), as necessarily something over and above God's tri-personhood. At the same time, like Barth, he does

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without stuttering. Atheism, or sheer anger, are in fact reasonable responses to God's governance of his creation. The church's theology should say all that, in public. That God is the good Creator can only be affirmed following an anguished 'Nevertheless!'" Robert W. Jenson, "Luther's Contemporary Theological Significance," in Donald K. McKim, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), 279.

57 "Identification by the Resurrection neither replaces nor is simply added to identification by the Exodus; the new identifying description *verifies* its paradigmatic predecessor." Jenson I:44.

58 Jenson, "The Hidden and Triune God," 10.

59 Jenson, "The Hidden and Triune God," 11.

not consider the concept of being as inherently idolatrous. With its potential for determinateness, being may be profitably utilized, once it has been reinterpreted in order to accommodate the gospel.[60] Now, what the gospel exhibits are "three identities of one being" (I:106). These, as ought to be evident from Jenson's rejection of "sheer being" as an underlying identity-less *ousia*, are not to be understood in a modalist sense, but rather in terms of a dramatic movement from a point of origin to a goal. Accordingly, Jenson defines a divine identity as "a *persona dramatis dei* who can be repeatedly picked out by a name or identifying description or by pronouns, always by relation to the other two" (I:106). What this means is that the Trinity is not an identity: "the triune God is always identified by reference to one or several of the three identities" (I:119). This is not to say, however, that the Trinity could not be regarded as a complex personality—after all, there is only one God. To express this interpenetrating oneness of the triune *personae*, Jenson appeals to contemporary construals of personhood as self-transcending, social openness. "God is not personal in that he is triunely self-sufficient; he is personal in that he triunely opens himself" (I:124). In sum, as Trinity God remains his own unsearchable ground, exhibiting self-sameness of being and a coherence of action, that is, a self-consistent personal history, but at the same time this self-consistent personal history can be interpreted determinately and specifically only through its *dramatis personae*.

Let us look further at how Jenson understands this perichoretic personality of God. In fact, it is from Hans Urs von Balthasar that Jenson borrows the idea of dramatic coherence as the foundation of God's triuneness.[61] What he means by it is that God's self-identity is, like his personhood, an openness, because it is necessarily established from the end, from its outcome. "The biblical God is not eternally himself in that he persistently instantiates a beginning in which he already is all he ever will be; he is eternally himself in that he unrestrictedly anticipates an end in which he will be all he ever could be" (I:66). As a dramatically coherent movement, God's being is, therefore, characterized by his own space and his own time.[62] In this space and time, the *personae dramatis*, as self-transcendent, social agents, keep on communicating, and so are constituted as persons. For Jenson being is conversation;[63] the Trinity is

[60] Jenson I:212.
[61] Jenson I:55.
[62] Cf. Jenson I:95–96; II:45–46.
[63] Jenson II:49.

conversation.[64] Language, however, is not merely a neutral exchange of some information. Rather, language consists of words that are themselves events and so makes possible both the recognition, and thus constitution, of others as persons, as well as the dramatic movement itself.[65]

Now, in that God's being is conversation, it means that others can also be invited to take part in it. The existence of the world, therefore, presupposes God's triunity. According to Jenson, "for God to create is for him to *make accommodation* in his triune life for other persons and things than the three whose mutual life he is. In himself, he *opens room*, and that act is the event of creation" (II:25). Creation happens through speech, because it is anticipated by the word of inner command in God.[66] And so, "to be, as a creature, is to be mentioned in the triune moral conversation, as something other than those who conduct it" (II:35). Briefly put, "there is other reality than God because he speaks" (II:6); he speaks already within himself and, more importantly, speaks from what is and will be the common divine-human future. Given, therefore, God's nature, it is no surprise that God creates not a thing but history (II:14, 47)—a reality that is temporal and spatial. This construal of creation as a divine making room for truly other conversation partners thus raises questions of language and being in general. Having discussed the being of God, we now move on to Jenson's view of the creatures' capacity for participating in and expressing that being.

Univocity through God's Address

We have already noted that God's being is not "sheer being" but rather dramatic conversation that allows for other partners. Jenson explains this further in a trinitarian fashion: "the Son mediates the Father's originating and the Spirit's liberating, thereby to *hold open* the creatures' space in

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[64] "The trinity is . . . a conversation . . . that can never collapse into dialogue and monologue, because the three who make its poles *are* the conversation." Jenson II:26.

[65] Cf. Jenson I:171. Louis-Marie Chauvet's treatment of the "symbolic" aspect of language may be helpful in understanding the implications of this conversational emphasis. The "efficacy of speech" makes it a vehicle of recognition, in that what is communicated is very often secondary to the fact that in communication one recognizes one's interlocutor as a subject, a conversation partner. The gratuitousness of this conversational recognition and the concomitant closeness are at the same time prevented from being overwhelming by a gracious difference in which recognition of genuine otherness can take place. So used, language assigns positions; it maintains difference in nearness. See *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), especially 110–125.

[66] Cf. Jenson II:8.

being" (II:27). Creation is God's self-communication (II:7), and so the communication of God's being. Thus, in that, room is made by God in himself for others. Humans not only are participants in being; more than that, "creaturely being . . . answers to the simple occurrence of the triune being" (II:38). The implications of this can hardly be overstated. When God says, "Let there be . . . " (Genesis 1),

> whatever God means by 'be' is exactly what it means for a creature to be; in deed the utterance 'Let there be . . .' is itself the positive relation of creature to Creator, is itself the comparability of the fact that God is and that others than God are. Therefore insofar as 'being' says something *about* God or creatures, 'being' must after all be univocal rather than analogues. (II:38)

This may look like a willful plunge into the ambiguity of the *analogia entis* on Jenson's part. However, nothing is farther from the truth. His construal of the being of God and humans as univocal is only an application of the principle that God does not traffic in fiction. As such, it need not mean that the difference between creator and creature has been obscured or obliterated.

Jenson, in seeing creation as originated by God's speech and, consequently, in regarding being as univocal, is able to maintain the difference between God and humans by introducing a disparity on the level of language. In creation God speaks the world into being and then addresses the creature. To begin with, Jenson's exposition challenges Barth's claim that human words can only correspond to and agree with the being of God but are never on a par with that being, since, as Barth fears, that would annul the deity of God or the manhood of man. On the contrary, as one and the same language, human and divine words have the same meaning. Then, however, having stated the sameness of divine and human language, Jenson returns to his earlier point that language does not merely communicate. When God speaks humans into being and then addresses them, his words have the character of a "personal speech of commission" conversation (II:15–16). Thus, divine language is performative and commanding speech *par excellence*. God's words are word-events. Human language can likewise be performative, even commanding, but in a different way:

> When we say "God is" . . . we acknowledge our entire dependence on a primary cause and reason of our being. . . . When God says, "God is" . . . in the infinite perichoresis of the triune life, he declares himself both as the one who is sufficient reason for his own being and as the one who has that reason. Or again, when we say, "Creatures are," we give thanks,

but when God says, "Creatures are," he creates. It is such propositions that state the incomparability between the fact that God is and the fact that we are. (II:38)

Hence the disparity enters in at the illocutionary level, rather than the general locutionary one, namely, not in terms of what is meant by certain words, but in terms of what is done (event) with those words. Note again the moral dimension that such conversational address and recognition create.

In all, there is thus an actual distance between God and humans. It is "not merely because of the limitations of our finitude that we inevitably imagine God as 'beyond' or 'above' us, using what we are likely misleadingly to call 'metaphors' or 'mere' pictures; it is simply the reverse of the fact that we are beyond for God" (II:47). Yet it is not the distance of the *analogia entis*, arbitrarily established for its own sake or by us for God's sake. Nor is it the ontological and epistemological distance necessitated by God's hiddenness for the sake of his lordship. Rather, it is a distance of address in which performative communication between God and humans is truly possible. This distance is thus true nearness: the presence of God with his people, as well as the presence of God's people in his history.

Like Barth, Jenson is critical of the *analogia entis*. It is not only rooted in Greek thought, which posits the world's being as somewhat divine (I:209; cf. II:47), but is also based on the neoplatonic principle that "[e]very agent produces effects that are similar to itself in that respect in which it acts as agent" (II:36). The fact of the analogousness, let alone univocality, of human being to God's being can never form the premise of human thinking about God. Only the actuality of God's history in the world, recognized for what it is, can be this premise. That human thinking and human language, in and of themselves, will prove futile seems to be guaranteed by the fact that without God addressing humans in Christ they are bent on idolatrous self-possession. In this they undermine their self-transcending, social personhood, and with it their own speech, which, as originally divine, thrives only in mutual conversational acknowledgement. By contrast, "if we exist because we are addressed by God and if we have our specific identity as those who respond to God, then we do not possess ourselves" (II:63); we are thus free to respond and so to be ourselves: persons, by God's grace his conversational partners. Freedom becomes our share, because as believers we have our lives hidden in the freedom of God's Spirit, who, nonetheless, is the guarantee of a good ending to our

story.[67] This is reminiscent of Barth's principle of "looking back from God's revelation." Where Jenson appears to differ from Barth, however, is that in Barth it is not only sinfulness, displaced self-deception, that prevents humans from knowing God from the fact that they exist; it is their very creatureliness that stands in the way of such knowledge.[68] In contrast, Jenson's views seem to be a cautious affirmation of a natural theology that, however, remains only a possibility cut short entirely by the impossible possibility of sin. Now, because it makes no sense for us to deal with an "otherwise" in God, this possibility appears to be likewise undercut by the very being of God. Consider that for Jenson creation and redemption are parts of one and the same story of God's speech reaching out beyond himself. Since God is who he is in the openness of his own future, in the conclusion of his eternal history he can be known only from the message of the eschaton. Moreover, the identification of the eschaton takes place only through the narrative of Jesus,[69] and never in the unsearchableness of the Father, as if the Father were without the Son. Apart from Christ there is no knowledge of God.

In conclusion, Jenson espouses a stronger view of God's actuality in contrast to Barth, which determines God's identity through the history of Israel, Christ, and the church. God's being is, for Jenson, constituted and revealed in its very identity, in a more specific kind of becoming, namely, a thorough-goingly trinitarian movement of God's revelatory hiddenness. In this trinitarian movement, God's being emerges as a history and conversation which makes directly possible other histories and other conversation partners. Creation is thus taken to share univocally in God's being and language. This, according to Jenson, is not the annulment of God's divinity and the creatureliness of creation, so feared by Barth, because conversation itself implies not only distance, and so makes incomparably concrete the notions of both distance and nearness, but also different modes of language use. Thus God emerges as God without the necessity to appeal to his ontological and epistemological hiddenness to assure the sovereignty of his lordship.

