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Talking about the Son of God: An Introduction

The articles found in this issue were first presented as papers at the third Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) Theology Professors' Convocation that took place on March 1-4, 2007, in Dallas, Texas. These biennial convocations have each focused on a single article of the Augsburg Confession.[1] "Talking about the Son of God," based on Article III (The Son of God), was the theme. As in the past, this convocation was funded by The Marvin M. Schwan Charitable Foundation, which supports the concord and harmony cultivated in our church by these convocations. Article III of the Augsburg Confession states:

> Likewise, they teach that the Word, that is, the Son of God, took upon himself human nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary so that there might be two natures, divine and human, inseparably conjoined in the unity of one person, one Christ, truly God and truly a human being "born of the Virgin Mary," who truly "suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried" that he might reconcile the Father to us and be a sacrifice not only for original guilt but also for all actual sins of human beings. He also "descended into hell, and on the third day he was" truly "resurrected." Thereafter, "he ascended into heaven" in order to "sit at the right hand of the Father," and he will reign forever and have dominion over all creatures. He will sanctify those who believe in him by sending into their hearts the Holy Spirit, who will rule, console, and make them alive and defend them against the devil and the power of sin. The same Christ will publicly "return to judge the living and the dead . . . ," according to the Apostles' Creed.[2]

The papers and responses that follow exhibit unique Lutheran scholarship and research that contributes to the world of theological education and to the church that lives the life of God on earth. As you read them, you will journey to the land of Jesus for a view of archeological digs in Galilee. Then you will look at what the gnostic gospels–so popular today–say about Jesus. You will also taste afresh the vibrant waters of Christology in Luther. Finally, you will discover the various Jesuses in American Christianity so that your own understanding and proclamation of Jesus' identity will be clear and faithful. It's a joyful journey!

L. Dean Hempelmann
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St. Louis, Missouri

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[1] The focus of the first convocation in 2003 was on Article I (God) convening under the title, "Confessing the Trinity Today." Presentations were published in *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 67:3/4 (July/October 2003). The second in 2005 centered on Article II (Original Sin) with the theme "Talking about Sin and the Wrath of God." The major presentations were published in *Concordia Journal* 31:4 (October 2005).

[2] Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, tr. Charles Arand, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 39.

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Recent Archaeology of Galilee and the Interpretation of Texts from the Galilean Ministry of Jesus

Mark T. Schuler

When Article III of the Augsburg Confession opens by asserting that "God the Son became a human being" (*CA* III, 1),[1] the Lutheran Confessions recognize that Jesus came into the historical-cultural context of agrarian Roman Palestine in the late Second Temple period. Recent archaeological work in Galilee has enriched our understanding of this context. Attention to archaeological insights drives us to consider the Son of God as a fully human being who lived in a particular time and place, with the result that we reject the easy slide into Docetist heresies, either ancient or modern (*CA* III, 2–6).

After a clarification of this study's methodology in the context of the history of biblical archaeology, this paper will focus on the recent archaeology of Galilee by cataloging major sites and surveys. As we proceed through the material, insights that archaeology offers for our exegesis of biblical texts will be offered. Then reconstructions of the Galilean world of Jesus based on this data will be explored. Summary comments will challenge New Testament exegetes to reconnect text and artifact.

I. Methodology

Any discussion of archaeology must begin by deconstructing popular notions. In Steven Spielberg's film, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Professor Jones informs his college class that "archaeology is the search for fact—not truth. If it's truth you are after, Dr. Tyree's philosophy class is right down the hall." Archaeology is preeminently concerned with facts, although there is something romantic about a quest for the truth.

In a way, biblical archaeology began as a quest for the truth. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Bible stood at the center of

[1] All citations of the Lutheran Confessions are from Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, tr. Charles Arand, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). Augsburg Confession references are to the German text.

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intellectual life in the West. The rise of a scientific consciousness, however, raised doubts about the traditional understandings of the Bible. In parallel with this challenge of modernity, and perhaps in response to it, explorers such as Edward Robinson began to search for the biblical places mentioned in those now-questioned stories. "Underlying his approach is the search for demonstrable evidence of the accuracy of the biblical witness."[2] Similarly, Charles Wilson and Charles Warren came to Jerusalem through the support of the Palestine Exploration Fund. The Fund's appeal declared, "Those who value the removal of difficulties from the right understanding of the sacred text should be foremost in helping a society which has no other aim than to remove them."[3] Biblical archaeology began as a quest for truth.

The work of W. F. Albright characterized the golden age of biblical archaeology. Famous for his development of a pottery and chronology sequence for the Middle Bronze, Late Bronze, and Iron Ages, Albright and his disciples entered the debates about Israelite origins raised by higher criticism. The American school became known for its positive synthesis of text and material remains, especially in the pages of the *Biblical Archaeologist.*

As excavation methods improved, the relationship between Bible and spade began to change. For instance, Kathleen Kenyon's work at Jericho disproved John Garstang's earlier identification of City D as the one destroyed by Joshua. She dated it to the Early Bronze Age.[4] Kenyon could find no evidence of significant destruction at the approximate time of Joshua. The proof of biblical truth was lacking. Consequently, Albright and his disciple G. Ernest Wright began to construct models where archaeological data "[took] precedence over the biblical text. . . . The archaeology was used to correct the biblical record, which was used in turn to interpret the archaeology," becoming what Thomas Davis calls "a circular trap."[5]

As had Bible defenders, advocates of other ideologies began to advance their arguments based on material remains. Yigael Yadin's work at Hazor sought to support the conquest narrative of Joshua (and, with it, Zionist

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[2] Thomas W. Davis, *Shifting Sands: The Rise and Fall of Biblical Archaeology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 10. The first section of this paper follows Davis's outline.

[3] C. Grove, "Quarterly Statement of Progress," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 1 (1869): 9.

[4] Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Archaeology in the Holy Land*, 3rd ed. (New York: Praeger, 1970).

[5] Davis, *Shifting Sands*, 121.

claims to the land).[6] A second generation of Israeli archaeologists, the minimalists, question whether Solomonic Jerusalem ever existed.[7] Even the concept of "biblical archaeology" has been challenged by Bill Dever's insistence on the use of the identifier "Syro-Palestinian Archaeology."[8] As a consequence, the *Biblical Archaeologist* was renamed *Near Eastern Archaeology*. Davis concludes that biblical archaeology is "an unsound method. . . . The demonstration of the historical validity of the Bible depended on archaeology being *realia* . . . objective data untouched by the questions."[9] Be one a crusading Indiana Jones or a budding biblical archaeologist, the distinction between truth and data is methodologically critical. Scripture and the confessions speak truth; the spade yields data.

One may legitimately ask: What then is the role of archaeology in the exploration of biblical texts? Where then does one go between text and artifact? Scott Starbuck's model for integrating archaeology with biblical studies is worthy of attention. He calls it a "Chalcedonian" pattern.[10] The Chalcedonian christological settlement is best illustrated by an icon of the pantocrator from St. Catherine's at Sinai. According to local lore, the iconographer wished to depict the two natures of Christ. So the two sides of the face of Jesus on the icon are quite different. The iconographer refused, however, to reveal which side was the human and which the divine, even as Chalcedon manages the tension between divine and human by refusing to explain how Jesus can be both. Rather, both are asserted "without division, separation, confusion or change."

A Chalcedonian approach to text and artifact allows the two disciplines of biblical studies and archaeology to stand side by side in all their tension.

> In theological contexts, an authoritative epistemology that renders a canon of hallowed texts must be given full and distinct voice. At the same time, the fact that the God of the canonical text is portrayed as

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[6] Yigael Yadin, *Hazor: The Rediscovery of a Great Citadel of the Bible* (New York: Random House, 1975).

[7] David Ussishkin, "Solomon's Jerusalem: The Text and the Facts on the Ground," in *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period*, ed. Andrew G. Vaughn and Ann E. Killebrew (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 112.

[8] William G. Dever, "Whatchamacallit: Why is it so Hard to Name our Field?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 29, no. 4 (2003): 56–61.

[9] Davis, *Shifting Sands*, 155.

[10] Scott R. A. Starbuck, "Why Declare the Things Forbidden? Classroom Integration of Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology with Biblical Studies in Theological Context," in *Between Text and Artifact: Integrating Archaeology in Biblical Studies Teaching*, ed. Milton C. Moreland (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 104–108.

being intrusive to the physical world in actual historical settings necessitates, on the other hand, the full voice of the archaeological discipline.[11]

Bible and spade are "wholly distinct and separate" with their own "unique integrity." At the same time they are an "inseparable unity" for revealing the historical world from which Christianity originated.[12] They explicate the context, not each other. The results stand best together without division, separation, confusion, or change.

As we turn now to the Galilean world of Jesus, we doff the adventurer's hat and whip to take up the spade to uncover the historical world of Jesus.

II. Recent Work in Galilee

Who are the Galileans?

An exploration of the Galilean world of Jesus may legitimately begin with the question, "Who are the Galileans?" According to 2 Kings 15:29, "King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria came and captured . . . Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried the people captive to Assyria." Zvi Gal's archaeological survey of the lower Galilee found no evidence of occupation in the seventh and sixth centuries.[13] Most excavated sites were destroyed or abandoned in the eighth century.[14] While modest settlement did occur in the Persian and Hellenistic periods, the disappearance of Galilean Coarse Ware at the end of the Hellenistic period[15] plus an explosion of settlement after the annexation of Galilee by the Hasmoneans[16] point to a repopulation resulting from Hasmonean conquest.[17] Jonathan Reed concludes, "The settlement history and

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[11] Starbuck, "Why Declare the Things Forbidden?" 107.

[12] Starbuck, "Why Declare the Things Forbidden?" 108.

[13] Zvi Gal, *The Lower Galilee in the Iron Age* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992).

[14] Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 31.

[15] Mordechai Aviam, "First Century Jewish Galilee: An Archaeological Perspective," in *Religion and Society in Roman Palestine: Old Questions, New Approaches*, ed. Douglas R. Edwards (New York: Routledge, 2004), 8.

[16] Eric M. Meyers, James F. Strange, and Dennis E. Groh, "The Meiron Excavation Project: Archaeological Survey in Galilee and Golan, 1976," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 230 (1978): 7–8.

[17] Eric M. Meyers, A. Thomas Kraabel, and James F. Strange, *Ancient Synagogue Excavations at Khirbet Shema', Upper Galilee Israel, 1970–1972* (Durham, NC: American Schools of Oriental Research by Duke University Press, 1976), 147–152; Dan Barag, "Tyrian Currency in Galilee," *Israel Numismatic Journal* 6/7 (1982–1983): 7–13; and Danny Syon, "The Coins from El-Kabri, " *Atiqot* 51 (2006): 125–129.

numismatic profile suggest that the Galileans were descendants of the Judeans, a point that their socialized patterns of behavior left in the material culture indicate."[18]

Exegetical Insight: Although distance from Jerusalem and variant topography had a slight impact on Judaism in Galilee, sharp distinctions between Galilean and Judean practice do not have a basis in the archaeological record. Galileans and Judeans were cousins religiously and in terms of their material remains.

Jewish Villages

The Jewish material culture is most clearly evidenced by recent excavations in the villages of Galilee and the Golan. Although Capernaum is best known for the fifth-century AD white synagogue and the Byzantine octagonal basilica surrounding the putative house of Peter, the village itself seems to have stretched 400–500 meters along the shore of the lake and inland up to 250 meters. At most the village was from 10 to 12 hectares (about 25 acres) in size, although exact confines and occupation are hard to trace as the village had no outer walls.

Domestic construction employed basalt stones. The houses were characterized by courtyards surrounded by small dwellings, as a reconstruction of the house of Peter demonstrates. In the courtyards were ovens and staircases with access to roofs or to second floor sleeping chambers. A paucity of roof tiles in the ruins would indicate that the houses were roofed with reeds and mud. In general, there was only one exit from a domestic complex. The housing stock is similar to that found throughout Galilee, the Golan, and southern Syria.[19] Extended families occupied these *insulae* (town building plots).

The white synagogue at Capernaum sits atop an older basalt foundation. Beneath the synagogue is a first-century AD basalt floor along with remains of other domestic quarters. A public building may have occupied the location in the first century AD, but its identification as the free-standing synagogue of Jesus is unlikely. No other public buildings from the Second Temple period have been found. Jonathan Reed estimated a population density of 100–120 per hectare due to the organic nature of this

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[18] Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 43.

[19] Vassilios Tzaferis, ed., *Excavations at Capernaum*, vol. 1, *1978–1982* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 217 n. 12; and Howard Crosby Butler, *Ancient Architecture in Syria*, Section A, *Southern Syria* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1907), 120–123.

fishing village, that is, between 600 and 1500 inhabitants.[20] Capernaum was a typical Jewish village.

Domestic *insula* at Capernaum

Exegetical Insight: The domestic circumstances of Capernaum – extended families and neighbors living in close proximity – provide color for stories in that community narrated by Gospel writers. The healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Matt 8:14), the paralytic brought by friends (Mark 2:1–12; cp. Luke 5:17–26 "roof tiles"), and the disciples leaving families (Matt 19:27; Mark 10:28; Luke 5:11) all must be understood from this domestic context.

The livelihood of the occupants of Capernaum was drawn from the Sea of Galilee. Mendel Nun's documentation of anchorages around the sea and his collection of stone anchors and of net sinkers provide a glimpse of that life.[21] Anchorages were little more than breakwaters of basalt boulders. Likewise the anchors, most weighing between 10 and 45 kilograms, were basalt stones with a single hole. Net sinkers could be of ceramic, lead, or smaller stones with naturally occurring holes.