III. Conclusion

This study had as its goal the presentation of an alternative to the way much of contemporary theology conceives of, and attempts to avoid,

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[67] Cf. Jenson, "The Hidden and Triune God," 11–12.

[68] Barth describes man as "doubly hidden . . . (by our creatureliness and our sin)." *CD* II/1, 229.

[69] Cf. Jenson I:170.

idolatry. In these attempts, it shies away from such concepts as being and even from thinking and speaking of God, for fear of imposing an illicit constraint on God. Inconsistently, in this speculative exercise, it cannot avoid thinking of God and speaking of him. It thus lapses in its own way into use of the analogy of being. It thinks God from the premise of human fear of idolatry, and then, in an attempt to avoid the consequences, it removes him to the end of the spectrum of human thought, and, as it seems to believe, even beyond. The alternative that this paper took up was found in the theologies of Karl Barth and Robert W. Jenson, both of whom place a strong emphasis on the actuality of God's self-disclosure and the corresponding engendering of faith which must take place in those that seek to speak and think God aright, if God is not only to be God, but also *their* God, and only so *God*. I have demonstrated that whereas Barth seeks to give expression to God's Godhood by asserting his sovereign lordship over all real and potential sources of idolatry, such as being, knowledge, and language, Jenson subsumes all those under a dramatically dynamic doctrine of God's triunity. In so doing, the latter theologian establishes a knowability of God, based on the reliability of his revelation in determinate distance-nearness. Both Barth and Jenson are at pains to let God be God, but, whereas Barth seems to be more focused on letting God be *God*, Jenson, through ironic jibes at contemporary theology, simply lets *God* be God.

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The Rich Monotheism of Isaiah as Christological Resource

Dean O. Wenthe

The canonical corpus of the prophet Isaiah is remarkable for many reasons. One of the most notable aspects of this prophetic witness is its unqualified critique of any alternative claim to divine status. What makes this claim so expansive is that it is embedded in the larger Torah narrative that has the entire world as its landscape. Isaiah, as well as the entire Old Testament, stands as an unequivocal challenge to any hint of implied or explicit pluralism. The pluralism of the twenty-first century makes Isaiah's message particularly applicable and poignant. This study will demonstrate that it was the wider prophetic narrative of Isaiah that was foundational for early confessions of Christ's identity and work, not only isolated prophecies that are explicitly cited in the New Testament.[1]

I. The One God of Isaiah

Isaiah stands out in the canonical collection as the voice with rigorous and timeless clarity on the uniqueness of the one God of Israel. In a series of rhetorical questions, the prophet distinguishes and delineates the character of Yahweh as qualitatively different from any other claimant. In chapter 40, the question is repeatedly posed in a manner that requires the answer, "No one . . . absolutely no one." The beauty of Isaiah's own words—his elegant and precisely framed rhetoric—cannot be surpassed. He proclaimed:

> Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed Him as his counselor? (Isa 40:12–13)

> To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare Him to? As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. A man too poor to present

[1] For a recent study of the use of Isaiah within the New Testament, see Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken, eds., *Isaiah in the New Testament* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2005).

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such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple. (Isa 40:18–20)

In chapter 44, the prophet brackets his critique of every idol with majestic claims for the true God's character and actions toward his people. Isaiah provides the following creedal description of God:

This is what the Lord says—Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: "I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no god. Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come—yes, let him foretell what will come. Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one." (Isa 44:6–8)

In this passage, God's character as creator, controller of history, and covenant initiator is exhibited as distinctive and exclusive. The people, if their eyes perceive rightly, are witnesses to these truths embedded in the personal agency of the true God.

This confession frames one of the most incisive and extensive critiques of idolatry in any literature. The prophet uses several literary devices—from declaratory statements, to rhetorical questions, to satire. It is worthy of a fresh reading:

All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant, to their own shame. Who shapes a god and casts an idol, which can profit him nothing? He and his kind will be put to shame; craftsmen are nothing but men. Let them all come together and take their stand; they will be brought down to terror and infamy. The blacksmith takes a tool and works with it in the coals; he shapes an idol with hammers, he forges it with the might of his arm. He gets hungry and loses his strength; he drinks no water and grows faint. The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine. He cut down cedars, or perhaps took a cypress or oak. He let it grow among the trees of the forest, or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow. It is man's fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms

himself and says, "Ah! I am warm; I see the fire." From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, "Save me; you are my god." They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand. No one stops to think, no one has the knowledge or understanding to say, "Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals, I roasted meat and I ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?" He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, "Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?" (Isa 44:9–20)

The other bookend for this inclusion is a striking contrast to the emptiness and futility of idolatry. Isaiah invites his audience to remember:

Remember these things, O Jacob, for you are my servant, O Israel. I have made you, you are my servant; O Israel, I will not forget you. I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you. Sing for joy, O heavens, for the Lord has done this; shout aloud, O earth beneath. Burst into song, you mountains, you forests and all your trees, for the Lord has redeemed Jacob, he displays his glory in Israel. This is what the Lord says—Your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the Lord, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself. (Isa 44:21–24)

Here is commentary that expounds the basic creedal statement: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod 20:2–3).

Not only does the rich Torah tapestry provide Isaiah with an exposition of God's creative role, it also exhibits how the nations are utterly at his disposal to move about as he wishes. So, this chapter concludes with the specific prophecy of Cyrus as the instrument that God would call upon to restore his people to Zion, to Jerusalem, to city, and to temple:

[I am the Lord] . . . who carries out the words of his servants and fulfills the predictions of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, "It shall be inhabited," of the towns of Judah, "They shall be built," and of their ruins, "I will restore them," who says to the watery deep, "Be dry, and I will dry up your streams," who says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please"; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid." (Isa 44:26–28)

This text is a definitive articulation of the solitary nature of the Godhead. There is not only no competition—there is no entity that inhabits the same

category. Here the Torah story is expounded in greater fullness. Moses, contrary to the fashionable view in some circles that he was at best a henotheist, was a monotheist. M. W. Chavalas rightly states:

> Nowhere does the Pentateuch imply that the 'gods' have fundamentally the same nature as Yahweh. Thus Moses could have penned a statement such as Exodus 15:11 'Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?' and still have been a true monotheist. The prohibition of worship of other gods and of divine images in Israel appears to be unique in the ancient Near East.[2]

The inherited critical orthodoxy that such strict monotheism could not have existed in the second millennium BC cannot survive cross-examination. The eminent Egyptologist Kenneth A. Kitchen has recently written: "That a monotheistic belief might be found as early as the fourteenth/thirteenth centuries is no problem whatsoever. Akhenaten of Egypt instituted precisely such a religion during circa 1350–1340, promoting worship of the sun god as Aten to the exclusion of all other deities in Egypt."[3]

Against such an inclusive claim, therefore, it is noteworthy and striking that Isaiah's corpus describes this solitary God not as an undifferentiated monad, but as a solitary God whose character is rich and multifaceted. In these sixty-six chapters the character of God takes on dimensions of personality and community that are nonetheless one. This dense portrait of the God who stands utterly alone and without peer is the very heart of God's revelation. It is at the same time mysterious and beautiful. It requires a certain humility to be read rightly; no single attribute and action can be weighted at the expense of the others. One is placed in the position of simply receiving and beholding the wonder of such an exclusive and simultaneously profound God.

In such a context, Isaiah's portrait of God provides content for a truly textual Christology. Or, perhaps a more appropriate analogy would view the prophet as weaving a rich tapestry that displays the contours of God's work in such a way that the work of God, the presence of the God's Spirit, and the face of Christ can all be distinguished.

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[2] M. W. Chavalas, "Moses," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 576.

[3] Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 330–331. For a sustained critique of the "no monotheism until the exile dogma," see W. H. C. Propp, *Ugarit-Forschungen* 31 (1999/2000): 537–575.

II. Reading Christology from Isaiah

The abiding critique that Christians, following the "mistaken" lead of the evangelists and other New Testament writers, are simply reading these contours back into the texts must now be cross-examined. As an example, consider the Qumran texts. These texts, like the New Testament apostles, expound Isaiah as a resource for future deliverance and a future deliverer. For example, the pesher on Isaiah (4QpIsa) understands Isaiah 11:1–5 to speak of a Davidic Messiah. John Collins summarizes his study of this text: "The pesher clearly envisages a role for the Davidic messiah in the final battle against the Kittim."[4] More broadly, James VanderKam and Peter Flint have recently written: "Returning to our survey of messianism in the scrolls, as several of the passages we have surveyed indicate, the covenanters expected a war in the future and that the Davidic Messiah would lead the forces of good to victory and execute the leader of the armies of evil."[5]

There is, however, a more decisive point to make about the propriety of viewing Isaiah as a rich tapestry where the face of Christ is clearly and rightly displayed. In Luke 24, the resurrected Lord expounds for the Emmaus disciples and for the apostles all the things concerning himself:

> He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:25–27)

> He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. (Luke 24:44–45)

Thus, the Old Testament is the Lord's catechetical choice in teaching the disciples about himself, even after the resurrection. Walter Moberly keenly observes about these passages: "This risen Jesus offers no new visions from heaven or mysteries from beyond the grave but instead focuses on the

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[4] John Joseph Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 57.

[5] James C. VanderKam and Peter W. Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 272. For an interesting collection of essays, see also *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

patient exposition of Israel's Scripture. The crucial truth lies there, not in some hidden heavenly revelation."[6] Thus the apostolic writers draw on dominical instruction for their exposition. R. T. France has aptly captured the pivotal place of Jesus in providing the apostles' their hermeneutical lens: "The school in which the writers of the early church learned to use the Old Testament was that of Jesus."[7]

Over against the Jesus' Seminar's fanciful interpretation of a personality created by their hypothetical Q-source and combined with the second-century *Gospel of Thomas*, sober New Testament exegetes have recognized the historical Jesus as the source of the apostolic vision and construal of texts like Isaiah. The cautious, but clear, common-sense language of the Cambridge scholar C. F. D. Moule is appropriate:

> A more satisfactory approach, perhaps, is to rely on the total impression gained, cumulatively, by putting side by side the various portraits that are presented by the traditions of Jesus in his various activities: teaching, healing, disputing, training his disciples, and so forth. Without attempting any more than a rough-and-ready sifting, leading to the rejection of only the most obviously late accretions in each category, the general effect of these several more or less impressionistic portraits is to convey a total conception of a personality striking, original, baffling, yet illuminating. And it may be argued that it is difficult to account for this except by postulating an actual person of such a character.[8]

The initial point is the integration and coherence of Isaiah's tapestry. While proof-texting has its utility, it has robbed many a reader of pleasure and theological fulfillment. Put rather simply, Isaiah's corpus is not a clothesline on which he has hung a series of discrete Messianic prophecies. Just as removing all the blue threads from a tapestry does not reflect how that color is used in the whole pattern, so to isolate several texts is to present their claims partially and inadequately. No, Isaiah's program of restoration is a beautifully woven cloth that requires the reader to keep in view the whole pattern.

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[6] R. W. L. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 51.

[7] R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1971), 225.

[8] C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 156.

III. The Messiah and the Messianic Age in Isaiah

Thus, the pattern of Isaiah's tapestry expounds the coming Christ and his deliverance, and this pattern deserves a fresh consideration. It entails the whole of the sixty-six chapters, though it is only possible to place a portion of it here in the foreground. Having mapped this pattern, it will then be helpful to turn to how Jesus and the apostles cite passages that by their very nature assume and expound the larger message of the prophet.

The portion of Isaiah's tapestry considered here is that of the Messiah and the Messianic age. Consider this pattern in these texts and textual summaries:

The Messiah

4:2 "In that day the Branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel."

7:14 "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

9:6, 7 "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this."

11:1, 2 "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord."

42:1–4 God upholds his servant and bestows his Spirit upon him.

49:1–13 The servant is the "ideal" Israel who reaches out and gathers in faithful Israel.

50:4–9 The servant will do God's will faithfully.

52:13–53:12 The servant will vicariously atone for the sins of the people and cause them to be righteous.

The Messianic Age

2:1–5 The Temple, Zion, and Jerusalem are exalted. God will teach many peoples in a peaceful epoch. The house of Jacob will walk in the light of the Lord.

4:3–6 The people will be holy. God will dwell in Mount Zion as he dwelt in the tabernacle. Zion will be a refuge for the faithful.

9:1–7 It shall be an epoch of peace, joy, justice, and righteousness.

11:1–11 It shall be an epoch of peace, righteousness, and justice. Creation is restored. The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord.

25:1–9 There will be an eschatological banquet on Zion for many. Death will be no more. Tears will be wiped away.

35:1–10 The blind will see; the lame will walk; and the deaf will hear. The desert will be watered and a highway will run through it.

40:1–8 The glory of the Lord will be revealed to all humanity. God's Torah will give life. An epoch described by wonderfully glad tidings.

42:1–7 An epoch of faithfulness and justice will come. The blind will see. Captives will be released. Nations will be included.

49:1–13 God's glory will shine and salvation will arrive. The Holy One of Israel is there. There will be no hunger and no thirst. There will be a highway in the desert.

50:4–9 The servant will display and do God's will in the face of opposition.

52:13–53:12 Righteousness will characterize the people through the agency of the servant.

56:1–12 Temple and Sabbath will be restored and available to all.

60:1–62:12 Zion will be exalted. God's glory and light will be displayed.

65:17–25 A restoration of creation: new heavens, new earth, and peace.

66:12–23 It shall be an epoch of peace due to God's comforting presence. God's glory will be displayed.

These two patterns of the Messiah and the Messianic age are woven together with a typology of judgment and destruction for those who have rejected the character and exclusive claim of Yahweh as the only true God. The Torah story provides the motifs, rationales, and vocabulary for both

restoration and judgment. The best commentators from the church fathers to the present have recognized this wonderful coherence and integration of Isaiah's message.[9] A classic Lutheran commentary, in many respects still the best available, is that of August Pieper. He writes:

> Isaiah stands on that peak of the development of the kingdom of God in the Old Testament from which he discerns clearly that the Sinaitic pedagogy of the Lord has ended in the complete apostasy of His chosen people, 1:2; 5:2ff., etc., and that any further application of this kind of rearing by the Law is useless, 1:5. There is no longer any possibility of change for the better that might lead to salvation (1:16ff). Only destruction is now in order (1:24 ff.). The house of Jacob has been rejected (2:6ff; 5:6ff., etc.). Therefore a wholly different Royal Child must appear and establish a new kingdom—He who is Wonderful, Counselor, Power, Hero, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, who will prepare and establish His kingdom with a judgment and a righteousness of another kind.[10]

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[9] For patristic exposition, see Steven A. McKinion, *Isaiah 1–39*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament 10 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004). McKinion summarizes: "The most important theme in the early Christian interpretation of Isaiah is messianic announcement. The prophecy of Isaiah occupied a central position in the early Christian proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah." *Isaiah 1–39*, xx.

[10] August Pieper, *Isaiah II: An Exposition of Isaiah 40–66*, trans. Erwin E. Kowalke (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979), 31. More recent commentaries that recognize and develop the integrated character of Isaiah's prophetic corpus are: J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993); John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), and *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998). A helpful summary of the Messiah's work that incorporates the multiple dimensions of Isaiah's description is that of Gerard van Groningen: "The Messianic message, or better said, Yahweh's revelation concerning the Messiah, contains the following elements. First, the One of whom Isaiah prophesies is the ministering Agent of Yahweh serving in place of the covenant people who have failed to carry out their covenant responsibilities. . . . Second, the ministering Messiah is the Mediator of the covenant. Promised as a covenant seed and Agent he mediates between Yahweh the Husband and Judah the unfaithful bride. In fact, he reconciles them. He restores, renews, enriches, and assures everlasting continuity of this covenantal relationship. Third, the ministering Messiah mediates for the nations as well. He is a substitute witness to them and he becomes the focal point to which they are drawn. Fourth, the ministering Messiah is able to carry out all his duties because he is anointed by Yahweh through the bestowal of the Spirit upon him. Fifth, the messianic concept in its narrower view is proclaimed. The ministering Messiah is a person of royal ancestry, a leader, and commander. In other words, he functions as a royal Shepherd. Sixth, the threefold office

From the patristic period to the present, this holistic interpretation of Isaiah most accurately exhibits the rich Christology within the unity of the one God. More than that, this manner of exegesis has its origin in the Lord and his apostles. They did not quote select texts, as though they were isolated punctiliar promises, but rather these texts served as shorthand for the whole Isaianic program of redemption and restoration. They selected and quoted material with the assumption that the hearer would know the larger plot and schema in which the specific text was embedded. A rough parallel might be the manner in which John 3:16 is sometimes used as a summary of the entire Scriptures. That single text can hardly be understood aright without a significant awareness of what it means in the framework of John's Gospel, and indeed, within the witness of Scripture as a whole.

IV. Isaiah in Early Christology

The contours of the apostolic use of Isaiah shall be considered next. In turning to the pages of Matthew's Gospel, what does one find? What is striking is the manner in which Isaiah, featured so prominently by Matthew among the prophets whom he cites, provides pivotal content to his Christology. In Matthew's birth narrative, 1:22–23, Isaiah 7:14 is appealed to: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' which means, 'God with us.'" Matthew is communicating not simply this text, but the whole witness of the so-called "Book of Immanuel," that is, Isaiah 7–12. Another use of this section of Isaiah supports such a suggestion. In Matthew 4, Isaiah 9:1–2 is used to expound on Jesus' movement: "Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: 'Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned'" (Matt 4:13–16).

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included in the messianic concept is proclaimed. As king, priest, and prophet he comes and labors on behalf of the covenant people and the nations. Seventh, the wider view of the messianic concept is described by the work the ministering Mediator performs. He seals the sure mercies promised to David; he functions as Yahweh's arm bringing deliverance and restoration, establishing justice and righteousness, and executing the vengeance of Yahweh as Judge. . . . Eighth, the ministering Messiah assures that Yahweh's eschatological program will become a reality." *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 2:663–664.

Again, there is a fascinating use of Isaiah 53:4 in Matthew 8:16-17: "When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.'" It is noteworthy that the apostle understands Jesus as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 early in his ministry, as he bears the suffering and reverses the brokenness of a fallen creation.[11]

One more Matthean example will show how the apostle has Isaiah's whole program of redemption and restoration in view. In Matthew 11:1-6 there is a striking usage of Isaiah 35:5-6 and Isaiah 61:1. John the Baptist is in prison and requires proof that Jesus is "he who is to come." In response, Jesus points to his words and deeds as the fulfillment of these two prophecies: the one a prediction of eschatological blessing (Isaiah 35), and the other a specifically Messianic prediction (Isaiah 61). Isaiah 61:1 is employed in a deliberate statement of Jesus' status and mission. God's time of salvation has come, and Jesus is the one anointed to be the bringer of that salvation. As R. T. France accurately states:

> Isaiah 61:1-3 describes a figure closely similar to the Servant as depicted in Isaiah 42:1-7: both are endued with the Spirit of Yahweh, open blind eyes, and bring prisoners out of darkness. Both are, in other words, sent and equipped by Yahweh to deliver the oppressed and wretched, and both are characterized by their gentleness. . . . If this is not the Servant, it is a Messianic figure of similar character and status. That it was so regarded in the time of Jesus is indicated by Matthew 11:5, where Jesus' use of the passage depends on the recognition by John the Baptist that it describes 'him who is to come'; that Jesus himself so interpreted it we shall see from his use of it.[12]

Turning to the Gospel of Mark, several texts exhibit the foundational role of Isaiah in describing the work of the Messiah. Mark 10:45 reads: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Again, R. T. France aptly describes the clarity of this use of Isaiah 53:

> The fact that the allusion occurs almost incidentally, as an illustration of the true nature of greatness, far from indicating that the redemptive role

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[11] For additional comments, see Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher, eds., *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004).

[12] France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 132-133.

> of the Servant was not in mind (for it is specifically the redemptive aspects of Isaiah 53 to which Jesus alludes), is in fact evidence of how deeply His assumption of that role had penetrated into Jesus' thinking, so that it emerges even in an incidental illustration. 'It is as if Jesus said, "The Son of Man came to fulfil the task of the *ebed Yahweh*.'"[13]

In Mark's account of the Last Supper we read: "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many" (Mark 14:24; see also Matt 26:28 and Luke 22:20). Although Exodus 24:8 is the background for "the blood of the covenant" language in the words of institution, Isaiah 53 is the probable source for Jesus' atonement language, "poured out for many"; "because he [the servant] *poured out* his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sins of *many*" (Isa 53:12). As R.T. France states:

> His work is to re-establish the broken covenant, but this can be done only by fulfilling the role of the Servant in His vicarious death. To make this point Jesus chooses words from Isaiah 53 which are as deeply imbued as any with the redemptive significance of that death, in that they highlight its vicarious nature. Thus here, if anywhere, we have a deliberate theological explanation by Jesus of the necessity for his death, and it is not only drawn from Isaiah 53, but specifically refers to the vicarious and redemptive suffering which is the central theme of that chapter.[14]

In the Gospel according to Saint Luke, both the beginning of Jesus' ministry and its end are described with pivotal and defining texts from Isaiah. We read at the inception of Jesus ministry:

> Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled upon the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him,

[13] France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 121.