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[20] Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 152.

[21] Mendel Nun, *Ancient Stone Anchors and Net Sinkers from the Sea of Galilee* (Kibbutz Ein Gev: Kinneret Sailing Co., 1993).

In 1985–1986, the level of the Sea of Galilee dropped considerably owing to a drought. One and a half kilometers north of the shore of the ancient town of Migdal, the remains of a wood fishing boat could be seen jutting from the mud. The boat hull is 8.2 meters by some 2.3 meters wide. It was built using pegged mortise-and-tenon joints to edge-join the cedar and oak planking; it is further held together using iron nails. As the boat displays a number of repairs and a multiplicity of wood types, the boat likely had a storied life. Carbon-14 tests and some shards and coins found at the site allow us to date the boat to the turn of the millennium.

Exegetical Insight: New Testament accounts involving boats, nets, fishing, and the lake likewise receive color from such material remains (Luke 5:1–11).

In Nazareth, church construction and urban expansion have obliterated architectural remains of the hometown of Jesus. Housing in this farming village near a spring was likely little more than small scattered structures of fieldstones and mud with thatched roofs. What remains are a few cisterns, storage bins, presses carved in the bedrock, and small caves. Some terracing of the hillside and a tower have been identified. Local pottery shards, grinding stones, some household items, and fragments of stone vessels have been recovered. No evidence remains of imported fine wares, marble, or any public buildings. Roman and Byzantine tombs limit the size of the town to about 4 hectares and suggest a population of less than 400 people.[22] Nazareth was a struggling farming village, perhaps worthy of little more than the pejorative of Nathanael (John 1:46).

Biblical Cana is best identified with Khirbet Qana, a low hill on the north side of the Beth Netofa Valley. Cana was an unwalled city.

> Streets and lanes are being defined in the excavations that provide a sense of how the town's circulation patterns worked. Around the hilltop, the housing on slopes on three sides followed the contours, with streets along the contours (*vici*) wider than streets climbing the slopes (*clivi*). Stairs are still visible in a few of the *clivi*.[23]

The hillside houses are terraced. The houses higher up the slope use the roof of the house below as a substitute for a courtyard to extend the living and working areas. On the flatter north slope are larger houses built around a central courtyard with storage rooms and even a *mikveh* (a pool

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[22] Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 131; and David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. "Nazareth."

[23] Peter Richardson, "Khirbet Qana (and Other Villages) as a Context for Jesus," in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 128.

used for ritual washing). Some economic differentiation seems to be in evidence. There may even be a three-item typology: "terrace housing without courtyards, side courtyard houses, and central courtyard houses."[24] That differentiation is evident as well from industrial areas on the edge of the village: *columbaria* (chambers for breeding doves), olive presses, dying vats, and glass wasters. A later synagogue and a Byzantine complex with stone vessels attest to the Jewish nature of the site.

Exegetical Insight: The parables of Jesus frequently employ metaphors drawn from agrarian life and from the social differentiation visible in communities such as Cana.

Evidence of Jewish village life in these biblical sites is affirmed by work at other comparable Jewish villages not mentioned in the New Testament. Yodefat (Jotapata) is located in central Galilee. Residential areas, some with narrow lanes, were constructed in the early Roman period (ca. the first century BC). The houses were built on terraces, cut into the rock of the hillside. The residents relied on rock-cut cisterns for their water supply since there is no nearby spring, yet in some of the houses *mikva'ot* (stepped pools) were found. In the southern part of the town a number of pottery kilns were uncovered. Numerous clay loom weights indicate a weaving industry. The remains of a large mansion near the top of the town, some of its rooms decorated with frescos, are evidence of some wealth.[25] Except for walls at the hilltop, Yodefat was an unwalled city until the period leading up to the Jewish revolt against Rome.

Gamla, on a ridge in the Golan, was also walled at the time of the revolt and endured an infamous fate when Romans breached the walls. At Gamla, the *vici* follow the irregular contours of the hill and the *clivi* are stepped as at Cana. The steep slope requires that all the houses be terraced. Still there is some economic differentiation. A neighborhood to the west is better built with "flagstone courtyards, stone stairs, better finishes and larger floor areas."[26] Next to the city wall is a colonnaded rectangular building with benches on all sides. It is probably a synagogue as there is a *mikveh* next to the entrance court. It would be the oldest synagogue in

[24] Richardson, "Khirbet Qana (and Other Villages) as a Context for Jesus," 133–134.

[25] "Yodefat—A Town in Galilee," *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs Web site* (The State of Israel, 20 Nov 2000), http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Early%20History%20-%20Archaeology/Yodefat%20-%20A%20Town%20in%20Galilee (accessed February 18, 2007).

[26] Richardson, "Khirbet Qana (and Other Villages) as a Context for Jesus," 135.

Israel, as it pre-dated the revolt and was modified to house refugees as the Roman armies advanced.

Qazrin is a Jewish village in the Golan occupied since the fourth century BC. Since no appreciable changes are evident in village housing stock and domestic pottery between the Roman and early Byzantine periods,[27] its reconstruction provides a unique glimpse into Jewish domestic life. The main door of the home opens into the kitchen with a rough stone floor and a small oven. A storeroom is accessed through a window wall with a bedroom above. The main living room has food storage at one end. Outside is a courtyard for domestic animals. It was the center of household activity for most of the year, as is evidenced by hand mills and ovens. Food preparation was an endless task.

Exegetical Insight: The domestic role and place of women is a factor in the parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8–10). That domestic space included a main room, storage rooms, sleeping loft, a courtyard, and perhaps connected domestic quarters of members of the extended family speaks to the challenging task in searching for a lost coin. The proximity of friends and neighbors is implied by the organic nature of village life.

Jewish Identity

Jonathan Reed notes that artifacts found in the villages and domestic spaces of Galilee are quite similar to those of Judea. In particular, stone vessels and stepped pools indicate Jewish identity along with occasionally noted *kokhim*-type tombs (a Roman-period burial place cut from rock) and osteological profiles lacking pig bones. Each of these types of evidence will be here presented.

Reed states that "Stone vessels are found in strata up to the first century and fade out of use in the early second century."[28] Such vessels were considered impervious to ritual impurity.[29] Significant numbers of these vessels have been found: at Capernaum some 150 stone vessel fragments have been identified; from Nazareth four stone vessels have been cited; at Yodefat about 200 stone vessels have been found; and stone vessels also

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[27] Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Palestinian Dwelling in the Roman-Byzantine Period* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1995), 23.

[28] Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 44.

[29] Mishnah, *Kelim* 10:1. For this reference, see I. Epstein, ed., *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*, vol. 26, *Kelim, Oholoth, Nega'im, Parah, Tohoroth, Mikwaoth, Makshirin, Zabim, Tebul Yom, Yadayim, 'Ukzin* (London: The Socino Press, 1989).

are noted in the pottery profile from Gamla, Yodefat, Nazareth, and Capernaum.[30]

Mikva'ot have been identified at Nazareth, Yodefat, and Gamla, along with Sepphoris, Chorazin, and other sites. As with stone vessels, these pools reflect a deep concern for ritual purity. Interestingly, no such installations have been discovered at Capernaum, perhaps due to its proximity to the lake.[31]

Exegetical Insight: The Gospels often portray Jesus in conflict with religious authorities. Matters of ritual purity are often central. As this conflict is heightened during Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem (Matt 21:32; 23:13, 25) and as opponents are sometimes portrayed as coming from Jerusalem (Matt 15:1; Mark 3:22; 7:1), it is tempting to describe Jesus' Galilean followers as less strict on matters of purity. The archaeology of the Jewish villages of Galilee ought to counter this tendency. Ritual purity was a significant concern, especially for those with the leisure or commitment to be observant. For Jesus to have employed "stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification" in the miracle at the wedding at Cana (John 2:6) would have been noteworthy to the observant. Other words and deeds running counter to the norms of purity would be equally problematic, even in Galilee (Matt 15:10-20; John 6:66; 7:12).

Kokhim-type tombs have been excavated in Nazareth and Beth-She'arim and identified at Khirbet Qana. Where bone profiles are published, pig avoidance may be an identity marker.[32] Reed notes, "At sites outside of Galilee and the Golan, stone vessels, *miqwaoth*, Jewish burials, and pork-avoidance are not present in the archaeological profile of private space."[33]

An additional piece of evidence, although not distinctly Jewish, is the appearance of mechanized oil presses in the Hasmonean and early Roman periods. Nazareth, Gamla, Yodefat, Chorazin, and Khirbet Qana display presses of varying degrees of sophistication. Apparently, "the Hasmoneans repopulated Galilee with Jewish inhabitants, among them

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[30] Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 50.

[31] *Letter of Aristeas* 305. For the *Letter of Aristeas*, see "Letter of Aristeas," trans. R. J. H. Shutt, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigraph*, vol. 2, *Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1985), 7–34.

[32] Brian Hesse, "Can Pig Remains be Used for Ethnic Diagnosis in the Ancient Near East?" in *The Archaeology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present*, ed. Neil Asher Silberman and David B. Small (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 238–270.

[33] Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 51.

Judeans, who probably brought with them knowledge of oil cultivation and the new technology of the mechanized oil press."[34]

Exegetical Insight: Burial and dietary practices are small factors in the Gospel narratives from Galilee, except for pork avoidance in the parable of the prodigal son. Olives are only mentioned in the parable of the unjust manager (Luke 16:6). Perhaps the presence of an olive industry is an indicator of social differentiation.

The synagogue is popularly identified with Judaism and frequently mentioned in the stories of Jesus. With the exception of Gamla, no other synagogues from Galilee can be firmly dated to the Second Temple period.[35] Lee Levine, however, has noted other sites where public buildings may have served as synagogues, such as at Qiryat Sefer, Modi'im, and Jericho.[36] Levine argues that "the first-century synagogue was primarily a communal institution serving the many and varied needs of the local community, including religious ones."[37] Deriving from the city gate or village square, the synagogue remained a community center even as one room took on the form of a diminished sanctuary after the destruction of the temple.[38] If Levine is correct, the lack of distinct synagogue architecture is what one would expect in the first century.

Exegetical Insight: The reference to a centurion from Capernaum who "loves our people and . . . [has built] our synagogue for us" (Luke 7:5) is problematic. Not only is there a paucity of such first-century structures, but such a provision by a Roman (or Herodian) is doubly problematic. If, however, "synagogue" is construed more broadly as a public gathering space for the community which was also used for religious assembly on the Sabbath, then the public beneficence on the part of an official accords with common Roman practice of euergetism. Under that Greek word lays one of the realities of a successful public career in ancient times: if you did well, you paid some of it back to your community.[39]

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[34] Mordechai Aviam, *Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Galilee* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 56.

[35] Synagogues at the Herodion and Masada were erected near the time of the revolt.

[36] Lee I. Levine, "The First-Century Synagogue: Critical Reassessments and Assessments of the Critical," in *Religion and Society in Roman Palestine: Old Questions, New Approaches*, ed. Douglas R. Edwards (New York: Routledge, 2004), 84–89.

[37] Levine, "The First-Century Synagogue," 93.

[38] Levine, "The First-Century Synagogue," 93–95.

[39] Typical is the inscription: "Lucius Vennius Sabinus, with his son Efficax, gave as a gift to the people of Tifernum Tiberinum (this) fountain and the (entire) water collection system, from their property line up to the intake, for the embellishment of the community." *Inscriptiones Aemiliae, Etruriae, Umbriae latinae*, ed. Eugenius Borman,

In sum, the archaeology of Jewish villages in Galilee points to relatively self-sufficient agricultural and fishing-based economies. Economic differentiation is present in the larger towns. Religiously, there seem to be common Jewish practices implied in the material remains. This included "use in many places of a communal meeting hall or public building and access to a communal *mikveh*; wealthier citizens who wished to highlight their concern for ritual purity built private *mikvaot*. Some used stoneware, if they could afford it."[40] Jewish burial customs and dietary concerns likely prevailed.

Roman Cities

The conquest of Jerusalem by Pompey in 63 BC brought Roman hegemony to the eastern border of the empire. With the appointment of Herod the Great in 40 BC, Hasmonean royalty were swept away. Herod left his mark on the land with spectacular building projects: his palaces at Jericho, Masada, and the Herodion; his seaside port at Caesarea; the temples for his patron Augustus at Sebaste and near Caesarea Philippi; and his great renovation of the Second Temple at Jerusalem into the largest sacred shrine in all antiquity.

Herodian construction, with modifications for topography, followed the conventions of Roman city planning.[41] Roman urban planning was orthogonal. Planned Roman cities were surrounded by a wall and entered though massive city gates. The major north-south street was a *cardo*, the central city street that is often flanked with colonnades. An east-west street was called a *decumanus*. In the center of the city was a public market or forum, often surrounded by colonnades. Temples, theaters, and bath houses marked the urban landscape with public places. Caesarea Maritima was built according to this plan. Notably, Galilee was untouched by the architectural Romanization of Herod. After Herod's death, his son Antipas began the Romanization of Galilee with a reconstruction project at Sepphoris, the capital of Galilee.

The excavations at Sepphoris are spectacular, a fact that may inflate their significance. A rock-cut theater adorns the northeast side of the summit. A

Corpus Inscriptionum Latinorum 11 (Berolini: G. Reimerum, 1888–1926), 5942. The famous Erastus inscription from Corinth reflects similar practice.

[40] Richardson, "Khirbet Qana (and Other Villages) as a Context for Jesus," 144.