[14] France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 123.

and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:14–21)

One can hardly imagine a more pregnant moment of interpretation. Here Jesus again refracts his appearance through the lens of the prophetic text in such a way as to say that the whole program of reversal and restoration is now present in him. Consider this comment by I. Howard Marshall: "Above all, the fulfillment of Scripture is to be found in the person of Jesus himself, who has been anointed with the Spirit and appears as the eschatological prophet—a figure who is to be identified with the Messiah and the Servant of Yahweh. It is through his word that forgiveness comes to men."[15]

At the very end of Jesus' life, Luke narrates the following: "He said to them, 'But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. It is written: "And he was numbered with the transgressors"; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment'" (Luke 22:36–37).[16] R. T. France offers a helpful comment:

> That Jesus on the eve of his death should quote from Isaiah 53 at all is surely significant, and indicates that he saw his death in the light of that chapter; that he should quote the phrase 'was numbered with the transgressors', far from indicating that vicarious suffering was absent from his mind, shows that he was preoccupied with the fact that he, who least deserved it, was to be punished as a wrong-doer.[17]

V. Conclusion

As asserted earlier, a holistic interpretation of Isaiah most accurately exhibits the rich Christology of this book within its powerful testimony to the unity of the one God. Even though specific passages are at times quoted or echoed in the New Testament, it is the wider prophetic testimony to redemption and restoration in Isaiah that forms the basis of this usage. In describing how the apostolic writers used Isaiah for

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[15] I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978), 178.

[16] I. Howard Marshall significantly notes, "The citation is from Is. 53:12 (LXX: καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀνόμοις ἐλογίσθη (cf. 1 Clem. 21:13); Luke's version shows two differences from the LXX (use of μετά instead ἐν; omission of the article). These differences bring the quotation nearer to the MT (J. Jermias, TDNT V, 707 n. 404), and suggest that it is drawn from pre-Lucan tradition." *The Gospel of Luke*, 826.

[17] France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 115–116.

expressing Christology, Richard Bauckham aptly concludes: "They do so carefully, deliberately, consistently and comprehensively by including Jesus in precisely those characteristics which for Second Temple Judaism distinguished the One God as unique . . . Jesus, the New Testament writers are saying, belongs inherently to *who God is*."[18]

[18] Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 45; emphasis original.

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The Gospel in Philemon

John G. Nordling

Many appreciate the brevity and apparent simplicity of Philemon, but what is Paul's shortest letter *about*? Although the letter does not overtly revisit the history of Christ's ministry on earth or expound explicitly upon such cardinal doctrines of the faith as Christology or Soteriology, Philemon *is really about the gospel.*[1] Nevertheless, Christ is amply present in this letter,[2] and a sense of how the gospel permeates—and, indeed, gushes forth from—this shortest letter in the Pauline corpus shall prevent one from reading Philemon ethically or, at best, as a means of better understanding mere "background matters."[3] Paul's specific repayment of Onesimus' debt (Phlm 18–19a) was founded upon and intentionally reflects the payment for all sin which the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished for the world (for example, Isa 53:11; Matt 1:21; Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2). That the story of Jesus is at the heart of all Paul's theologizing has been recognized most forcefully by Ben Witherington III[4]; another way of

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[1] By the term "gospel" in this paper I mean the gospel in its strict sense, for example, "[T]he Gospel, strictly speaking, is the kind of doctrine that teaches what a man who has not kept the law and is condemned by it should believe, namely, that Christ has satisfied and paid for all guilt and without man's merit has obtained and won for him forgiveness of sins, the 'righteousness that avails before God' [Rom. 1:17; 2 Cor. 5:21], and eternal life." FC Ep V, 5. References to the *Book of Concord* are from Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 478. For other definitions of the gospel in its strict sense, see Ap IV, 5; SA IV; FC SD V, 6.

[2] The title "Christ" occurs eight times in 25 verses: "Christ Jesus" (Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, 1, 9); "Lord Jesus Christ" (κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, 3, 25); "in Christ" (εἰς Χριστόν, 6); "in Christ" (ἐν Χριστῷ, 8, 20); and "in Christ Jesus" (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, 23).

[3] With all due respect to my own commentary, where I assert that one of the main reasons for studying Philemon is "to understand better the type of background matters that surely attended each Pauline epistle in its original situation." John G. Nordling, *Philemon*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), xvi.

[4] For example, "For Paul, Christ is the central and most crucial character in the human drama, and everything Paul says about all other aspects of the Story is colored and affected by this conviction. This becomes obvious even in unexpected ways and places. For instance, 1 Cor. 10:4 reveals not only that Paul reads the story of Israel in the light of his Christian faith but also that he believes Christ was already part of that story even during the Exodus-Sinai events. Indeed, Paul believes the one he calls Christ was

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putting the matter is to suggest that what is *contingent* about Paul's letter to Philemon—namely, the likely flight of Onesimus and the resulting debt which Paul promises to pay carte blanche—is intimately connected also to Paul's *coherent* understanding of the gospel, as prominent in Philemon as one finds anywhere else in Paul's writings.[5]

I. Paul's Promise to Make Amends

Not everyone accepts the interpretation that Onesimus stole from Philemon and ran away,[6] but making that assumption leads readers to appreciate one of the most brilliant facets of the gospel in Philemon: the idea that Paul himself assumed Onesimus' damages and paid them off. Here is all that Paul himself reveals about the matter, although his brief words must speak volumes: "[and] if he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account" (Phlm 18 RSV; εἰ δέ τι ἠδίκησέν σε ἤ ὀφείλει, τοῦτο ἐμοὶ ἐλλόγα). Notice, then, that Paul shifts Onesimus' infidelities to a conditional clause ("if . . ."), as though the main part of the sentence were reserved to mollify the master Philemon's pain and anger at what had been Onesimus' theft and flight. The word ἐλλόγα ("charge that!") constitutes the main verb in the sentence and so sets forth its main idea; what Paul intends to do in the imperative ἐλλόγα is direct Philemon's attention away from what must have been an all-engrossing attention to Onesimus' past crimes to the promise that Paul shall pay for everything, no matter what: "I, Paul, write with my own hand: 'I will repay'" (Phlm 19a; ἐγὼ Παῦλος ἔγραψα τῇ ἐμῇ χειρί, ἐγὼ ἀποτίσω). The implicit basis for such an assertion must rest with the atoning sacrifice of Christ, not simply with Paul's generosity. Elsewhere, indeed, Paul writes of Christ that he is

already present and active before the human story began, even active in the creation of the universe (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15-17). In Paul's view, one is always in danger of saying too little about Jesus Christ, not too much." *Paul's Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 3.

[5] For the understanding that so-called "coherence" and "contingency" dominate Paul's thinking, see Johan Christiaan Beker, *The Triumph of God: The Essence of Paul's Thought*, trans. Loren T. Stuckenbruck (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990). "By *coherence* I mean the unchanging components of Paul's gospel, which contain the fundamental convictions of his gospel . . . the term *contingency* denotes the changing, situational part of the gospel, that is, the diversity and particularity of sociological, economical, and psychological factors that confront Paul in his churches and in his missionary work and to which he had to respond." *The Triumph of God*, 15–16.

[6] For the extremely influential views of the scholar John Knox who in so many ways challenged the traditional interpretation of Philemon, see Nordling, *Philemon*, 9–19.

the "sacrifice of atonement [ἱλαστήριον]" (Rom 3:25 NIV), a passage with many instructive parallels.[7]

How could Paul have made such a promise to Philemon if he was a "prisoner" (δέσμιος, Phlm 1, 9) and so presumably impecunious? Some suggest that Paul engages here in a kind of "comic ploy" that strove to compel Philemon to take Onesimus back without recompense.[8] Most commentators, however, affirm that Paul pledged his own liability for damages Philemon sustained as a result of Onesimus' theft and flight.[9] In the admission that Onesimus had "wronged" (ἠδίκησεν, Phlm 18a) Philemon and "owed" him something (ὀφείλει, Phlm 18a), Paul alludes—albeit subtly—to Onesimus' damages which could have been substantial. The two verbs—ἀδικέω ("I wrong," cf. ἠδίκησεν in 18a) and ὀφείλω ("I owe," cf. ὀφείλει in 18a)—occur in ancient documents that designate the illegal activities of people who refuse to pay debts and so incur criminal prosecution. In one papyrus, a certain Attalus complains, "I am *being wronged*" (ἀδικούμαι) by Ptolemaios in the matter of a failed debt.[10] In another, a certain Demetrios takes legal action against several guarantors who *owe* (ὀφείλων) thousands of unpaid drachmas for olive oil and wine.[11]

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[7] For example, ἱλαστήριον ("atoning sacrifice"): Exod 25:17, 20, 21; 31:7; 35:12; 38:5, 8; Lev 16:13, 14, 15; Amos 9:1; Ezek 43:14 (twice), 17; ἐξιλάσασθαι ("to make atonement"): Exod 30:15, 16; Lev 1:4; 6:23; 8:15, 34; 14:21; 16:10, 17, 27; 23:28; Num 8:12; 15:28; 28:22, 30; 29:5, 11; 31:50; Zech 7:2; Ezek 45:18; Dan 9:24; ἱλάσῃ ("you will forgive"): Pss 24:11 (LXX); 64:4 (LXX).

[8] So argued by John Koenig, *Philippians, Philemon,* in *Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, 1 Thessalonians,* by Edgar Krentz, John Koenig, and Donald H. Juel, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 201.

[9] See Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon,* trans. William R. Poehlmann and Robert J. Karris, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 204–205; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians,* New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1984), 219–220; and N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon,* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1986), 188.

[10] Campbell Cowen Edgar et al., ed., [*Michigan Papyri:*] *Zenon Papyri in the University of Michigan Collection,* 19 vols., University of Michigan Studies, Humanistic Series 24 (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1931), 1:71,1; Philadelphia, 247–221 BC.

[11] J. G. Winter et al., ed., [*Michigan Papyri:*] *Papyri in the University of Michigan Collection: Miscellaneous Papyri,* 19 vols., University of Michigan Studies, Humanistic Series 40 (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1936), 3:173,7–8; third-century BC.