[41] Dominic Perring, "Spatial Organization and Social Change in Roman Towns," in *City and Country in the Ancient World*, ed. J. Rich and A. Wallace-Hadrill, Leicester-Nottingham Studies in Ancient Society 2 (London: Routledge, 1991), 273–293; and David Sperber, *The City in Roman Palestine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Jewish quarter on the western part of the summit is replete with ritual baths. The summit is crowned with a Roman mansion including a *triclinium* (dining room) depicting Dionysian rites. The eastern city is orthogonal with a colonnaded *cardo*. At its north is a grand basilical structure, about 40 by 60 meters in size, that likely served as a market. Its foundation stones were Herodian. To the south of the *cardo* is the so-called Nile house, named for its stupendous collection of mosaics that includes a depiction of the annual cycle of the Nile. A Byzantine synagogue has been discovered north of the Roman basilica.

Exegetical Insight: Although Matthew assigns theological significance to the return of Jesus and his parents to Nazareth after the death of Herod the Great (Matt 2:23), the economic opportunities in the area afforded by such a massive project may have also provided impetus for a "builder" such as Joseph. Claims that Joseph worked at Sepphoris and that Jesus helped him there, however, cannot be substantiated.

In AD 20, Antipas founded the city of Tiberias on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee to replace Sepphoris as the capital of Galilee. A number of features typical of Roman urban architecture have been revealed. A colonnaded *cardo* lined with shops runs parallel to the shoreline for some 400 meters. A market area (or forum), Roman basilica, and bathhouse have been unearthed east of the *cardo*. The corner of a theater and the foundations of the southern gate of the city have been located. In the second century a temple would be built in honor of Hadrian. At Tiberias, the Romanization of Galilee continued.

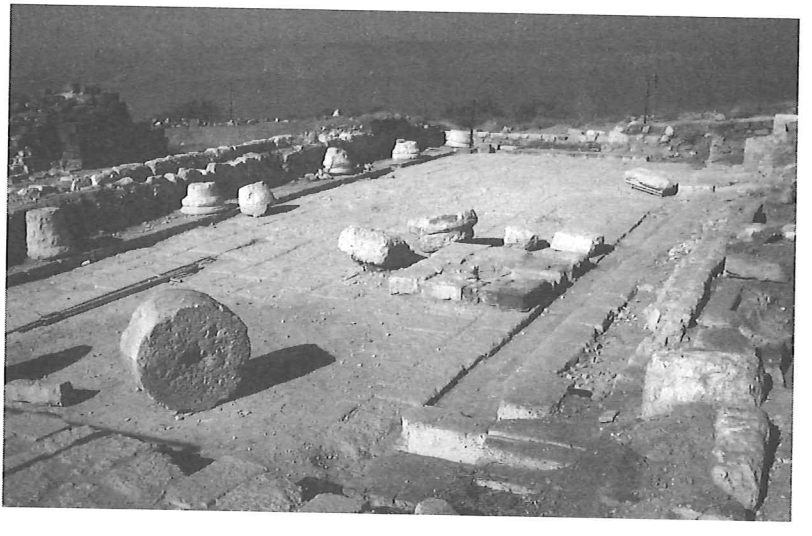
Exegetical Insight: Although Sepphoris is but a short distance from Nazareth and Tiberias borders the lake, neither city is mentioned in the Gospels. Did the Jewish sensibilities of Jesus keep him away from the centers of occupying power? Did the execution of John the Baptist cause Jesus to avoid Antipas? We have no answers to such questions.

A third center of Greco-Roman culture is Hippos, which sits atop a prominent hill on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Hippos is one of the Decapolis cities and is currently being excavated.[42] With a walled perimeter of 1550 meters, Hippos is some 10 hectares in size. The site is bisected by the *decumanus maximus*, a colonnaded street of some 650 meters. The eastern gate of Hippos was incorporated into the city wall and situated at the edge of a cliff overlooking the Golan. A round tower, similar to those at Tiberias, has been exposed. The main public plaza of

[42] It is being excavated by the University of Haifa in conjunction with the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw and Concordia University in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Roman Hippos is paved with carefully dressed basalt slabs. The forum was planned as a *tristoon*, a rectangular plaza surrounded on the north, west, and east sides by colonnades. Fourteen of these column shafts made of Egyptian grey granite were found scattered on the forum's pavement. To its west is a Kalybe, a monumental structure which served as a temple for the imperial cult.

To the north of the forum is a Hellenistic compound bounded on its western and southern sides by an imposing wall. This wall is noteworthy, especially for its excellent construction with its layers arranged in a uniform pattern of headers and stretchers. The *temenos* of the compound,[43] dated to the Seleucid period, is surrounded by limestone column bases. A massive column shaft and a damaged Corinthian capital suggest that the Hellenistic temple stood as much as five stories high. To the north of the platform are two long steps terminated on the east by an *anta* (a short stub-wall) which ends in a slender engaged column. These steps were part of a Roman basalt building, either a temple or a portico accompanying a temple. Still awaiting excavation at Hippos are other public buildings, a bathhouse, a small theater, fortifications, and domestic structures.



Temenos of a Hellenistic Temple at Hippos

[43] A *temenos* is an enclosed sacred precinct. It was generally a platform in the middle of which stood the temple. The platform holding the temple in Jerusalem was a *temenos*.

Exegetical Insight: The tombs and mausolea *lining the entrance road to Hippos provide an appropriate context for the miracle of the demons cast into the swine (Matt 8:28–9:1; Mark 5:1–21; Luke 8:26–40). The possessed individual was from "the city," and Hippos was a* polis. *Just to the north of the saddle leading to the city is a fearsome abyss (Luke 8:31); the nearby hillsides provide ample evidence of agricultural usage (Luke 8:32); and the bone profile from our excavation shows domestication of swine. Also of note are Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount about a city set on a hill. If the referent is to a specific city, the followers of Jesus near the Sea of Galilee would likely have thought of Hippos and its five-story limestone temple which would have been clearly visible from the lake. More than a bit of irony would come from the dominical instruction "so let your light shine," for the exemplar is pagan. Nevertheless, in subsequent centuries this pagan city would become the largest stronghold of Christianity on the Sea of Galilee, boasting a cathedral and at least seven other churches.*

A site that mediates between Jewish village and Roman city is emerging through the excavations at et-Tell, a mile and a half from the shore of the Sea of Galilee. It has been identified as Bethsaida. In a Hellenistic-Roman residential quarter, several private houses have been discovered that are similar to those in Capernaum. They have a large central courtyard surrounded by rooms with different domestic functions. The homes are constructed of basalt stones and may have had sleeping lofts, but not second stories. One is named the "Fisherman's House" because of the "plethora of fishing implements discovered there. Among the finds were lead fishing-net weights, anchors, needles, and fishhooks."[44] North of it is another house designated the "Winemaker's House." It had a wine cellar and from it were recovered pruning hooks and fishing gear.

According to Josephus, Herod Philip elevated the status of this village to a city and renamed it Julias in AD 30.[45] At the top of the mound of the site, excavators have found minimal remains of a small temple (20 m. by 6 m.), which they have interpreted as built in honor of Livia-Julia, wife of Augustus and mother of Tiberias.[46]

Exegetical Insight: Bethsaida is the hometown of the apostles Peter, Andrew, and Philip, and it was frequently visited by Jesus (Mark 6:45; John 1:44). It seems to have been a Jewish village upon which a modest imperial cult was imposed. One can easily envision this cult providing some of the background for the request of

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[44] Rami Arav, "Bethsaida," in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James Charlesworth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 161.

[45] *Jewish Antiquities* 18.28. See *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications), 588.

[46] Arav, "Bethsaida," 161. Compare Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 43.

the Greeks from Bethsaida to Philip, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" (John 12:21). Jesus' easy movement between Jewish villages such as Capernaum, the Greco-Roman Decapolis, and intermediate locals such as Bethsaida accords with Jesus' mission to the marginalized and resistance to excessive concern for purity.

Reconstructing the Galilean World of Jesus

One of the more popular and problematic reconstructions of the Galilean world of Jesus is that offered by John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan Reed in *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts*.[47] In their reconstruction, the Herodian family brought a commercial kingdom to the land of God's covenant:

> The architecture of ancient cities was built with agricultural wealth from peasant labor and Herod needed plenty of wealth for his city and kingdom. Polycropping and self-sufficiency on family farms gave way to monocropping on estates and royal lands and to an asymmetrical exchange of goods. Landholding patterns changed and tenancy increased to create economies of scale. Coinage and currency increased in the local economy to facilitate taxation to the coffers of Herod and Rome, which funded the architectural grandeur of Caesarea. The kingdom was commercialized . . . . Luxury increasing at one end of the society made labor and poverty increase at the other.[48]

In this scheme, Antipas brought his father's legacy to Galilee first at Sepphoris and then at Tiberias. The power of the commercial kingdom of Rome was brutal on the peasantry. Resistance movements arose, according to Crossan and Reed, one of which was the non-violent kingdom preaching of Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew steeped in the "covenant-based demands for divinely mandated equitable distribution of land."[49] Anchored in this theology, Jesus supposedly taught, acted, and lived in opposition to Antipas' localization of the kingdom of Rome among peasantry. According to this reconstruction, the Gospels reflect the rural-urban tension between these two understandings of kingdom. The Jesus of this reconstruction gives voice to this tension and resists it with a prayer about God's kingdom, will, daily bread, and debt.

Other resistance was violent. A major Jewish revolt, led by the Zealots, was the logical outcome of the cultural and economic oppression of the

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[47] John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001).

[48] Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 61–62.

[49] Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 275.

Herods. Beginning in the north at sites like Gamla, Roman punishment can be traced from the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 and the final defeat of the Zealots at Masada.

This reconstruction is problematic for a number of reasons. First, the thoroughgoing Romanization of Galilee is questionable. As has been pointed out by Mark Chancey and others,[50] actual material evidence datable to the first half of the first century has yet to be recovered in significant quantities. Only the Hellenistic temple at Hippos and the domestic houses at Bethsaida are firmly dated to the first century. The Roman bathhouse at Capernaum dates from the second century. At Sepphoris, the majestic finds are from the second century and later. Only foundation stones of the basilica are datable to the first century. Work at Tiberias has barely begun. A first-century level was identified in 2005, a marble floor supposedly of the palace of Antipas, but this identification has yet to be published. Even based on what is known from later times, both Sepphoris and Tiberias were quite small compared to the expansive projects of Herod the Great and would likely elicit less reaction.[51]

Romanization in Galilee began in force with the movement of the VI Ferrata legion to Jezreel around AD 120. Some detachments were stationed in Galilee itself. This deployment was part of a larger reorganization of Roman forces in the east. Roman power previously centered in Syria. As a result, by the beginning of the second century there were two legions in Palestine and a third in the new province of Arabia to the east. "The changes in the material culture of Palestine and the Trans-jordan that followed in the wake of this influx of Roman soldiers were dramatic."[52]

A second problem with the Crossan and Reed reconstruction is its assertion of monetization, the shift in commercial urbanization to coin-based economies that extract resources from the peasantry. The evidence of monetization in the early part of the first century is lacking. "Few Roman coins are found in first century contexts. The claims to a highly monetized economy . . . are not being borne out by the archaeological results."[53] Notably, it is "coins minted in the Galilee in the second and third centuries [that] reflect a wholesale adoption of Greco-Roman

[50] Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[51] I would further note that the first ten years of building at Tiberias would not compare to the glories of Hippos just across the lake.

[52] Mark A. Chancey, *Graeco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 223.

[53] Richardson, "Khirbet Qana (and Other Villages) as a Context for Jesus," 128.

numismatic customs."[54] Additionally, monetization does not necessarily elicit resistance. As the anthropological work cited by F. Gerald Downing has shown, "[A]n imposed cash economy does not have to destroy the traditional *habitus* . . . in Galilee."[55]

The third problem with this reconstruction is its emphasis on exploitation. Communities in Galilee expanded in number and size in the Hasmonean and Herodian periods. Commercial expansion likely was also a factor. However, if commercialization brought exploitation one would expect to find in the material record evidence of evacuation of houses of the exploited. Such evidence is lacking.

Fourth, perhaps the most significant flaw in the portrait provided by Crossan and Reed is the methodological mistake of constructing a Jesus, rather than keeping archaeology in its domain of providing data for a reconstruction of the Galilean world of Jesus. It is as if Crossan, in leather jacket and dusty fedora, has cracked his whip to draw our attention to "the truth" about Jesus. Such swashbuckling may be appropriate to the silver screen, but it does a disservice to archaeology and biblical studies.

While much work has been done recently in Galilee, any comprehensive reconstruction of the Galilean world of Jesus must take into account the limited nature of the data from the first century AD. From recent work done by Douglas R. Edwards in compiling survey data and integrating numismatic data, a picture is emerging of a Galilean world in which villages were not isolated economically or culturally from urban centers, each other, or surrounding non-Jewish territories. There is some cultural differentiation as witnessed by the use of stone vessels and *mikva'ot*. Jewish villages seem to have been served by Jewish sources of pottery such as Kefar Hananya, but some villages were served by other sources. There was an active trade—even competition—in general pottery. Pervasive basalt mills and presses, *columbaria*, stone jars, and even coins also witness to a complex and diverse economy. The Galilean world of Jesus was a diverse economy teeming with activity; it was not a series of isolated villages.[56]

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[54] Chancey, *Graeco-Roman Culture*, 192.

[55] F. Gerald Downing, "In Quest of First-Century C.E. Galilee," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 66 (2004): 84.