In a third, a certain Pyrrhos submits to an oath wherein he swears that he *owes* neither corn nor money: μὲ [μὴ] ὀφείλειν με σίτον (μ)ήτε ἀρ(γύ)ρι(ο)ν.[12]

The point is that Paul promises to pay Onesimus' damages completely, even as he apparently paid other sums of money in the course of his apostolic career.[13] Paul's usual habit consisted in his bearing the entire cost of the apostolic ministry himself by plying his tentmaking skills in whatever city his wide-ranging travels took him (for example, σκηνοποιοὶ in Corinth, Acts 18:3).[14] At times he tapped other sources of income, too, as when Epaphroditus revived Paul by bringing to the apostle ample gifts from Christians at Philippi (Phil 4:18). Perhaps the written promise in Philemon could indicate Paul's expectation that "the Lord would provide," just as he always had.[15] These parallel examples suggest, in any event, that Paul possibly had the means at his disposal to pay Onesimus' damages in full and so model for Philemon his famous self-sufficiency: "His pay was to receive no pay. His work was between him and God; he would not be paid for it."[16]

These standard explanations, however, still do not adequately account for what must constitute the *theological significance* of Paul's promise to assume Onesimus' damages. Paul would not have located himself so centrally in the repayment of Onesimus' debt were not his very person intended to serve Philemon and the congregation as a kind of blank check.[17] Not only was his written obligation (Phlm 19a) significant,[18] but so

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[12] [*Michigan Papyri:*] *Zenon Papyri* 1:58,13–15; Philadelphia, 248 BC. For more evidence of the type provided here and in the preceding two footnotes, see Peter Arzt-Grabner, *Philemon,* Papyrologische Kommentare zum Neuen Testament 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 237–238.

[13] For example, Christians in Jerusalem urged Paul to pay for the expenses of four men at the temple (Acts 21:23–24). Felix expected that Paul would pay him a substantial bribe (Acts 24:25–26). Paul lived in Rome in a rented house (Acts 28:30).

[14] See Todd D. Still, "Did Paul Loathe Manual Labor? Revisiting the Work of Ronald F. Hock on the Apostle's Tentmaking and Social Class," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125 (2006): 781–795.

[15] So Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians,* 220.

[16] P. W. Barnett, "Tentmaking," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters,* ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 927.

[17] The name (Παῦλος), the repeated and emphatic personal pronoun (ἐγώ . . . ἐγώ), and the first person singular verbs (ἔγραψα . . . ἀποτίσω) constitute a virtual incarnation of Paul himself in the text of the letter at this point. Elsewhere in Philemon Paul employs similar techniques, for example, Παῦλος δέσμιος, 1; τοιοῦτος ὢν ὡς Παῦλος πρεσβύτης, 9. However, in no other place—as it seems—does Paul as strikingly inject his personality into a letter (although for still other examples of this kind see 2 Cor 10:1; Gal 5:2; and 1

too was Paul's expectation that he would receive hospitality soon upon his forthcoming visit to Philemon's house (Phlm 22a). Suppose, then, that the two verses were intended by Paul to be connected: the purpose of Paul's visit alluded to in verse 22a was for the apostle to deliver a generous monetary gift to Philemon and his household to fulfill the binding pledge announced in verse 19a.[19] A temporary residence in Philemon's home could have impressed not only the recompense upon Philemon and the others, but also modeled for them—and, indeed, for all the world—how God works in Christian congregations according to the gospel. Luther, albeit in a non-related matter, provides the powerful insight that God's greatest gifts to sinners usually consist of a non-monetary type:

> If I had gone . . . and seen and heard a poor pastor baptizing and preaching, and if I had been assured: "This is the place; here God is speaking through the voice of the preacher who brings God's Word"—I would have said: "Well, I have been duped! I see only a pastor." We should like to have God speak to us in his majesty. But I advise you not to run hither and yon for this. . . . Christ says: "You do not know the gift" [Jn. 4:10]. We recognize neither the Word nor the Person of Christ, but we take offense at his humble and weak humanity. When God wants to speak and deal with us, he does not avail himself of an angel but of parents, of the pastor, or of my neighbor.[20]

Whenever Paul's residency occurred, then, the apostle would have presented himself to Philemon and the congregation as the type of "poor pastor" (to paraphrase Luther) who was content to proclaim nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 2:2), an activity that models well the

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Thess 2:18). Philemon 18–19a becomes, in effect, a promissory note wherein the dramatic elements of Paul's personality combine with the type of highly technical, legally binding language that would have obligated Paul to pay off Onesimus' debts in full. So Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 220.

[18] "With this 'receipt,' Philemon could have required damages of Paul in the courts." Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 483.

[19] It would have been analogous to the way Paul gathered a collection among the Gentile Christians in order to deliver an impressive gift "for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem" (Rom 15:26). So Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 110. For more on the Gentile offering, see Romans 15:25–28; 1 Corinthians 16:1–4; and 2 Corinthians 8:1–15.

[20] Martin Luther, "Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 1–4," in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 22:526–527. Hereafter cited as *LW*.

office of the holy ministry. Hock supposed that it would have been difficult to imagine Paul *not* bringing up the gospel as he engaged with fellow-workers, slaves, customers, and others who would have frequented the sort of leather-working shop with which Paul was familiar (see Acts 18:2–3).[21] In an even greater way, Paul's residency with Philemon (Phlm 22a) would have impressed his hosts with the incalculable wealth of Christ and the gospel by the actual repayment of the money Onesimus had squandered, by the contribution to Philemon's wealth which Paul's tentmaking skills afforded, and (certainly not least) by Paul's preaching of the gospel while resident with Philemon and his workers.

The apostle's crushing poverty, therefore, would make many rich in Christ[22] and more than cover all the debts incurred by Onesimus. This recompense from Paul would mimic—however imperfectly—the atoning sacrifice of Christ crucified, risen, and ascended, who in his death on the cross paid all debts to God.[23]

II. Paul Embodies Christ in Philemon

From the first Paul presents himself as "a prisoner of Christ Jesus" (Παῦλος δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, Phlm 1a). In verse 9 the same expression reappears, but in a greatly expanded form: "being such a one as *Paul*, an old man and now indeed also [νυνὶ δὲ καί] a *prisoner of Christ Jesus*" (τοιοῦτος ὢν ὡς Παῦλος πρεσβύτης, νυνὶ δὲ καὶ δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, Phlm 9b; emphasis added). Elsewhere Paul employs the phrase νυνὶ δέ to introduce the idea of striking reversal, often in passages where the gospel dramatically trumps the law, sin, and death.[24] Here, with the addition of an intensifying καί,[25] Paul applies to himself an even stronger form of the same formula of striking reversal, as if to say, "An *old man*, true, but now

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[21] Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 41. Others propose that Paul was a weaver who made tentcloth from *cilicium* (that is, goats' hair), and still others that Paul worked in canvas or linen. For the representative opinions, see Still, "Manual Labor," 781 nn. 2–4.

[22] Paul describes the ministry of himself with his coworkers (2 Cor 6:1–12) as "poor men [πτωχοί], yet making many rich [πολλοὺς δὲ πλουτίζοντες]" (2 Cor 6:10).

[23] For the atoning sacrifice to which Paul's promise to make amends in Philemon corresponds, see, for example, Exod 25:17; Lev 16:10, 15–17; Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17; 9:28; 1 John 2:2; 4:10.

[24] "*But now* [νυνὶ δέ] the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law . . ." (Rom 3:21 RSV); "*but now* [νυνὶ δέ] that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God . . ." (Rom 6:22 RSV); "*but in fact* [νυνὶ δέ] Christ has been raised from the dead . . ." (1 Cor 15:20 RSV). Added emphases. For the formula, see also Rom 7:6; 11:30; 1 Cor 13:13; Eph 2:13; Col 3:8.

[25] Paul adds καί to νυνὶ δέ in 2 Cor 8:11, and possibly also in Phlm 11.

also [νυνὶ δὲ καί] a *prisoner of Christ Jesus*!" Hidden in Paul's abject wretchedness and misery as a prisoner was the apostle who—as a projection of Christ himself—applied to Philemon and the others the actual repayment of Onesimus' debt with all that this meant for the situation at hand: "the apostle, so to speak, plays Christ to them [Philemon and Onesimus], his ministry of reconciliation mirroring that of Christ at every point (2 Cor. 5:17–21)."[26]

The designation "old man" (πρεσβύτης, Phlm 9) represents an additional part of the expansion and so justifies the understanding that—in this section of the letter, at least—*Paul represents, or even embodies, Christ.*[27] The term "old man" (πρεσβύτης) does not enable one to fix Paul's age with chronological exactitude and yet, since some of the ancient philosophers used πρεσβύτης to designate the sixth of a man's seven ages in life,[28] the word could suggest that Paul was in the neighborhood of forty-nine to fifty-six years old when he wrote the letter.[29] What seems especially significant about the word "old man" (πρεσβύτης) in Philemon is its marked similarity to the word "ambassador" (πρεσβευτής)[30]; association with the latter word may have bestowed on Paul's "old man" a kind of dignity.[31] The main point to see, then, is that the formal similarity between the two words results practically in the expansion, or even outright duality, of Paul's personality. Paul is more than just himself in Philemon; he also represents and shows forth Christ. The idea that in the Pauline persona

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[26] Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 179.

[27] See Wright, who describes the "paradoxical offices" of the apostle. *Colossians and Philemon*, 180–181.

[28] Pseudo-Hippocrates supposed that a "man" exists from twenty-eight until forty-nine years old, then is an "old man" (πρεσβύτης) until fifty-six years old. Cited in Philo *On the Creation of the World* 105–106.

[29] So Günther Bornkamm, "πρεσβύτης," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 6:683; Barth and Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon*, 321; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Letter to Philemon*, Anchor Bible 34C (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 105.

[30] "Before and after Paul's time the original difference between *presbytes* and *presbeutes* had begun to vanish or became neglected." Barth and Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon*, 323. Indeed, some of the manuscripts admit of either πρεσβύτης or πρεσβευτής in Philemon 9b (see the critical apparatus in NA[27]). Only an internal epsilon (-ε-) distinguishes the two words formally; so almost certainly πρεσβύτης and πρεσβευτής sounded the same, or were even indistinguishable, to native speakers of the Greek language.