[56] Douglas R. Edwards, "Recent Work in Galilee: A Village and its Region" (lecture, Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Washington, DC, November 18, 2006).

III. Conclusion

Archaeology does not and dares not tell us who Jesus is or what he said. It does, however, challenge the biblical interpreter to contextualize the Scriptures, to hear them in the alleys of Jewish villages, amidst the smells of agrarian domestic life, on the waters of the lake, and even amidst the ashlars and pavers of Romanization. The words and deeds of Jesus are grounded in this real world, not some spiritual fantasy land, for "God the Son became a human being" (*CA* III, 1). James Charlesworth issues a challenge to scholars that is applicable to all interpreters of the Scriptures:

> While archaeologists may pursue pure research without any interest in possible historical or theological payoff, biblical scholars no longer have the . . . luxury of avoiding data from the times and places in which the biblical records took shape. . . . For a New Testament scholar to disavow the importance of archaeology for New Testament studies . . . is a form of myopia. It leaves the Gospels as mere stories or relics of ancient rhetoric. Archaeological work, perhaps unintentionally, helps the biblical scholar to rethink and re-create the past. . . . The results are unexpectedly surprising and rewarding.[57]

Response to Mark T. Schuler

Daniel E. Paavola

Dr. Mark Schuler deserves thanks for his vivid presentation of the archaeology of Galilee, especially for bringing near these distant places and experiences. In a way, it is an incarnational work that he does and that we share. He noted that archaeology wrestles with the Bible and the spade, with data and truth, with what is already known and discoveries just made. He repeatedly showed the implications for exegesis in the ongoing discoveries. Who does not better see the disciples being called from their fishing boat when an example of such a boat has been found?

This work is incarnational in a broad sense; it joins the eternal and the present, the human and the divine. God took upon himself human flesh, and all humans are touched by his life within that one body. Archaeology gives a boat, a synagogue, or a tomb, and Christians are reminded that

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[57] James H. Charlesworth, "Conclusion: The Historical Jesus and Biblical Archaeology: Reflections on New Methodologies and Perspectives," in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 694–695.

their Lord rescued just such a boat, spoke in such a synagogue, and was laid in such a tomb, and every place has been changed by him.

Dr. Schuler's archaeological work is also an incarnational work because it exemplifies the best of theological education by bringing the truth of spade and Bible into the lives of students. One example is Kristina Neumann, a senior at Concordia University Wisconsin with a double major of history and classical studies. She worked with Dr. Schuler at Hippos in July 2006 and will be working with him again in 2007.[58] His archaeology work has captivated Kristina and given her a focus for her exceptional talents. In keeping with this incarnational theme and the conference theme of theological education, I asked Kristina also to read Dr. Schuler's paper and to share her thoughts. She wrote the following paragraphs:

> While Dr. Schuler correctly dismisses the Indiana Jones experience as the norm for archaeological endeavors, the benefits of a Holy Land dig for a student are even greater than Hollywood could imagine, as classroom learning is truly transformed. Fieldwork has the ability to ground students in a historical context for the Scriptural accounts. Through interpretation of the evidence, students' analytical skills can be honed in bringing together theology and archaeology. Finally, any biblical dig raises questions of faith and gives a student an opportunity to refine his or her Christian belief. This learning experience translates into life experience.
>
> To some, Dr. Schuler's account of each Jewish village and Roman town may seem robbed of all biblical color in his deliberate descriptions of the archaeological sites. Certainly his clinical debunking of the synagogue at Capernaum in both his paper and during a visit to the site came as a disappointment to this student, as the Christian romantic in me would have loved to be in the exact place where Jesus once was and seek out the "historical Jesus." However, this helps to illustrate one of the benefits of a Levantine dig, in that, although it may not yield physical evidence of the Christ, it does provide students with a historical context for the scriptural accounts. Being in a place like Hippos which was in existence during the time of Jesus and working among remains concurrent to his era allows a student to transcend time. Dr. Schuler outlines in his paper Scott R. A. Starbuck's Chalcedon pattern for biblical archaeology, where the "text and artifact allows the two disciplines of religious studies and archaeology to stand side by side in all their tension." Indeed, while students of all ages crave the material remains of a historical Jesus, working with artifacts from his historical context give enough perspective to illuminate the

[58] Kristina Neumann won the *Biblical Archaeology Review* 2007 Scholarship award for her article "And the Digs Go On: Digs2007 Scholarship Winner," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 33, no. 1 (2007): 46–47.

Scriptures in a very satisfying manner. A student will forever be transformed, as he or she cannot help the pique of interest every time the word "Galilee" is mentioned in a Biblical text or envision Hippos as a "city set on a hill" when the words from the Sermon on the Mount are spoken (Matt 5:14). Although much of my role in the work of Hippos/Sussita was in a sixth-century Byzantine church, excavating a place where people once worshiped provided a very tangible glimpse of what life once was like in the early Christian church that mere reading of historical accounts alone could not give.

Speaking beyond the historical context provided by this experience, work on an archaeological dig refines a student's thinking. The question of methodology features foremost in any dig as an archaeologist must ensure his or her work is a dialogue with the material uncovered and not a monologue. Thomas Davis' main problem with the Biblical archaeologists was not that they were proponents of a Judeo-Christian belief, but rather that they went to the field blinded by preconceived notions of what they would find. This insistence on a biblical connection for all uncovered artifacts was greatly damaging for scientific discovery. Consequently, students of archaeology—and specifically "biblical archaeology"—are trained to come to the data with a question, but not an answer.[59] A student learns to occupy both worlds governed by the truth of the Bible and the *realia* of the archaeological dig, in order to better understand the specific period of ancient and classical history.[60]

Dr. Schuler once wrote to me, "If one is to say that archaeology is fact, one must first define what a fact is. I believe archaeology gives us an angle on *realia*, but so does theology, just in a different way."[61] The student must learn to look scientifically at all uncovered material and wrestle with interpretation, simultaneously seeking out and narrowing all possibilities. A student is forced to utilize all aspects of his or her knowledge, while actively assimilating or rejecting the interpretations of others. Again, in overseeing the excavation of Cistern D in the Byzantine church, I was forced continually to re-evaluate my interpretation of the evidence as I saw it. Each day as new items were uncovered—first a piece of intricate gold, then pottery, followed by animal bones and finally a coin—I had to ask myself and others, "Why would this be here?" and "What was this used for?" The afternoon of the dig also provided for a unique opportunity, as all the volunteers came together to wash pottery. From the lowly student volunteer to the most learned theologian, we would discuss the day's findings while drawing upon each other's understanding and practice. The value of this experience for a student's thought process is invaluable.

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[59] Davis, *Shifting Sands*, 151. Neumann: "I use the term 'biblical archaeology' loosely and simply to refer to that archaeology directly relating to biblical times and locale."

[60] Neumann: "*Realia* simply refers to the archaeological remnants and artifacts recovered on the dig that contribute to a sense of historical understanding."

[61] Mark Schuler, e-mail message to Kristina Neumann, July 22, 2006.

> Finally, at some point on a biblical archaeological adventure, the element of faith must enter into the student's excavation experience. The temptation exists in such a dig to base one's faith on what is uncovered. Davis states that the former biblical excavators believed their faith solely depended on uncovering the historical reality of the Bible and that the *realia* of archaeology in Palestine would "buttress the hope of faith."[62] In a way, these men and women mirrored the errors of previous Christian pilgrims, who gallivanted off to the Holy Land, haphazardly scrambling to find holy relics and holy sites as a basis of their faith. In both instances, when no scientific proof of this existence appeared, data and artifacts were fudged. A student of a biblical dig must come to terms with where his or her faith is based: on data or on spiritual truth. Are we to doubt the account of Joshua if no Jericho has yet been found? More importantly, are we to question the existence of Jesus if we cannot uncover the cross he died upon or the tomb from which he was raised? Although my dig experience dealt with a time following after Christ's life on earth, traveling to the various holy sites surrounding the Sea of Galilee and in Jerusalem made me consider the heart of my faith. Is it particularly important to know the exact location of the nativity? Is it a matter of salvation on which hill the Messiah was crucified? These questions are uniquely fueled by an archaeological experience in the Holy Land, and with the proper instructor guiding discussion, they can lead students to an affirmation of faith.

These extended comments of Dr. Schuler's student show the importance of his research and its impact upon students. In the end, his presentation bridges the dividing choice of the theological educator: Shall I be a painter or a chef? Each of us likely has a preference. Painters work long, often quietly and alone, perfecting a single canvas. Their work produces a book, a thought-changing article, or some other lasting piece. The chef prefers the noise of the classroom, feeding a demanding crowd who appreciate the meal but want another tomorrow. Painters produce lasting truth and beauty; chefs provide food for today. Each is needed, though they might have difficulty appreciating one another's work. Dr. Schuler bridges these two choices. This painter gives lessons. His canvas of Galilean stone is drawn upon by many different hands. When he pauses, his students are eager to continue and likely will do so for generations. His work of archaeology is not merely past but present and future.

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[62] Davis, *Shifting Sands*, viii.

CTQ 71 (2007): 121–144

Jesus and the Gnostic Gospels

Jeffrey Kloha

I. Why Are We Talking about the Gnostic Gospels?[1]

If we were to discuss Christology, and specifically the relationship between the Christology of the 'gnostic' gospels and the Christology of the canonical gospels, this would be a short paper because there is no Christology in the gnostic gospels. More precisely, we could consider the Christology of Seth because the *Gospel of Judas* calls Seth—not Jesus—the "Christ." That, however, is not the challenge, but the fact that the questions raised by the gnostic gospels go to the very heart of the Christian faith: Who is Jesus? What did he do? What is the human condition and humanity's place in the world? What is our relationship to the divine? What is the nature of salvation? Indeed, what is Christianity? The issue is what was done with and to Jesus in the second century. The problem facing the church is how to account for these "newly discovered" or previously "lost" texts. They were written by people in the second century who claimed to be followers of Jesus yet present an entirely different perspective of him. Beyond those questions, a further requirement is to help students, pastors, teachers, and the people in our pews deal with the challenges that these texts present to creedal Christianity. The problem is acute, since they have heard and have read that these texts give us a "better" Jesus than the one that we proclaim.

Previous generations fought over the Bible. For better or for worse, the battle used to be over creationism, Jonah, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and how many Isaiahs there might be. Above all, however, the battle was fought over the first century and Jesus. Historical criticism attacked the text and replaced its authority with reconstructed sources, but historical criticism has now run its course. To be sure, there is still a Jesus Seminar, but "the Quest for the Historical Jesus" did not bring an end to historic, creedal Christianity. The Jesus of history could not be pried away from the church, and so the church is now the target.

The battleground has changed. The nature of Christianity in the second century, rather than the first century, is debated. What was Christianity

[1] Quotations of gnostic texts are from James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

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like after Jesus? Or, as it is more often stated, what were "Christianities" like? It is no longer assumed that the same Christian faith was preached everywhere by all. Rather, some took Jesus and ran one way, some another. Some died out early, like the Nazoreans. Others died out later, like the so-called Gnostics. The Nazoreans may have simply been too indistinct from Judaism and too small to be sustainable. The Gnostics, it is argued, were viciously attacked by what later were called "orthodox" or "catholic Christians" and were persecuted out of existence. Is orthodox Christianity merely one possible outcome of the teachings of Jesus? Bart Ehrman's way of framing the issue is typical: "What if it had been otherwise? What if some other form of Christianity had become dominant, instead of the one that did?"[2] He continues,

> In anticipation of these discussions, I can point out that if some other form of Christianity had won the early struggles for dominance, the familiar doctrines of Christianity might never have become the "standard" belief of millions of people, including the belief that there is only one God, that he is the creator, that Christ his son is both human and divine. The doctrine of the Trinity might never have developed. The creeds still spoken in churches today might never have been devised. The New Testament as a collection of sacred books might never have come into being. Or it might have come into being with a completely different set of books . . . ."[3]

Now that these "lost" or "hidden" or "secret" gospels have been made known to our conspiracy-loving culture, we can no longer appeal simply to "the Bible" or "the Divine Inspiration of the Bible." After all, how does one externally prove that the Bible is inspired and inerrant when other books make identical claims to divine origin and authority?[4] The canonical books, whether sixty-six or seventy-three or eighty-one (depending on the division of Christianity), are no longer the only game in town.

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[2] Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5. This book is marketed as a textbook for undergraduate classes in religion.

[3] Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 6.

[4] I recently presented a weekend seminar on the gnostic gospels for University of Iowa students at St. Paul's Lutheran Chapel. During one of the breaks, a couple of students pulled me aside to discuss the question of how we know that we have the right Bible. One student had recently been challenged by a non-Christian and was forced to acknowledge that he had no idea how we got the Bible, how we know that it is the right one, or where to begin the discussion.