[31] While the noun "ambassador" (πρεσβευτής) does not appear in the New Testament, Paul twice applies to himself the cognate verb πρεσβεύω ("to be an ambassador"): "so we are ambassadors [πρεσβεύομεν] for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Cor 5:20 RSV); ". . . for which I am an ambassador [πρεσβεύω] in chains" (Eph 6:20 RSV).

really two characters come together—both Paul and Christ—occurs elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, for example, "I have been crucified with Christ [Χριστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι]; nevertheless, I live [ζῶ δέ]; yet not I [οὐκέτι ἐγώ], but Christ lives in me [ζῇ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός]" (Gal 2:19–20).[32] Luther attempts to plumb the mystery that "in Christ" every Christian leads a kind of double life.

> Paul had said above: "I have died, etc." Here a malicious person could easily cavil and say: "What are you saying, Paul? Are you dead? Then how is it that you are speaking and writing?" A weak person might also be easily offended and say: "Who are you anyway? Do I not see you alive and doing things?" He replies: "I do indeed live; and yet not I live, but Christ lives in me. There is a double life: my own, which is natural or animate [*naturalis vel animalis*]; and an alien life [*aliena*], that of Christ in me. So far as my animate life is concerned, I am dead and am now living an alien life. I am not living as Paul now, for Paul is dead." "Who, then, is living?" "The Christian." Paul, living in himself, is utterly dead through the Law but living in Christ, or rather with Christ living in him, he lives an alien life. Christ is speaking, acting and performing all actions in him; these belong not to the Paul-life, but to the Christ-life.[33]

In dealing with the situation for which he wrote the letter to Philemon, Paul presents himself in two guises: the first, according to Paul's "human nature" (bound prisoner, old man, and so forth), so to speak, but the second as the very embodiment and projection of Christ who, in ways hinted at in the text, would pay off Onesimus' debt, provide the means by which the two principle protagonists would forgive each other, and bring a lasting solution for whatever problems Onesimus' theft and flight had caused Philemon's struggling congregation.

III. Triangularity in Philemon

The insight into the doubled nature of the Pauline persona enables one now to understand also the sort of relationship that Paul hoped could begin to exist henceforth between Philemon and Onesimus. As Paul composed this letter, he knew Onesimus would soon look his aggrieved master full in the face. To alleviate that potentially disastrous moment,

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[32] Martin Luther, "Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4," in *LW* 26:165, 167.

[33] *LW* 26:169–170; Latin from Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [*Schriften*], 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), 40.I:287. In Galatians 4:14 (RSV), Paul, speaking in the first-person, writes: "you did not scorn or despise me, but received me [ἐδέξασθέ με] as an angel of God [ὡς ἄγγελον θεοῦ], as Christ Jesus [ὡς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν]."

Paul wrote of Onesimus that he was "sending him back" to Philemon (ἀνέπεμψά σοι, Phlm 12a). The apostle used the verb ἀνέπεμψα—an epistolary aorist—to insinuate himself into the same time as Philemon who doubtless would be reading the epistle in Onesimus' presence:[34] "We should imagine that the first thing Onesimus did after returning to his angry master was to hand him Paul's little letter."[35]

Hence Paul presents himself as manifesting *Christ in engagement with* the governing dispositions and animus which would have led Philemon and Onesimus to react to the other at that point in time, each knowing full well the other's "old Adam." Philemon is the one to whom Paul addresses himself in particular ("you," σοι in Phlm 8, 11–12; σε in Phlm 10), and yet—if the appeal is at all symmetrical—points put to Philemon must already have been put to Onesimus in an earlier conversation, before Paul composed the letter. Because Paul reminds Philemon that he has "much boldness [πολλήν . . . παρρησίαν] in Christ to command you [ἐπιτάσσειν σοι, Phlm 8]," how much bolder, and how much more insistent, might Paul have been toward Onesimus in bringing that runaway slave to a repentant acknowledgement of his "uselessness" (ἄχρηστον, Phlm 11a)? Then Paul plays father to Onesimus by "begetting" him amid the imprisonment (ὃν ἐγέννησα ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς, Phlm 10) and thereby instills in Onesimus a desire to be "useful" (εὔχρηστον, Phlm 11b) to his master once again. This reconstruction assumes that Onesimus could have been indispensable to Philemon well before a falling out or perhaps greed caused Onesimus to steal from his master and abscond: "[I]f there is any truth to the emerging picture, Onesimus [c]ould have been *the most important slave in Philemon's employ*—perhaps, let us say, the slave whom Philemon had elevated to give the other domestics 'their food at the proper time' [Mt. 24:45], or the very one set 'over all [Philemon's] possessions' [Mt. 24:47]."[36]

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[34] Paul sometimes chose the aorist tense to describe an action which, for him (as he wrote), was *present*, even though it would have been *past* from the perspective of the letter recipients. For the epistolary aorist in Greek, see Herbert W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1920; 1956), "1942. Epistolary Tenses"; and Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), "334. The epistolary aorist." Other verbs in Philemon which commentators often suggest are epistolary aorists are ἔσχον (7); ἠθέλησα (14); and ἔγραψα (19, 21).

[35] John G. Nordling, "*Onesimus Fugitivus*: A Defense of the Runaway Slave Hypothesis in Philemon," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 41 (1991): 108–109.

[36] Nordling, *Philemon*, 145–146; original emphasis. For evidence in the papyri that even highly trusted, well-provisioned, and apparently unassailable slaves could, on occasion, betray trusting masters, see Nordling, *Philemon*, 147.

Such speculation should be recognized for what it is, of course, yet a clear pattern emerges in verse 8 where Paul launches his appeal for Onesimus "in Christ" (ἐν Χριστῷ, 8a). Behind the changed Onesimus stands Paul, and behind Paul stands Christ—each personality lending stature to the one who stands before. Hence the relationship envisioned by Paul vis-à-vis Philemon and Onesimus is essentially triangular, with Paul himself playing Christ's part at the apex of the triangle.[37] Paul urges the sanctified response of love wherein the two former combatants were to be for each other "in Christ," even as Paul—Onesimus' spiritual "father" (10b) and the one to whom Philemon is beholden (19b)—has already stood as Christ for each of the other two in separate contexts.[38] Just as Christ had shown God's grace to Paul on prior occasions,[39] and as Christ even now intercedes on behalf of sinners before God the Father, so Paul presents himself in the letter as the one through whom the forgiveness of sins shall be conveyed to Philemon and Onesimus. The triangularity of the relationship is reiterated in one of Luther's enduring insights into Paul's shortest letter:

> What Christ has done for us with God the Father, that St. Paul does also for Onesimus with Philemon. For Christ emptied himself of his rights [Phil. 2:7] and overcame the Father with love and humility, so that the Father had to put away his wrath and rights, and receive us into favor for the sake of Christ, who so earnestly advocates our cause and so heartily takes our part. For we are all his Onesimus[es] if we believe.[40]

IV. Restored Relationships in Philemon

As Paul looked beyond the near-term rapprochement between Philemon and Onesimus, he saw not only a restoration and patching-up of whatever

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[37] See figure 8 in Nordling, *Philemon*, 232.

[38] Philemon could have met Paul in the place where that apostle lived and taught for more than two years (Acts 19:10; see 19:8), namely, in Ephesus, the great metropolis of Roman Asia. Perhaps Onesimus met Paul there for the first time (he possibly traveled to Ephesus with his master on business), though the conversion of Onesimus occurred wherever Paul had been "in bonds" (ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς, Phlm 10b, 13b) when he wrote the letter—in Rome, suppose many (see the attestations in Nordling, *Philemon*, 7 n. 33), though an Ephesian imprisonment also has received much support (see Nordling, *Philemon*, 6 n. 20).

[39] For example, Paul uses the highly autobiographical phrase "through the grace that was given to me" (διὰ τῆς χάριτος τῆς δοθείσης μοι, Rom 12:3). Slight variations on the formula occur at Rom 15:15; 1 Cor 3:10; Gal 2:9; Eph 3:2, 7.

[40] Martin Luther, "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to Philemon, 1546 (1522)," in *LW* 35:390.

had been the troubled past relationship between this particular master and his slave, but also a clear demonstration of what the gospel and the forgiveness of sins can do among ordinary sinner-saints in a Christian congregation. The matter seems apparent by the way the leading *dramatis personae* were intended to interact with each other henceforth in this still-unfolding drama of salvation. By now the character substitutions had come full circle: first, *Christ* had faced *Philemon* in the aged and suffering persona of *Paul* the old man and prisoner of Christ Jesus (Phlm 8–9). Second, *Paul* relates to *Onesimus* as though the latter were virtually a piece of his inner self (τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα, Phlm 12b; see μου τὰ σπλάγχνα ἐν Χριστῷ, Phlm 20b). Third, *Paul* urges *Philemon* to receive *Onesimus* as though he were *Paul* himself (προσλαβοῦ αὐτὸν ὡς ἐμέ, Phlm 17b). Fourth, a hint of Onesimus' future usefulness is presaged by Paul's statement that he would like to keep Onesimus back for himself in order that *Philemon* may serve *Paul* through *Onesimus* (ἵνα ὑπὲρ σοῦ μοι διακονῇ, Phlm 13b).[41] Fifth and finally, *Paul* exclaims to *Philemon*, "may I benefit [ὀναίμην] from you in the Lord!" (ἐγώ σου ὀναίμην ἐν κυρίῳ, Phlm 20a). In the latter statement the verb ὀναίμην[42] almost certainly effects a play on Onesimus' name,[43] as if Paul were to say, "May I derive an *Onesimus* from you in the Lord!"[44] Paul saw Onesimus as key, then, to whatever future relationship the apostle would cultivate between himself, Philemon, and the congregation.

Such triangularity and taking-each-other's-part in Christ, climaxed by a former runaway slave becoming reconciled to his master, were signs of

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[41] "[Philemon] would delight in rendering [Paul], through the slave, the service which he could not personally perform." Marvin R. Vincent, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Philippians and Philemon*, International Critical Commentary 37 (New York: Scribner, 1897), 186.

[42] The first person singular, aorist optative middle of ὀνίνημι, which in the present context means: "*may I have joy* or *profit* or *benefit, may I enjoy* w[ith] gen[itive] of the pers[on] or thing that is the source of joy." Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 570. Only here in the NT does the verb ὀνίνημι occur, though see ὀναίμην τοῦ παρόντος (Euripides *Hecuba* 997), and οὕτως ὀναίμην τῶν τέκνων (Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazusae* 469).

[43] "*Onesimus*, lit[erally] 'useful' (s[ee] the play on words in Phlm. 11), a name freq[uently] found . . . , esp[ecially] for slaves," Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 570.