The purpose of this paper is to begin to formulate a response to the rise of the use of gnostic texts in the life of the church. One unacceptable response is to pretend that there is not a problem. If the circus that accompanied the *Gospel of Judas* and *The Da Vinci Code* proved anything, it is that people will hear about this. It would be better if our pastors and people heard about it first from us. Another unhelpful response is simply to label all the gnostic material non-Christian and be done with it. This does not work for the thinking layperson. I have had the opportunity to offer numerous seminars on the gnostic materials to groups of lay people and pastors. The reactions are always interesting. The pastors typically think it is all just weird, but it never fails that during one of the breaks someone comes up to me and wants to talk further about the role of women, the historicity of Jesus, or the development of the creeds. Something they have read or seen on television about these materials made more sense to them than the pat answers they typically receive from us. We can decry the American suspicion of authority and institutions, love of conspiracy theory, passion about gender issues, and general rejection of the Christian world view, but this is our context. Not to give answers only leads people to question the message we preach. In this paper, I will not propose solutions, but will lay out the issues surrounding these gnostic writings, discuss how they are analyzed, and suggest areas where we need to be engaged in the debate.[5]

II. Re-imagining Christianity

The definition of "ancient" and "early" has changed. It sounds impressive to talk about a "historic liturgy of the ancient church," but there is little, if any, firm textual evidence for it until the fifth, or maybe the fourth, century. This is as far removed from the apostle Paul as we are from Johann Gerhard. It sounds convincing to say that the Nicene Creed traces back to AD 325 and that we have references to *regulae* from 150 years earlier, but those *regulae* are a bit amorphous and varied, and it is clear that the Council of Nicea was an end point in the development of specific articulations of doctrines rather than the consensus of the previous 250 years. The fourth century is too late, too recent, and too reflective of its own theological interests and controversies to help us understand—let alone critique—what Christianity was in the second century.

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[5] I will not state the obvious points, such as the fact that the canonical Gospels are reliably dated to the first century but that no gnostic gospel, save the *Gospel of Thomas* (which will be discussed further below), can be dated in the first half of the second century, and most much later.

The second century, however, is shrouded in unknowns. New Testament textual critics have long recognized that there are huge gaps between the composition of the New Testament writings and the great codices of the fourth century, with only a patchwork of fragmentary papyrus manuscripts from the second and third centuries.[6] The situation is the same for writings from the second century. Apart from Irenaeus, piecing together orthodox Christianity is a difficult task. Now there is a whole group of writings, typically labeled "gnostic," that often have Christian elements and that, for the most part, were composed as early as the mid- to late-second century.

What is Gnosticism?

It used to be easy to deal with the Gnostics. They were considered part of another religion, as distinct from Christianity as Islam or Buddhism. Alternatively, Gnosticism was considered aberrant, a corruption of orthodox Christianity. All this has changed. Among the most significant issues is the definition of Gnosticism itself. In contemporary literature on Gnosticism there is considerable debate—at times even confusion—regarding terminology. No one in the ancient world describes themselves as followers of "Gnosticism," as if it had a known and recognized set of shared characteristics. In fact, the word itself does not occur until the seventeenth century, though, of course, *gnosis* and *gnostikoi* are both ancient terms. Moreover, there are only indirect references to people calling themselves "Gnostics." This confusion applies also to the texts themselves. Though I have titled this study "Jesus and the Gnostic Gospels," none of the writings that I will discuss use the word "gnostic." Cristoph Markschies opens his primer on Gnosticism with this caveat: "[T]here is no usage of this term ['gnosis'] on which there is consensus in every respect and which is accepted everywhere. Nor, things being as they are, can there be, since any definition remains somewhat arbitrary."[7]

After the fashion, writers in the second century did not refer to religious adherents by collective names, like "Christian" or "Gnostic," but by the

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[6] See especially Barbara Aland, "Die Rezeption des neutestamentlichen Textes in den ersten Jarhunderten," in *The New Testament in Early Christianity*, ed. Jean-Marie Sevrin, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 86 (Leuven: Leuven University Press; Uitgeverij Peeters, 1989), 1-38; and William L. Petersen, ed., *Gospel Traditions in the Second Century: Origins, Recensions, Text, and Transmission*, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 3 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

[7] Cristoph Markschies, *Gnosis: An Introduction*, trans. John Bowden (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2003), 1.

founder or leader. One can read about Valentinians, Marcionites, followers of Basilides, Nicolatians, and, on occasion, Gnostics. Indeed, Irenaeus's magnum opus is titled "Disproof and Refutation of *Gnosis* Wrongly So-Called," yet this book discusses dozens of teachers and groups, only one of which he describes as giving themselves the name "Gnostic."[8] Ireneaus also labeled this group followers of a certain Mercellina and described them as people who worship images of the great philosophers, such as Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, and Jesus. It is not clear, however, that all references to "Gnostics" refer to the same groups. Clement, for example wrote,

> For I know that I encountered some sort of sect, and its leader claimed that he fought pleasure with pleasure. This noble Gnostic (for he said that he was a Gnostic) deserted to pleasure through feigned combat, since he said that it is no great thing to avoid pleasure which had never been enjoyed, but it is something to avoid it after having been involved in it, so he trained [to avoid pleasure] by indulging in pleasure.[9]

Later in the same writing he accused the followers of Prodicus, who also called themselves Gnostics, of the same abandonment toward pleasure.[10]

Earlier still, Justin Martyr conceded to his Jewish interlocutor that many groups called themselves Christians, such as Marcionites, Valentinians, Basilidians, and Saturnilians.[11] Later, Hippoplytus claimed that only a single group, the "Naassenes," called themselves "Gnostics."[12] It cannot be questioned that many groups used the name "Christian" in the second century, including those that were then, and would be today, considered "heretical" by orthodox standards.[13]

Furthermore, these groups cannot be considered entirely non-Christian. The first Christian commentary on a New Testament writing, in the ancient sense of that term, is by Heracleon, a follower of Valentinus, whose commentary on John is quoted extensively by Origen. Moreover, both Marcion and Valentinus relied heavily upon the Pauline Letters. Valentinus himself wrote something like a commentary on them. The writings drawn upon by the "Gnostics" seem to be identical to the writings

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[8] Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.25.6.

[9] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.20; my translation.

[10] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 3.4.

[11] Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 35.

[12] Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 5.6.

[13] See also the survey in Michael Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 33–43.

used by the "orthodox," specifically the four Gospels and the Pauline Letters. The writings ignored by the Gnostics, such as what came to be called the Catholic Epistles, are the same writings that were generally ignored by the orthodox until much later. Furthermore, in his sermon *Gospel of Truth*, Valentinus did not reflect the grand cosmology so typical of Sethian Gnostics. His creator is described positively, Jesus is the primary savior, and the world is not so much evil as a place of ignorance. The goal is not, as is often typical in gnostic thinking, to escape the flesh. Instead, the Son by his death on the cross makes the Father known, and through this knowledge ignorance is done away with so that salvation is achieved. Valentinians also observed the Eucharist and, surprisingly, accepted marriage, which many Gnostics (and some later Christians) did not.[14]

Nor were Gnostics completely independent of early Christian communities. In the late fourth century, Epiphanius reported a remarkable autobiographical story of a group in Egypt who called themselves "Gnostics" (one of only a handful so labeled in his *Panarion*). A long passage describes their attempts to lure him into heresy by sending beautiful women to seduce him physically and spiritually. Epiphanius received strength from the Lord to resist, then reported the group to the bishop and—here is the important point—the bishop, "finding out which ones were hidden in the church . . . they were expelled from the city, about eighty persons, and the city was cleared of their tare-like, thorny growth."[15] It is also worth pointing out in this report that Epiphanius fled only after "reading their books," which means that he must have spent some time among them though without converting. Although this group of self-described "Gnostics" had their own teachings, evangelism methods, and books, they still were "in the church" of this unnamed Egyptian city. The confusion is compounded by recognizing that the use of the term *gnosis* by theologians of the early church (such as Barnabas, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and before them even Paul) parallels common

[14] Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 159–162; see also April D. DeConick, "The Great Mystery of Marriage: Sex and Conception in Ancient Valentinian Traditions," *Viligiae Christianae* 57 (2003): 307–342.

[15] Epiphanius, *Panarion* II.26.17.8; in *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Book I, Sects 1–46*, trans. Frank Williams, Nag Hammadi Studies 35 (Leiden; New York: E. J. Brill, 1987), 98.

vocabulary and themes in Greco-Roman thought and not specific "gnostic" or "gnosticizing" tendencies.[16]

It may be surprising to learn that the term "gnostic" appears nowhere in the Nag Hammadi documents, the *Gospel of Thomas*, or the *Gospel of Judas*. There are other names, like "Sons of God," "the elect," "descendants of Seth," "children of the bridal chamber," and the "fourth, kingless and perfect race." The last designation is particularly significant in one respect, for Christians of the second century referred to themselves as "children of the third race," that is, that Christians superseded Jew and Gentile. With the name "children of the fourth race" the Nag Hammadi group was distinguishing itself from Christianity by claiming to supersede it.[17]

Providing a definition of what is "gnostic" is therefore extremely difficult. The point of debate is this: Is the phenomenon of *gnosis* a single religion, or a movement which goes beyond the limits of a single religion?[18] In *Gnosis: An Introduction*, Cristoph Markschies provided a slight tweaking of the classic description:

1. The experience of a completely other-worldly, distant, supreme God;
2. the introduction, which among other things is conditioned by this, of further divine figures, or the splitting up of existing figures into figures that are closer to human beings than the remote supreme 'God';
3. the estimation of the world and matter as evil creation and an experience, conditioned by this, of the alienation of the gnostic in the world;
4. the introduction of a distinct creator God or assistant: within the Platonic tradition he is called 'craftsman'—Greek *demiurgos*—and is sometimes described as merely ignorant, but sometimes also as evil;
5. the explanation of this state of affairs by a mythological drama in which a divine element that falls from its sphere into an evil world slumbers in human beings of one class as a divine spark and can be freed from this;

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[16] See the entries in G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), s.v. "γνῶσις".

[17] Markschies, *Gnosis: An Introduction*, 10–11.

[18] Markschies, *Gnosis: An Introduction*, 19.

6. knowledge ('gnosis') about this state, which, however, can be gained only through a redeemer figure from the other world who descends from a higher sphere and ascends to it again;

7. the redemption of human beings through the knowledge of 'that God (or the spark) in them' (TestVer, NHC IX, 3, 56, 15–20), and finally

8. a tendency towards dualism in different types which can express itself in the concept of God, in the opposition of spirit and matter, and in anthropology.[19]

Two scholars, however, have argued strongly against continued use of the term "Gnosticism," primarily because of its negative associations of not being "Christian." In his book *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* Michael Williams proposed an alternative designation: "demiurgical traditions," or, more specifically, "biblical demiurgical traditions":

> By "demiurgical" I mean all those that ascribe the creation and management of the cosmos to some lower entity or entities, distinct from the highest God. This would include most of ancient Platonism, of course. But if we add the adjective "biblical," to denote demiurgical traditions that also incorporate or adopt traditions from Jewish or Christian Scripture, the category is narrowed significantly.[20]

This definition has the advantage of not employing anachronistic terminology, but without the adjective "biblical," as Williams himself admits, the definition covers too broad a spectrum to be useful. With the adjective "biblical," however, there is (intentionally or unintentionally) perhaps a too-close connection with Jewish and Christian materials, for many of the Nag Hammadi texts themselves show a "demiurgical" foundation but make no reference to Jewish or Christian narratives.

Karen King offered a different approach. She eschewed any definition as confining and impacting negatively the study of the texts. For example, after presenting a paper at the International Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) meeting in Helsinki in 1999, a paper which became the opening chapter of her book *What is Gnosticism?*, King was pointedly asked by one participant to clarify how she would define the term "Gnosticism." King refused to offer a definition. She claimed that her only interest was to:

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[19] Markschies, *Gnosis: An Introduction*, 16–17.
[20] Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* 51–52.

> consider the ways in which the early Christian polemicists' discourse of orthodoxy and heresy has been intertwined with twentieth century scholarship on Gnosticism in order to show where and how that involvement has distorted our analysis of the ancient texts. At stake is not only the capacity to write a more accurate history of ancient Christianity in all its multiformity, but also our capacity to critically engage the ancient politics of religious difference rather than unwittingly reproduce its strategies and results.[21]

What this passage encapsulates is the program of much of recent scholarship on early Christianity and "Gnosticism." The early polemicists, whether intentionally grabbing power or not, marginalized Gnosticism as heretical and lifted up the emerging orthodoxy as the only "everywhere and at all times" truth of Christianity. Modern scholarship is able to strip away that façade and expose the arbitrariness of ancient Christianity and its modern adherents. This apparently means that any approach taken by a Christian researcher would inevitably result in a skewed understanding of Gnosticism. King wrote again: "[T]he problem of defining Gnosticism has been and continues to be primarily an aspect of the ongoing project of defining and maintaining a normative Christianity."[22]

From its very conception, then, this essay apparently is doomed to be skewed, and I would agree with such an assessment. Since any orthodox Christian researcher would not be a part of the community that wrote, preserved, and continued to be shaped by gnostic texts, he or she will inevitably misinterpret and read them against what is already familiar. Then again, no modern interpreter, including King herself, could be described as a member of such a community or as one who is free from his or her own agenda. In addition, I would argue that given King's pessimistic outlook on the use of language—if every use of a term like "gnostic" does violence to it—then by the same argument neither she (nor we) should use the term "Christian," for every use of that term will also inevitably be an attempt either to defend an orthodox perspective or to re-imagine Christianity in new terms. One of King's goals is to bring these previously ignored so-called "gnostic" materials into conversation with historic Christianity. For example, she wrote, "Far from unmaking Christianity or denigrating theological enterprises, elucidating this

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[21] Karen L. King, "The Origins of Gnosticism and the Identity of Christianity," in *Was There a Gnostic Religion?*, ed. Antti Marjanen, Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 87 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 118.

[22] King, "The Origins of Gnosticism," 116, and *What is Gnosticism?*, 18.

complexity will ground theological reflection in more accurate historical and theological reflections of the ancient material."[23] Her criticism of biblical scholarship vis-à-vis Gnosticism concludes with this call:

> The goal is not to destroy tradition but to open up space for alternative or marginalized voices to be heard within it. A fuller historical portrait of religious piety can enrich the funds of religious tradition, providing more complex theological resources to attend to the complex of issues of our own day. One's own faith is not diminished by hearing other voices; it may be strengthened and enriched.[24]

That such a paragraph could only be written by a twenty-first century American seems not to trouble King.[25] Nonetheless, this paragraph reflects the wider thinking of much of our society, and our typical response—*sola scriptura!*—is simply no longer effective.

Not all researchers who use the term "Gnosticism" do so in an attempt to compare it to Christianity, especially in the last decade. Marvin Meyer, for example, published yet another collection of gnostic gospels that interprets the texts on their own terms without comparison to the canonical gospels. His definition of Gnosticism is this:

> Gnosticism is a religious tradition that emphasizes the primary place of gnosis, or mystical knowledge, understood through aspects of wisdom (often personified wisdom) presented in creation stories, particularly stories based on the Genesis accounts, and interpreted by a variety of religious and philosophical traditions, including Platonism, in order to proclaim a radically enlightened way of life and knowledge.[26]

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[23] King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 150.

[24] King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 246.

[25] The last sentences of her book contain a hint of recognition that hers will likely not be viewed as the last word: "Ours is a post-colonial and postmodern world, struggling with the complex legacies of the increasingly pluralistic and multicultural globe we inhabit. It is essential that we gain a critical grasp on these discourses in order to disentangle them from our own work. Yet we do so with respect and appreciation for the contributions of scholars whose work constitutes our own past, knowing that our own enterprises will effect only a partial revolution, and no doubt will be subject to the critical hindsight of those who follow." King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 247. King comes perilously close here to assuming that she has a modernist, detached perspective, though the last sentence at least leaves open the possibility that her own work is as contextual as those who preceded her.

[26] Marvin W. Meyer, *The Gnostic Gospels of Jesus: The Definitive Collection of Mystical Gospels and Secret Books about Jesus of Nazareth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), xiii.

To put things in a less scholarly way, it seems that gnostic language and thinking was "in the water" of the Greco-Roman world. It drew heavily on the thought patterns of both Judaism and Platonism. Some groups, notably the Sethians associated with the *Gospel of Judas*, have an identifiable outlook. To the casual observer, others may have been simply another strain of Christians. James Robinson noted,

> Gnostic Christians surely considered themselves the faithful continuation, under changing circumstances, of that original stance which made Christians Christians. But the "somewhat different terms" "under changing circumstances" also involved real divergences, and other Christians clearly consider Gnosticism a betrayal of the original Christian position. . . . But the Nag Hammadi library also documents the fact that the rejection was mutual.[27]

Two elements deserve further discussion: the mention of "real divergences" and the "mutual rejection." Both will be addressed below.

The question of the relationship between catholic Christianity and Gnosticism is not as easily explained as was once thought. The implications of this in our own context, when many voices are claiming that creedal Christianity was never and should not be the only game in town, are considerable. Gnosticism is not what we thought it was; therefore, we are told, Christianity also cannot be what we thought it was.

III. Theology and Proclamation in a New Historical Context: The Challenge of the Gnostic Gospels

How does the church respond? Francis Pieper's theology, formulated in response primarily to modernism, does not answer the questions being raised today. Once Pieper had his "all Scripture is *theopneustos*" answer to the question of biblical authority, the rest of his dogmatics was relatively easy. Pieper never had to deal with the Gnostics, and, while he had challenging issues in his own modernist context, the answers he gave to those questions are ineffective in a pluralistic, non-foundational context. The risk we run is even greater than that we faced with historical criticism. At least in that debate everyone was a modernist, that is, everyone saw some kind of authority in Jesus and believed that he could be historically and accurately reconstructed, at least to some extent. In our present-day context, however, such chutzpah is not tolerated. We are reminded that there is no unmediated description of Jesus. The texts were written by individuals who were part of communities that had their own questions

[27] James M. Robinson, introduction to *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 4.

and issues. They were copied—and sometimes altered—by later communities who both reinterpreted and at times rewrote those narratives to suit their ever-changing situation.[28] Issues of community identity and differentiation from other communities were involved in this process, and the Jesus depicted in the gospels—whether canonical or gnostic—is simply assumed to be "someone's take on Jesus."

In a forum such as this, it is impossible to "solve" the problem of the gnostic gospels. To my knowledge, no book or article has been written by a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod theologian that analyzes or responds to these texts. Here I will lay out some areas for further investigation that I would encourage pastors and theologians to pursue. These are neither exhaustive nor the only fruitful lines of argumentation for a "response to," or classroom approaches to, the challenges of the gnostic gospels.[29]

Purity, Syncretism, and Genuine Christianity

Since Walter Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Early Christianity*,[30] the reigning assumption in early church studies is that the classic model of the development of theology cannot be born out by the evidence. That is, rather than a single orthodoxy that was later corrupted by various heresies, orthodoxy was only one—and by no means the inevitable—outgrowth of varied expressions of religious belief and practice, all of which claimed derivation from, and faithfulness to, the life and teachings of Jesus. While Bauer's thesis is not, of course, without criticism, any casual perusal of the Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen that stops at the early third century will uncover themes, language, and argumentation that sound little like that of Athanasius or Augustine, let alone Luther or Pieper. For example, Tertullian, who coined the use of *trinitas*, had essentially a modalist view

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[28] For example, Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). This is not the place to assess Ehrman's thesis and conclusions. Although factors other than "orthodox corruption" can account for some of the alterations, some examples are irrefutable.

[29] For example, the fact that the teachings of Jesus in the gnostic gospels are all narrated in post-resurrection settings (e.g., the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Gospel of Philip*). The *Gospel of Judas* is an exception in that it is set during the week of Jesus' passion. The post-resurrection setting is employed because Jesus' resurrection is viewed as his release into the physical realm from which he is able to bring *gnosis*.

[30] Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971 [German, 1934]).

of the Trinity and would be regarded as "heretical" according to later definitions of orthodoxy.

This, of course, is not news. It is news, however, that some researchers wish to define gnostic material as just another form of Christianity in the second century. In order to do so, the charge of "syncretism" must be done away with; that is, they must deny the existence of a "pure" Christianity that, when corrupted by foreign elements, thereby produced "Gnosticism." King, for example, acknowledged that a standard definition of "syncretism" would apply to gnostic materials: they are subject to "amalgamation, of blending heterogeneous beliefs and practices."[31] King also argued, however, that every religion, including Christianity, would fit this definition of syncretism and that both the ancient and modern charge of "syncretism" against Gnostics simply represents identity discourse and boundary-setting, in particular a defense of one's own already held ideas.[32]

Yet this relegation of the term "syncretism" fails when it comes to the person of Jesus and specifically to the question of whether or not the gnostic materials present anything remotely connected to the Jesus who walked the earth. There is firm textual evidence that Sethian Gnostics grafted Christian elements onto an already existing framework. Some of their writings contain no Christian elements, such as the *Three Steles of Seth*, which is essentially a description of hymns of praise sung to a gnostic "Trinity": the first stele is a hymn to the self-begotten Son, the second to the male virgin Barbelo (who is at the same time the mother, incidentally), and the third to the Unbegotten Father. Even though there is a "self-begotten Son" in this text, there is no trace whatsoever of Christian thinking or influence, though Jewish and neoplatonic traditions pervade the text.[33]

Other writings do show an adoption of Christian thinking. A remarkable pair of texts in this connection is *Eugnostos the Blessed* and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*. *Eugnostos* is a very early text, most likely first-century BC, which describes the existence of an invisible, heavenly world beyond the physical world. This world is not accessible, the text pointedly states, to philosophers (specifically, Stoics, Epicureans, and Babylonian astrologers).

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[31] Peter van der Veer, "Syncretism, Multiculturalism and the Discourse of Tolerance," in *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*, ed. Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (London: Routledge, 1994), 208, quoted in King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 223.

[32] King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 222–224.

[33] See James E. Goehring's introduction to the *Three Steles of Seth*, in Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 396.

It describes the ruling hierarchy of five beings who create successive worlds. The last, of course, is the realm of the immortal man, though this section may be a later addition. At some point, however, the text was adapted for a different cause: the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* takes the text of *Eugnostos* and places it on the lips of Jesus, who becomes the figure that makes known the revelation. Several disciples become Jesus' discussion partners, though only the disciples who typically appear in gnostic texts, such as Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, and Mary (never Peter or Paul). Philip asks the first question. Jesus appears after his resurrection, but "not in his previous form, but in the invisible spirit. And his likeness resembles a great angel of light" (*Soph. Jes. Chr.* 91,10–13). Jesus asks the disciples "What are you searching for?" and Philip responds, conveniently, "For the underlying reality of the universe and the plan" (*Soph. Jes. Chr.* 92,3–5). The final prediction of *Eugnostos* is applied to Jesus: "All I have just said to you, I said in the way you might accept, until the one who needs not be taught appears among you, and he will speak all these things to you joyously and in pure knowledge" (*Eugnostos* 90,4–11; cf. *Soph. Jes. Chr.* 114, 5–8). The only "Christian" element in the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* is the presence of Jesus as a character, but he is a character who merely mouths an already extant philosophical treatise.

The *Gospel of Judas* is another example. There is nothing about the person of Jesus, the disciples, or Judas that is not found in either the canonical gospels or Sethian Gnosticism. The use and adaptation of Jesus in such texts is an area that requires further investigation.

Gnostic Thought in Judaism and Neoplatonism

The popular impression given of the gnostic materials is that they are all about Jesus. Many gnostic texts, however, entirely lack Christian elements. James Robinson concluded, "Some traits previously thought to be characteristic of Christian Gnosticism have been shown by the Nag Hammadi library to be originally non-Christian."[34] Some texts, in particular Sethian ones, have no Christian influence, such as *Allogenes, Marsanes,* and the *Thought of Norea.* Other texts, such as *Zostrianus* and the *Apocalypse of Adam,* have themes that are only slightly related to Christianity. Some have a thin Christian veneer in that there are characters found in Christian texts but little else. Among these writings are the *Trimorphic Protennoia,* the *Gospel of the Egyptians,* and the recently recovered *Gospel of Judas.* Others, such as the *Hypostasis of the Archons, Melchizedek,*

[34] Robinson, introduction to *The Nag Hammadi Library,* 7.

and the *Apocryphon of John*, might be considered to represent a form of "Christian Gnosticism." The last text is frequently singled out as an example of the Christian-ness of the so-called "gnostic" texts.[35]

Furthermore, a monolithic religion did not exist in the Greco-Roman period, if it ever had. One cannot speak of "Judaism" and come up with a set of beliefs and practices that would reflect those of every member of that group. The Essenes, for example, held to a dualism that would not have been foreign to gnostic thinkers. Some of the texts, particularly among Sethian Gnostics, draw heavily upon Old Testament passages and characters, even if they eschew the world view and description of God in the Old Testament. The basic gnostic cosmological narrative has numerous parallels, including Platonic systems. Some individuals apparently took this similarity and adapted it even further toward a gnostic perspective. The neoplatonist Plontinus took umbrage at this adaptation. According to his student, Porphyry,

> There were in [Plotinus's] time many Christians and others, and sectarians who had abandoned the old philosophy, men . . . who . . . produced revelations by Zoroaster and Zostrianus and Nicotheus and Allogenes and Messos and other people of the kind, themselves deceived and deceiving many, alleging that Plato had not penetrated to the depths of intelligible reality. Plotinus hence often attacked their position in his lectures, and wrote the treatise to which we had given the title "Against the Gnostics."[36]

Notably Porphyry assigned the title "Against the Gnostics" to Plotinus' treatise, yet said that these texts came from "Christians and others." To Plotinus, at least, there was not much difference between Gnostics and Christians. Furthermore, he described "revelations" of Zostrianus and Allogenes, both which are titles of works found at Nag Hammadi.

Therefore, James Dunn's conclusion seems reasonable:

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[35] See Alastair B. Logan, who states: "[M]y second presupposition is that one is justified in seeking both a central core of ideas, a myth or myths based on and concretely expressed in a rite of initiation as a projection of Gnostic experience, which holds it together, and in treating it as a valid form (or forms) of interpreting Christianity." *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy: A Study in the History of Gnosticism* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), xix. See also Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[36] Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 16; translation from Robinson, introduction to *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 9.

> The more obvious interpretation of the Nag Hammadi documents is that they are all typically syncretistic: they draw upon bits and pieces from a wide range of religious influences in the ancient world, including Judaism and Christianity, but including others, too. As such they are totally explainable in terms of what we know about second and third century Gnosticism.[37]

Gnostics against the Christians

A fruitful area of investigation is the anti-Christian polemic of the gnostic writings. This has long been known from the *Apocalypse of Peter*:

> They [the catholics] will cleave to the name of a dead man, thinking that they will become pure. . . . And there shall be others of those who are outside our number who name themselves bishop and also deacons, as if they have received their authority from God. They bend themselves under the judgment of the leaders. These people are dry canals. (*Apoc. Pet.* 74,13–15; 79,22–31; cf. 73)

This anti-Christian (or to be more neutral, anti-catholic) rhetoric is seen very strongly in the *Gospel of Judas*. In two passages, the twelve disciples, who stand for the Christians, are worshipping what is called "their god." In the first, the disciples are offering sacrifices but Jesus rejects their actions. The second is even more striking. After walking in on their celebration of the Eucharist, Jesus laughs at the disciples. They respond,

> "Master, why are you laughing at [our] prayer of thanksgiving? We have done what is right." He answered and said to them, "I am not laughing at you. <You> are not doing this because of your own will but because it is through this that your god [will be] praised." They said, "Master, you are [. . .] the son of our god." Jesus said to them, "How do you know me? Truly [I] say to you, no generation of the people that are among you will know me." (*Gos. Jud.* 34,10–15)

Striking in both of these anti-catholic passages is the rejection of catholic ritual, worship, and even the Eucharist. In addition, a title of Jesus from the Synoptic Gospels, as well as a confession of the early church, is specifically rejected: Jesus is the "Son of your God," that is, "you call him Son of God but we do not."