[44] So Nordling, *Philemon*, 277. About the play on Onesimus' name in verse 11, David E. Garland observes, helpfully: "Paul comes from a pun-loving background." *Colossians and Philemon*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 339.

what could, by God's grace, henceforth be achieved through the gospel—a transformation begun during this life, to be sure, but one that will be brought to completion in the new heavens and new earth (for example, Isa 65:17–25; Rev 21–22). Isaiah's famous vision conveys the essential reality more powerfully:

> The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
> and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
> and the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
> and a little child shall lead them. (Isa 11:6 RSV)

Luther's comments on the latter passage seem relevant also to the prospect of a restored relationship in Christ between Philemon and Onesimus:

> [T]he tyrants who formerly preened themselves with their power, wisdom, and wealth will shed their feathers and tufts and with bowed neck confess themselves to be sinners, and they will be harmless. And he says, the wolf will associate with the lamb. Not the lamb with the wolf. The tyrant will become a martyr, and the wolf a teacher. The wolves are false teachers according to Matt. 7:15. Paul was a wolf before his conversion. The lambs are the Christians. . . . This is what the Word of God does; it casts down the proud and lifts up the lowly. The calves are the faithful. The lions are the rich. Lion cubs are said to act more fiercely than the adults. That is, those who formerly yielded to no one now obey the Gospel preached to them by the least of the brethren, and they gladly hear the Word. . . . Human beings differing extremely among themselves—savage, wild, irascible, hateful, murderous, ungovernable, and the people of the gentle Christ—come to agreement through the preaching of the Gospel. The church will convert the nations not by force but by the goodness of the Word.[45]

V. Conclusion

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that Philemon represents much more than an isolated fragment of Paul's writing, plucked somehow from out of the flotsam "of a large and varied correspondence."[46] The letter, though brief and practical, plainly represents Paul at his theological best. Such facets of the gospel as the substitutionary atonement of Christ and the forgiveness of sins are more than hinted at in Philemon, and so,

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[45] Martin Luther, "Lectures on Isaiah, Chapters 1-39," in *LW* 16:122–123.

[46] So J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1879), 303.

while considerably briefer than his other letters, tiny Philemon must rest upon the same theological substructure that Paul builds upon everywhere else in his corpus. Surrounding congregations, which the New Testament indicates were no less filled with peevish masters and chafing slaves,[47] must quickly have taken note of how repentance, forgiveness, and restoration genuinely prevailed in Philemon's house congregation as a result of the proper use of Paul's brief letter, not force, retaliation, or even the so-called "justice" that today merely masquerades as the gospel.[48] In fact, the restored Onesimus could himself have played a role in the eventual preservation of the letter Paul wrote to Philemon. [49] Thus the presence of the letter in the emerging canon of Scripture[50] suggests that, in the end, the gospel saved the day for Paul, Philemon, Onesimus, and every other Christian who worshipped in Philemon's house church (Phlm 2b).[51]

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[47] For example, Eph 6:5–9; Col 3:22–4:1; 1 Tim 6:1–2; Titus 2:9–10.

[48] See the decidedly activistic stance of Allen D. Callahan who, for the sake of so-called justice, argues that white America should pay reparations to the descendants of African slaves: "When a debt of injustice is incurred, justice calls for the retirement of that debt. The check must be paid." *Embassy of Onesimus: The Letter of Paul to Philemon* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 61–62.

[49] John Knox supposed that Onesimus, Philemon's slave, eventually came to have a role in the publication of a corpus of Paul's letters in ca. AD 90: "What better explanation would we need of both the presence of Philemon in the collection and the predominant influence of Colossians upon the maker of Ephesians?" *Philemon Among the Letters of Paul: A New View of Its Place and Importance*, rev. ed. (New York: Abingdon, 1959), 107.

[50] "The Muratorian Canon of ca. AD 175 plainly lists Philemon among its contents, indicating that in the earliest period of the church—to all intents and purposes—there never was any serious doubt about the authenticity of Philemon." Nordling, *Philemon*, 3.

[51] I would like to thank Drs. Peter Arzt-Grabner, John Thorburn, Brent Froberg, and Charles Gieschen, as well as my wife, Sara Nordling, for reading earlier drafts of this article.

Theological Observer

Sam Harris and the New Atheism

In *The Twilight of Atheism*, Alister McGrath concluded that modern atheism is either on the verge of slipping into obscurity or in the earliest stages of revival. It is too early to tell, but there are signs that the latter is the case. Consider the popular work of Sam Harris. As a lecturer, essayist, and author of two *New York Times* bestsellers, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (2004) and *Letter to a Christian Nation* (2006), he is out to convince the world that religion is the source of much, if not all, of our political and military strife, and that the only (rational) solution is naturalism and atheistic secularism.

Harris's assault on religion is not theoretical. It is motivated by practical—he would say, ethical—concerns, particularly the rise of religiously-inspired violence. Shortly after September 11, 2001, when he began his writing career, he asserted, "The evil that has finally reached our shores is not merely the evil of terrorism. It is the evil of religious faith at the moment of its political ascendancy." It is not just a resurgent Islam that is the problem for Harris; it is religion generally and more specifically the idea of faith that is the culprit. He thus calls rational people everywhere to stand against "a common enemy," which "is nothing other than faith itself." He contends that rejecting any and all claims of knowledge based on faith—defined as belief in what is not immediately empirically testable—is absolutely necessary if the world's civilizations are to survive. His rationale (clearly influenced by Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*) is this: the world's major religions are intrinsically hostile to one another. Because religion is integral to a civilization's culture (and competition between them is a zero-sum game) this puts civilizations at odds with each other.

Thankfully, in the modern age secular interests have rendered the religious culture of most civilizations innocuous. Yet, like the Islamic resurgence begun in the late 1970s, he is convinced that it would not take much to reawaken the religious identities of other civilizations around the world. Take the United States, for example. He contends that our secularism, particularly under the current administration, is but a thin veneer. If it were scratched deep enough, the majority of us would reassert our theology into public affairs. The result would not be pretty, for, according to Harris, the theology that fueled the medieval crusades or now fuels groups like Westboro Baptist Church and the theonomists is the real face of Christianity. The zealousness of religious fundamentalists and the relative ease in which weapons of mass destruction are proliferated is a recipe for catastrophe; unless we realize this, Harris worries, the days of civilization are numbered.

The solution to all this is a radical reorientation of our worldviews. Our conception of reality, Harris argues, cannot be built on faith in the unseen. The notion that one can base what they claim to be true on faith is a relic from the

past, and a dangerous one at that, for when "a man imagines that he need only believe the truth of a proposition, without evidence . . . he becomes capable of anything." Only a universal naturalistic worldview can solve the world's ills. It alone would guarantee that the foreign and domestic policies of the world's nations had no vested theological motives or interests. The resulting atheistic secularism would finally remove "the greatest impediment to our building a global civilization." If the world would just come to its senses, Harris hopes, such a dream could be achieved.

Clearly Sam Harris is no friend of religion. He is rightly worried about the advance of Islam, but is only slightly more tolerant (but still quite ignorant) of Christianity. So why should the pastor or layman keep abreast of his work? For one, he is very popular, and, if Natalie Angier of the *New York Times* is right, he expresses what many people, shocked by 9/11 and mystified by daily reports of ideologically inspired violence, are beginning to think. Moreover, his stated concern for peace and the arguments he employs seem to be the new trend in the thinking of a new and resurgent atheism. Since the publication of his books, more seasoned atheists like Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Daniel Dennett have even joined ranks with him. What is most troubling, though, is that not only are their books topping the sales charts but their professed concern for world peace, their defiance of fundamentalist expressions of religion, and, of course, their cynicism and skepticism all resonate well with the reading public. This, it seems, will be the new face of unbelief for decades to come.

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Kurt Marquart: Saluting a Fellow Saint

[*The following tribute was given during the Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions in Fort Wayne on January 18, 2007. The Editors*]

When Alah Gulab, our contact person in St. Petersburg for The Russian Project, asked about Kurt Marquart last fall, I had the sad duty to tell her that he passed away in September. She had known him only by his passing through to other parts of Russia, but she stated that Dr. Marquart was one of the most exceptional persons she had ever known. He fascinated all of us. This was as true for those who saw him as a defender of the Lutheran faith as it was for those who disagreed with him. He was and will remain unforgettable.

His intellectual capacity was expansive. He was at home in the German and Russian languages. He knew Estonian and taught French. Though he was not a native English speaker, his range of vocabulary and expression placed him in the highest percentile of those who have command of the language. His

expertise was theology, but he was also at home in the worlds of history and science. Kurt came as close to being that ideal Renaissance man as is now possible. He used his scientific knowledge to defend the unborn and dispute the foundations of evolution. He had a love for apologetics in defense of the Christian proclamation.

His journeys took him from Estonia to Austria, then to New York, then Texas where he met his wife Barbara, then to Australia, and from there to Fort Wayne where he served thirty-one years with us. He not only authored a dogmatical treatise on the church but he also taught the church across the globe. Especially important was his foundational work among the young Lutheran church in Haiti, whom he supported with his intellectual and financial gifts. Kurt was as much at home with those of high academic and intellectual achievements as he was with those who were rich in faith but poor as measured by relative poverty. Theological commitment and missionary zeal lived within him in the perfect harmony intended by Christ's great commission.

Yes, he will be remembered for many things, but our church will remember him for his courage in the promotion and defense of our Lutheran confession that he demonstrated in the lecture halls of our seminary as well as in presentations to clergy and laity throughout the United States and the rest of the world. He was the longest serving member in the history of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, and it is unlikely that his record will ever be matched. Shortly before Dr. Robert Preus died, he was given a standard evaluation form used to grade the performance of professors who had served during his administration. These documents have since been destroyed, but I do remember that one professor received straight tens before Preus scratched out the ten next to that professor's teaching abilities in the classroom and replaced it with a nine. Kurt received all tens with no erasures.

Barbara and the other members of his family will treasure their own memories of him, but the rest of us have a claim on him as a member of that family which we call the church. The ministers here today bid farewell to one who was their brother in the preaching of the gospel. His students bid him farewell as their father in Christ. We all salute him as a fellow saint who has attained the glory to which we all strive.

David P. Scaer

Book Reviews

The Apostles' Creed for Today. **By Justo L. Gonzalez. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007. 100 pages. Paperback. $14.95.**

Justo L. Gonzalez is well known for his historical and theological acumen. His three volume *A History of Christian Thought* has long served as a standard for courses in church history. The latest offering from Justo Gonzalez, however, reveals something new—his pastoral concern. *The Apostles' Creed for Today* is the fourth book in the *For Today* series. This series seeks to be a kind of catechism that engages people with little or no theological background in the study of certain fundamental Christian texts. Gonzalez fulfills this catechetical purpose by carefully explaining phrase by phrase the meaning of the Apostles' Creed in its historical context and expounding its significance for today's church.

For Gonzalez, the Apostles' Creed is not merely an historical text but a living confession. Rather than an ancient artifact testifying to a lost history, Gonzalez sees the creed as the heart of the church's life, binding together ancient and modern Christians into one ecclesial reality. Gonzalez's historical prowess fills the outlines of the creed with living color. Each phrase of the creed reveals the struggles and convictions of early Christians. For Gonzalez, it seems that the creed cannot be understood unless it is read as an expression of the church's birth. Her very identity is summed up in these apostolic phrases.

The greatest strength of Gonzalez's book is that he allows the creed to speak a living gospel that creates the very faith it demands and that constitutes the very church from which it proceeds. However, while the creed's connection to the church is emphasized, its connection to Scripture is less evident in Gonzalez's work. For the early Christians, the creed not only expressed the church's beliefs but also recapitulated the whole narrative of Scripture. God's relationship to man from creation to the resurrection of the body shaped the identity of the church. To be baptized into this creedal faith was not only an entrance into the social community of the church but also incorporation into the saving narrative of the Bible.

In spite of this modest critique, Gonzalez's book is a treasure chest full of historical and theological gems. His short exposition of the creed is thin—only one hundred pages—but it is thick with insight. It would be an excellent resource for pastors and teachers charged with catechizing laity in the meaning and significance of the creed.

James G. Bushur

***Why I am a Lutheran: Jesus at the Center.* By Daniel Preus. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004. 224 pages. Hardcover. $14.99**

Why I am a Lutheran sets forth the Christian faith from a Lutheran perspective for the lay reader, and it explains the theological differences between Lutherans and other Christians. For the true Christian faith, Christ and his saving work must be "at the center." Jesus was born, lived, suffered, crucified, died, and rose again so "that we might stand before God as righteous, acquitted of all sin and guilt" (26). Daniel Preus, Executive Director of the Luther Academy, describes Christ's saving work through three biblical mountains. First, on Mount Sinai God gave his law and demanded that it be kept perfectly; it thus reveals that all people are lost and sinful. Second, God's love for sinners is seen on Mount Calvary where Jesus perfectly fulfilled God's law and paid the penalty for every sin: "Through faith in Christ . . . Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness, and all that he has becomes ours" (47). Third, on Mount Zion (the Christian church) the Holy Spirit works through the means of grace to bring lost sinners to faith in Christ. *Why I am a Lutheran* also shows how incorrect views of sin, faith, conversion, and justification give the impression that sinners can earn their salvation.

Christ's justifying work creates a vibrant, dynamic, and living faith that bears fruit in both word and deed. With Christ at the center, Christians who remain both saint and sinner live in godly contrition and repentance. Forgiven by God's grace, Christians are strengthened for sanctified living in their callings and vocations. Christians also experience struggles and trials in this life but receive comfort from the theology of the cross. Hurting Christians look to Jesus—the one who bore the pain, sorrow, grief, and hurt of all humanity—as the center of their faith. In Holy Baptism, God delivers the lost from spiritual death by giving them faith and forgiveness. Why, then, do all Christians know the date of their physical birth while few know the date of their spiritual birth in Baptism? Having officiated at the funerals of children, I identified with Preus's description of how Christ's baptismal promise can comfort grieving parents, relatives, friends, and pastors (108–119).

Incorrect views of Baptism and the Lord's Supper put sinful human beings—their work, worship, thanksgiving, and prayers—at the center. The correct view is that Jesus Christ is at work in the Lord's Supper to give penitent sinners his true body and blood, the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. The scriptural doctrine of the Lord's Supper is tied to proper teaching about the Trinity, the incarnation, substitutionary atonement, the ascension, justification, and close(d) communion. The faith into which one is baptized is the same faith that is to be preached from the pulpit and confessed at the altar. The essential unity of font, pulpit, and altar is found in the justifying grace of Christ, who is at their center. Jesus Christ, the one who forgives sinners and enables them to live by faith, gives them abundant life

here on earth and the fullness of eternal life in heaven. Christ's resurrection victory is the resurrection victory of all who live and die with faith in him.

For the church to dispense these eternal blessings, Christ instituted the office of the holy ministry. For a proper view of the ministry, Christ must be at the center—the center of the preaching, the teaching, and the serving of all God's people. The office of the holy ministry exists to bring sinners to Mount Zion, to the gospel, and to Christ's grace and forgiveness. God's church is at its best when his royal priests and those in the office of the holy ministry serve together in Christ, who is the center of their respective callings and vocations.

Preus's exposition of the centrality of Christ in the church's liturgy explains why liturgical Christians worship as they do. The liturgy is centered in Christ, that is, in his saving and redeeming grace in word and sacrament, to which the congregation responds with singing, praying, and service to the world. All Christians—whether liturgical or not—will benefit from Preus's christocentric explanation of worship. In the church, Christ is to be at the center of worship, whether it is traditional or contemporary. Preus's words remind the church that both liturgical and contemporary worship can move Christ away from the center. Melanchthon wrote against the worship of the papists, whose liturgical services centered in human works, action, and eucharistic prayers (the mass), rather than in Christ's justifying work (see *CA* XXIV, 10-33; Ap XXIV, 46-47, 97-99; Tr 38-40, 51, 57, 72 79; SA II, 2). Removing Christ from the center of worship also happens when contemporary worship services focus on human works rather than on Christ's saving work.

Finally, Preus emphasizes the fact that Christ's church is a missionary church which brings the gifts of faith and salvation to lost sinners. Everyone in the church was once outside and without those gifts: "Christians want the world to know of this Christ who is at the center of Scriptures, of creation, of all life. . . . Christian missionary zeal is based on Christ and what He gives to the world. That hope for the whole world is why Christians and Christian churches will always be about missions" (198). As one who serves in Kazakhstan, these words were particularly striking for me.

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***The Reformation of the Keys: Confession, Conscience, and Authority in Sixteenth-Century Germany.* By Ronald K. Rittgers. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004. 332 pages. $52.50.**

Historians agree that changes in the medieval understanding of penance and auricular confession had a prominent role in Luther's discovery of the gospel

and the early development of evangelical dogma. Ronald Rittgers, who holds the Erich Markel Chair for Reformation Studies at Valparaiso University, examines the interplay between the theology of the keys and the socio-political history of Germany as the Reformation established itself. He probes the reasons for the reformers' retention of private confession, how they modified and implemented it in the face of obstacles, the reasons for its early derision and later acceptance, and the changing locus of religious authority in Germany. Though it is a detailed historical investigation, Lutheran pastors will find it a great benefit for understanding their own practice of private confession and absolution and for addressing the challenge of (re)establishing it today.

As with much recent Reformation scholarship, Rittgers acknowledges the secularization of religious authority, but he demonstrates how the changing authority of the keys and practice of private confession played into this, a facet often overlooked by other scholars. Rather than a simple realigning of control and discipline, both clerics and magistrates sought to protect spiritual freedom under the gospel and mature religious practices. Rittgers narrows his study especially to the events of Nürnberg, an imperial city, where much of the historic record has been preserved. Those concerned for the spiritual care of Lutheran congregations will be intrigued to see how common attitudes and understandings in this city were remarkably similar to many contexts today.

The study begins by providing an overview of confession and absolution as practiced and understood in the century leading up to the Reformation. The medieval schools did not offer assurance of full forgiveness apart from one's works; they taught a misplaced trust in how one obtained absolution. Nürnberg was primed for the Reformation. In addition, the relatively independent Nürnberg city council, though still subservient to the church, was seeking to exercise discipline over its citizens through this increasingly lax period. Luther's early writings were welcomed heartily there. While his writings encouraged private confession and absolution, their emphasis on forgiveness by faith in Christ triggered rejection of Roman practice in Nürnberg. Though evangelical doctrine led to revised orders and practices, the laity took the stripping of clerical authority and the shift to individual faith as permission not to go to private confession.

As private confession diminished in Nürnberg, outward discipline began to wane—a problem for its civil rulers. Fearing antinomianism, the city council and clergy sought unsuccessfully for means to remedy the problem, such as implementing more explicit forms of general confession within the mass and requiring pastoral interviews prior to Holy Communion. While these measures were included in the Nürnberg church orders (1528; rev. 1533), any obligation for private confession and absolution was intentionally omitted. Nürnberg's influential position and church orders made it a model for others to follow.

In the 1520s, Andreas Osiander—a central figure in Rittgers' investigation—protested the final authority of the ban being taken from the clerics and given to the city council. The council, citizens, and theologians had gradually worked in this direction, mainly to ensure that the clergy were servants and not lords. When general confession and absolution was implemented, Osiander vehemently opposed it. He repeatedly argued, debated, and even preached against general confession and only permitted it because Wittenberg did. Along with Brenz and Dietrich, Osiander viewed private confession and absolution as a sacrament; unlike other evangelicals, he believed that the keys were efficacious even apart from faith such that they could be used to one's judgment. Though absent in Rittgers treatment, one might see in these debates the roots of Osiander's later controversies on the doctrine of righteousness.

Discerning Osiander's errors was difficult for other evangelicals because they also desired the renewal of private confession. Nürnberg's absolution controversy quietly endured through the 1540s and, ironically, only became settled as the city bowed to the pressure of the Augsburg and Leipzig Interims. These factors, coupled with Osiander's departure, opened the way for instituting an evangelical practice of private confession and absolution. However, the generation that had experienced the early Reformation was already hardened against the practice. As a result, throughout the 1530s and 1540s many pastors diligently taught and encouraged their catechumens and parishes to private confession. It was a golden age for catechesis. The blessings of private confession were also taught through sermons, hymns, plays, and woodcuts. Its establishment proved critical for inculcating a confessional and evangelical identity among laypeople.

The Reformation of the Keys examines the historical, social, political, personal, and theological factors that shaped the practice of confession and absolution in this critical era. The tensions and dilemmas of laymen, magistrates, and theologians are well described. It is a welcome relief from popular Reformation scholarship, which has largely neglected spiritual/theological factors in favor of the sociological. Rittgers shows an awareness that many of the confession and absolution questions raised in Reformation Germany are still open for discussion among Lutherans. What is the proper place, form, and role of confession and absolution in Christian piety? How should it be practiced today? As today's Lutherans read this history, they will surely ask such questions and then hopefully seek and receive for themselves this great gift of full and free absolution.

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