The *Gospel of Judas* is one text, in particular, which requires further study. I hesitate to say much about this text right now, in spite of the whirlwind

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[37] J. D. G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1986), 98.

of the initial publication. If you recall, the text was hailed as providing an alternative view of Jesus' suffering and death—Jesus actually wanted Judas to betray him. This was connected, at least in scholarly circles, to various theories to explain Jesus' death. Maybe he actually was in league with Judas; maybe he wanted to die to spark a rebellion. When other scholars actually looked at a translation of *Judas*, however, it was soon recognized that there is but a single passage referencing Jesus' "request" for betrayal (*Gos. Jud.* 56). Furthermore, there is no passion story, and the actual act of betrayal is an anti-climactic conclusion to the grand Sethian cosmology laid out in the text (*Gos. Jud.* 58).

In addition, there is no consensus regarding the purpose of the text, nor indeed its translation. During the November 2006 SBL meeting, a panel of experts, including Marvin Meyer, Karen King, Elaine Pagels, and Craig Evans, gave their reflections on the text six months after its initial publication. It should be noted that there was a delay in the publication of the Coptic *editio princeps* until several months after the first translation was published. This is highly unusual. Typically a critical edition of a text is produced and translations are provided either concurrently or shortly thereafter. Not so with *Judas*. Three books, including translations, were available on Monday of Holy Week 2006, the day after the National Geographic special aired, and only a few weeks before the release of *The Da Vinci Code* movie. At this SBL session, King and Pagels argued that the text was not anti-Christian but an anti-clergy invective aimed at those who encourage Christians to martyrdom. They considered it a Christian polemic against other Christians and their blood-thirst for martyrdom. It was not mentioned that Seth is called the Christ in *Judas* (*Gos. Jud.* 52) and that Jesus is the Son of their God (*Gos. Jud.* 34). Their thesis was met with a subdued reaction and was vastly overshadowed by the other panelists, who discussed that the *Gospel of Judas* had been not only misunderstood but even mistranslated. It was all over the blogosphere, of course, though there have not yet been any journal articles on the topic. One *Gospel of Thomas* scholar, April DeConick, described it this way:

> My examination of the Coptic transcription has led me to think that certain translational errors and one mistaken reconstruction of a Coptic line led the team to the erroneous conclusion that Judas is a saint destined to join the holy generation of the Gnostics. The result is that certain claims have been made by the National Geographic that the *Gospel of Judas* says things it just does NOT say: Judas is the perfect enlightened Gnostic; Judas ascends to the holy generation; Jesus wants Judas to betray him; Jesus wants to escape the material world; Judas performs a righteous act, serving Jesus by "betraying" him; Judas will be

able to enter the divine realm as symbolized by his vision of the great house; as the thirteenth, Judas surpasses the twelve disciples, and is lucky and blessed by this number.[38]

Whatever the outcome of the scholarly debate about *Judas*, this serves to highlight the difficulties involved in the use of these texts. The communities that produced them, the rituals and beliefs behind them, and the rhetorical goals which led to their composition are all lost. Studies of these gnostic writings are in their infancy. Nevertheless, the anti-catholic perspective of many of these texts does show a differentiation between those who used texts like *Judas* and those who did not. This differentiation should not be minimized as we seek to answer the question of what Christianity looked like in the second century.

The Historical Jesus and the Gospel of Thomas

The *Gospel of Thomas* is unique among the writings found at Nag Hammadi, as well as unique among early Christian literature. It is a different form of a text called a "gospel," for a "gospel" is what its subscript says it is, at least in the Coptic translation. *Thomas* has no narrative, no birth, no passion, no deeds, and no miracles. It is simply a collection of sayings without a narrative context. In *Thomas*, one begins to see some of the formal features that would be encountered in the "gnostic" gospels but no blatant gnostic perspectives or tendencies.

Originally written in Greek, parts of *Thomas* were known beginning in the early twentieth century with two Greek fragments found at Oxyrhynchus. These were not properly identified as containing sayings matched by the Coptic version of *Thomas* found at Nag Hammadi until fifty years later. Some of the 114 sayings found in *Thomas* are remarkably similar to those in the Synoptic Gospels. For example, "He who does not hate his father and mother cannot be my disciple, and he who does not hate his brothers and sisters and does not take up his cross as I have will not be worthy of me" (*Gos. Thom.* 55).[39] In at least one case, *Thomas* preserves a form of the text that has been virtually lost in the transmission of the canonical Gospels. In Matthew 6:28 the standard text reads: "And concerning what you wear, why are you concerned? Consider the lilies of the field, *how they increase*; they do not labor or spin" (emphasis added).

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[38] April DeConick, "The Forbidden Gospels Blog: January 2007" entry for "Monday, January 29, 2007," *The Forbidden Gospels Blog*, http://forbiddengospels.blogspot.com/2007_01_01_archive.html. See now April D. DeConick, *The Thirteenth Apostle: What the* Gospel of Judas *Really Says* (London: Continuum, 2007).

[39] Cf. Matt 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; 14:26, 27.

"How they increase" seems out of place here; what does "increasing" have to do with either lilies or clothing? The original hand of Codex Sinaiticus, alone among all the witnesses, reads, "Consider the lilies of the field, *how they card*; they do not labor or spin" (emphasis added). That is, the lilies are not involved in clothes production; they do not card the wool, labor over it, or spin it into clothing. This may be dismissed as an "improvement" to the text, but Papyrus Oxyrhynhcus 655, one of the few Greek fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas*, reads: "How much more valuable are you than the lilies, which do not card nor spin" (*Gos. Thom.* 36). While *Thomas* is not identical to Codex Sinaiticus, it is based on a text that has been lost to all Greek manuscripts but one. The corruption in other manuscripts is easily explained: πῶς οὐ ξαίνουσιν ("how they do not card") was misread or misheard as πῶς αὐξάνουσιν ("how they increase").[40] Therefore, while the composition of *Thomas* itself does not reach back past the early second century, it preserves traditions and even individual words that had been lost or corrupted in the process of transmitting the canonical Gospels.

Other material in *Thomas*, while not quite reflecting thinking associated with Gnostics, at least moves in that direction. For example, saying 22 encourages a way of looking at the world that sees through the limits of the physical world. "Jesus said to them, 'When you make the inner two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and when you make the female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female, then you will enter the kingdom'" (*Gos. Thom.* 22).

Thomas cannot therefore be called a "gnostic" gospel. Nor is it really an "orthodox" gospel, for there is no mention of the cross aside from the need for carrying it in saying 55. There is no sin and forgiveness, only darkness and enlightenment; neither are there narrative or editorial helps to guide the reader toward a clearer understanding. Indeed, some sayings remain completely opaque. For example, saying 97: "Jesus said, 'The Kingdom of the Father is like a woman who was carrying a jar which was full of meal. While she was walking on a long road the handle of the jar broke; the meal spilled out behind her on the road. She did not notice it; she was unaware of the accident. When she came to her house she put the jar down and found it was empty'" (*Gos. Thom.* 97). If parables are really earthly stories with heavenly meanings, what does this mean? Without the community that preserved or created these sayings, they often remain unintelligible.

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[40] First proposed by T. C. Skeat, "The Lilies of the Field," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 37 (1938): 211–214.

Later Christians did not use this gospel or pass on the interpretive strategies necessary to understand it.

While *Thomas* has frequently been compared with the putative "Q" source for Matthew and Luke, it cannot be identical with Q (if Q ever existed). Again, the relationship (or lack thereof) of *Thomas* to the Synoptic Gospels is too complex for discussion here.[41] However, the origins, development, and use of *Thomas*, and its relationship to the canonical gospels are areas of study that should not and cannot be ignored.

The Narratives and Paul

Like the Pentateuch and the canonical gospels, gnostic perspectives on the world are not laid out in dogmatic texts but in narratives. Narratives, of course, have meaning only in the eye of the reader, and without a guide they often remain obscure. Christians have had various communities and resources—most prominently the Pauline Letters—to make clear the underlying focus of the narrative story later preserved in the canonical gospels. The gnostic materials have no comparable exegete and no enduring communities which created valid readers of their texts. As noted above with *Judas*, there is often uncertainty regarding the meaning of a given passage or even of an entire document. Nonetheless, some typical features of the gnostic material can be described.

What is a typical narrative? Here I can provide only a summary of one text, the *Apocryphon of John*. This narrative purports to be a revelation given to John by Jesus after his resurrection. This revelation includes the following cosmology. Sophia decides to generate a divine being apart from her male consort, but this offspring, named Yaldabaoth, is deformed and imperfect. To cover up her action, Sophia removes Yaldaboath from the *pleroma* and hides him in a lower sphere; left to himself, he decides to create other, lesser divine beings and the world itself. Yaldabaoth does not know about the *pleroma*, so he foolishly declares, "I am God, and there is no other God beside me" (from Isa 5:5–6). His other divine assistants decide to create man: "Let us create a man according to the image of God" (from Gen 2:7). This being, however, has no spirit. The One tricks

[41] Helmut Koester concludes that it is "unlikely that our document [*Thomas*] can be considered as an eclectic excerpt from the gospels of the New Testament." Introduction to the *Gospel of Thomas*, in Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 125. More cautiously, J. K. Elliott: "The possibility that at least some of the unique sayings preserved in Coptic Thomas may ultimately go back to Jesus is generally conceded." *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 124.

Yaldabaoth into breathing the power of his mother Sophia into this man, Adam, making him greater than the beings that created him. The One then sends Thought to Adam to help him escape his worldly prison.[42]

In this narrative, typical gnostic elements appear: for example, creation by a lower being, the exclusion of humanity from the *pleroma*, and access gained via *gnosis*. While it uses Old Testament "proof passages"—in a way that is not dissimilar from the use of the Old Testament in early Christian writings—the underlying narrative of the Old Testament, further clarified in the New Testament, is absent. That narrative could be summarized as follows: God created a perfect world; humanity fell into sin and became separated from God; God sent his Son as a human to save the world; Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God who was crucified for our sin; Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead by the Father as the first fruits of the new creation; and this creation will be restored on the last day. This brief summary is found in the creeds, in particular the Apostles' Creed.

Such a narrative is not as late as the Apostles' Creed. It is found already in Paul. Paul is notably absent from much discussion of Gnosticism and Christianity. For example, the popular book *Beyond Belief* by Elaine Pagels argued that the Gospel of John was written as a response to the *Gospel of Thomas* and that John was the writer who invented the divinity of Jesus.[43] While *Beyond Belief* claims that the divinity of Jesus was a late development, it never mentions any of the Pauline Letters (for example, Philippians 2). Particularly fruitful analysis of early Christology, including the Pauline Letters, is found in Larry Hurtado's *Lord Jesus Christ*.[44] His chapter on "Radical Diversity" engages the issue of gnostic gospels.[45]

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[42] A detailed analysis of the text is provided in Zlatko Pleše, *Poetics of the Gnostic Universe: Narrative and Cosmology in the* Apocryphon of John, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 52 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006).

[43] Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003).

[44] Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2003). For essays that are generally appreciative of Hurtado's work, see Charles A. Gieschen, "Confronting Current Christological Controversy," *CTQ* 69 (2005): 3–32; James W. Voelz, "A Review of Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*," *CTQ* 69 (2005): 33–47; and David P. Scaer, "Recent Research on Jesus: Assessing the Contribution of Larry Hurtado," *CTQ* 69 (2005): 48–62.

[45] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 519–561.

The Manuscripts

One final area of investigation is the manuscripts themselves. Recent studies into the development of the canon have helpfully demonstrated that the formation of the canon, far from a late process, influenced—and was influenced by—the use of the codex for early Christian literature.[46] While the details cannot be recounted here, some relevant observations can be made. First, the collection of the thirteen Pauline Letters (without Hebrews) was likely completed before the end of the first century, and the four canonical Gospels by the mid-second century. These collections were used by catholic and gnostic alike. Yet no gnostic writing is ever found in the same codex with either the Pauline Letters or the canonical Gospels. Furthermore, when Justin Martyr and Tatian produced their harmonies of the gospels, they were based on canonical texts and not gnostic texts.[47] The gnostic texts appear in codices with other gnostic writings; the *Gospel of Judas*, for example, is not an isolated text. Other texts in the "Codex Tchacos" are the *Letter of Philip* and the *First Revelation of James*, both of which are gnostic texts previously known from Nag Hammadi, as well as a previously unknown *Book of Allogenes*, which has not yet been published but apparently focuses on the character of Seth as typical Sethian texts do. Furthermore, there are no canonical texts in the Nag Hammadi find. This may be because the manuscripts were buried in a "purge" of the nearby monastery;[48] then again, the individual codices do not contain gnostic texts alongside canonical ones. What we do find is the eclecticism typical of the gnostic writings—alongside philosophical treatises are sections of Plato's Republic, Sethian texts, Valentinian texts, and Hermetic texts. The study of individual manuscripts within their usage in communities is still in its infancy,[49] but the fact that the canonical New Testament texts are never

[46] See J. K. Elliott, "Manuscripts, the Codex and the Canon," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 63 (1996): 105–123; T. C. Skeat, "The Oldest Manuscript of the Four Gospels?" *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997): 1–34; and Larry W. Hurtado, "The New Testament in the Second Century: Text, Collections and Canon," in *Transmission and Reception: New Testament Text-Critical and Exegetical Studies*, ed. Jeff W. Childers and D. C. Parker, Texts and Studies, 3rd ser., 4 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), 3–27.

[47] There is, however, debate about *Thomas* and the *Diatessaron*, as raised by William L. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 25 (Leiden; New York: E. J. Brill, 1994).

[48] Markschies, *Gnosis: An Introduction*, 50.

[49] See Colin H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt*, The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1977 (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); and

found alongside or in the same codices as gnostic writings says something about community differentiation.

III. Epilogue

Unmentioned so far is the issue of what is central in Christianity. Is it the sacraments? Both Sethians and Valentinians apparently practiced Baptism; the Lord's Supper was prominent in Valentinianism because *gnosis* was passed through the mouth, and, whether in a kiss or in the Lord's Supper, this gnosis was passed on. Is it a moral perspective? Some Gnostics practiced celibacy and continence, for example, but so did many catholic Christians. No, the central question is the work of Jesus. Is he a revealer of knowledge or is he one who acts to save? Specifically, did Jesus rise bodily from the dead, and what does that have to do with us? The point at issue is articulated quite clearly in an advertisement for a lecture by Karen King:

> According to Iranaeus [*sic*], a second century church leader, heretics denied the full humanity of Christ, making nonsense of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. Dr. King asserts that newly available texts, such as *The Gospel of Mary* and *The Treatise on the Resurrection*, vividly demonstrate that what was at stake was not the reality of the resurrection, but the question of what it means to be fully human. In an age of genomes and post-Freudian psychologies, where notions of the body and the self have shifted dramatically from those of Jesus' day, has the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection shifted as well?[50]

Many in contemporary society have problems with Jesus walking on water and healing people. They say that it could not have happened, so the canonical gospels must be false. The gnostic gospels do not describe Jesus like that, and thus some deem them to be more reliable. The church must point to the resurrection. If Jesus rose from the dead, then a walk on water is no big deal; if he did not rise from the dead, then walking on water does not matter. In a generation that searches not only for a narrative to explain existence but for an answer to the question of what it means to be human, we must hold forth this: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in

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Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006).

[50] "MBS 2005 Beck Lecture with Dr. Karen King," *Massachusetts Bible Society Web site* (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Bible Society, 2005), http://www.massbible.org/sections/programs/beck_lectures/past_becks/2005_beck_king/2005_beck_king.html.

accordance with the Scriptures. . . . If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Cor 15:3, 4, 14).

Response to Jeffrey Kloha

Charles R. Schulz

I am grateful for the careful argumentation of Professor Kloha regarding the syncretism of the gnostic texts.[51] The difference between the multiple historical and cultural influences in the biblical texts and the wild conglomeration in the later extra-biblical materials deserves such attention. I happily receive his instruction about the manuscript tradition, which illustrates that the supposed primordial soup of second-century Christian thought already observed differences in kind. This and the fact that ancient polemics cut both ways demonstrate the original distinction between orthodox Christianity and the deviations. I do miss any suggestion that we might yet make the traditional argument—a position so significant for historic Lutheran identity and ecclesiology even with all its difficulties—namely, that Christ preserves his church through the ages and therefore lost "Christianities" were simply not Christianity.

The paper provides a good foundation. Professor Kloha notes, for example, that the Sethian Gnostics "draw heavily upon Old Testament passages and characters, even if they eschew the world view and description of God in the Old Testament." While many in our culture no longer think in canonical categories, Christians confused by the authority claimed for the non-canonical texts might well be taught to ask themselves which texts stand in better continuity with the Old Testament. By inviting the Old Testament to determine the rest of the canon, the foreign character of the gnostic texts could be demonstrated at many points.

It is easy to sympathize with the first-century Jew who heard the apostolic message as a rather strange and fanciful interpretation of the

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[51] The relevance of this topic was brought home to me when I discovered that someone had stumbled upon the Web site of my Church, St. Thomas Lutheran, by using the search terms "Secret Gospel of Thomas." I then added a hyperlink, "All we can tell you about the Secret Gospel of Thomas," to Professor Kloha's article in the Lutheran Witness. Already at least one visitor followed that link. For the article, see Jeffrey Kloha, "The Revelation and Inspiration of the New Testament," *Lutheran Witness* 125, no. 8 (September 2006): 6–11.

hopes of Israel. Would it not be natural to accuse Paul of playing, like a Gnostic, wild and free with the Scriptures by introducing strange new elements? Paul himself admits that the Spirit of Jesus reveals what never entered into the mind of man; still, once revealed, it harmonizes with the Old Testament faith. In spite the gnostic-sounding Pauline vocabulary of archons, the pleroma, the evil age, sophia, gnosis, mysteries, and secret revelation,[52] and in spite of the popularity of his epistles with gnostic teachers, there are vital continuities which the gnostic texts abandon—the character of God, the nature of humanity, the world to come, and the relationship between God's word and saving deeds. Gnosticism, roughly characterized as a religion of salvation by revelation, employed historic and mythological narratives metaphorically. They retained their import even if invented from whole cloth. Christianity, as a revelation of Christ's work of salvation, depends entirely on his deeds done in flesh and blood.

Professor Kloha notes the different understandings of salvation, and this too deserves emphasis, particularly because the insight has so many fruitful applications for our proclamation. For this purpose, one might take a phrase from E. P. Sanders and define "gnosticism" as a *pattern of religion*. Most significant for the mission of the church is the natural tendency of the human mind to develop such erring systems of faith. For example, teachings within the Nation of Islam reveal the inherent superiority of the original black race and explain the existence of white peoples as the consequence of the malicious experiments of an evil black scientist, Yacub. Origin stories of Scientology interpret personal struggles as the consequence of traumatic experiences of past lives. It seems that extraterrestrial dictators long ago grafted deleterious implants into our souls, which can only be delivered by a costly treatment program. Traces of the pattern appeared again when it was discovered that a famous singer had sired scores of children as he traveled to perform all around the country and then, as the rumors of his profligacy spread, hundreds more gladly claimed him as their father. All such origin stories reveal the inherent but secret dignity of the believers who otherwise feel estranged or at least under-appreciated in the world.

Nor does the gnostic pattern limit itself to such fanciful story-telling. It appears in Christian attempts to articulate the gospel as an "eternal truth" revealed in, but not established by, the words and work of Jesus Christ.

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[52] 1 Cor 1:5–6, 24, 30; 2:7–8, 10; 8:2; Gal 1:3–4; Eph 2:1–2; and Col 1:25–28, 2:9. These all show how Paul emphasizes the importance of revelation in salvation and can speak of the Christian as estranged from this world because of the hostile spiritual powers which rule it.

"Smile, God loves you" and even "Jesus loves me this I know" become slogans of a hollow faith unless one also sings, "he who died, heaven's gates to open wide" (that is, to establish the new heaven and new earth with full bodied resurrection). A gospel of "God loves me, I'm Okay, You're Okay" dresses up the American civic virtue of tolerance as the mystery revealed from the divine realm. This pattern would tell us that God has never been all that concerned about our behavior *per se*. Witness the popular children's book *You are Special* by Max Lucado. In it, a wooden puppet discovers the secret that he can dismiss the judgments of others once he learns to hearken to the words of the woodcarver, who loves him just the way he is. In this putatively Christian story, there is no Christ-figure apart from Lucia, who only functions to reveal the message, illustrate its power, and direct others to experience for themselves the personal revelation of divine acceptance.

In the Augsburg Confession, Article III, on the Son of God, appropriately follows Article II, on original sin. The work of the Son of God does not first and foremost answer man's ignorance of his natural okay-ness; rather, the Son of God delivers man from the Father's wrath against sin. As Professor Kloha wrote, in the *Gospel of Thomas* "there is no sin and forgiveness, only darkness and enlightenment" and in the *Gospel of Truth* the cross does away with ignorance because it "makes the Father known." It is not just necessary to come to know the Father; rather, we need to believe that the *Father* has come to know *us* in love through the *work* of the Son on our behalf. Jesus Christ's saving deed was principally directed God-ward. We have a God problem and God had a problem with us until his Son stepped in to reconcile us by his blood.

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Reformation Christology: Some Luther Starting Points

Robert Rosin

"Reformation Christology" is an impossible topic in the space allotted. A narrower topic, relatively speaking, is Martin Luther's Christology, which leaves *only* about one hundred and twenty heavyweight volumes, each the proverbial blunt instrument that could do in the person foolish enough to think that Luther can be managed in this space. Nor is it just a matter of volume(s). A conceptual argument lurks in the shadows: Did Luther really have a Christology? Not that Luther was uninterested in Christ. Christ, said Luther, was the focal point: "One doctrine rules in my heart, namely, faith in Christ. All my theological thought ebbs and flows from it, through it, and to it day and night. Yet I realize that all I have grasped about the height, breadth, and depth of this wisdom amounts to poor, measly first fruits and [is just] bits and pieces."[1]

It is not "Christ," but rather a question of the "-ology," that gives us pause. One looks in vain for a coherent, systematic treatment of the doctrine of Christ that is at least to some degree a presentation in abstract.[2] Luther was a biblical theologian, not a systematician. He neither wrote nor lectured in that style. Instead, Luther was an "occasional writer." This does not mean that he wrote every once in a while—one does not produce better than one hundred volumes doing that. In fact, he could keep two secretaries busy at once, while he also scribbled away. As he once quipped, "I deliver almost as soon as I conceive."[3]

The "occasional" problem is crucial in understanding how Luther viewed Christ. Different occasions with varied circumstances shaped his answers to the problems at hand. That is part of his view. There was no

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[1] Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [*Schriften*], 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), 40.I:33. Hereafter cited as WA. For the English edition, see Martin Luther, *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), 27:145. Hereafter cited as *LW*.

[2] Whether dogmatic theology is ever really theology in the abstract is a discussion for another day.

[3] WATR 4:189; *LW* 54:326. *Table Talk*, no. 4188 (1538).

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hope, no expectation, that he could ever exhaust all that could be said, no way to wrap up everything into *loci theologici* with a thick "*de doctrina Christi*" section. Yet this does *not* preclude making summary statements. Luther had no patience for Erasmus throwing himself back into the arms of the church and instead asserted boldly: *Spiritus Sanctus non est scepticus.*[4] To be honest and realistic, one never really finishes with "Christ" once and for all. Rather God continues to engage his people in a real, ongoing, existential (not existentialist) way. Luther would come to realize this, and his own writings on Christ reflect it. Some texts are better than others when it comes to mining Luther's thought, but one should always remember to read with the circumstances well in view. That is part of the reason Luther said "historians are the most useful people and we cannot thank and praise them enough."[5] Yet while circumstances changed both in terms of God's engagement and Luther's writing about it, Christ remained the anchor that held Luther's theology firm.[6] At bottom, the message of Luther, as of Christianity, was simple. A child can say, "I am Jesus' little lamb," or, "Jesus loves me, this I know." Or, since 2007 is the Paul Gerhardt year: "Lord Jesus, who does love me, now spread your wings above me, and shield me from alarm. Though Satan would assail me, your mercy will not fail me. I rest in your protecting arm." Yes, there is a simple message.

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[4] WA 18:606; *LW* 33:24.

[5] WA 50:384; *LW* 34:276.

[6] Lutherans saw this Christ-focus early and hung on for dear life. Through any number of in-house theological arguments, the clash often focused on whether Christ would be lost or mitigated. Take the flap over the Leipzig Interim, for example. Critics weighed in to chastise Philipp Melanchthon for forfeiting too much. They claimed that he had surrendered the cause. Perhaps so, but it also might be easier to criticize when imperial troops are not just down the road. With the war going horribly for the Smalcald League at the time, the Lutherans were something like a boxer pinned in the corner, covering up and hoping to hang on till the bell for a chance to regroup and push back next round. So Melanchthon conceded all sorts of things in the Interim (including the *sola*, some complained), but with all the punches taken, look at the three things left: justification by grace, the Lord's Supper in both kinds, and pastors/priests keeping their wives. In two of those three, Christ is immediately the focus. The third helped stall the rebuilding of that old sacred-secular wall that Luther razed in his 1520 *Appeal to the Christian Nobility* with implications for vocation and Christian service in daily life. Losing the idea of vocations as ways to show the fruits of faith would let "sacred" works up off the canvas, special good works needed for finishing off salvation, and Christ would be lost in the confusion. One may quibble with the attempt to salvage Melanchthon's efforts and reputation, but Christ still was his focal point. Both sides saw the importance of Christ—who he is and what he does. It marked evangelical theology.

While simple, Luther's theology is hardly simplistic. Only consider his comments on Christ: the intricacies and wonders of the things Luther touched on could occupy a person until Christ returns and there would still be more to explain. It is a daunting task. Yet there is no need to rehearse the basics from classes on Reformation history or dogmatics. I would rather mention quickly what some others have done with the topic and then note some of the interesting accents of Luther on Christ—what he says, and how and why he says it—with the hope of sparking more occasional thinking. I hope that by looking at Luther's take in various circumstances, we might realize that our task is really the same: not to find a Luther quote and sling it at a problem, but to watch Luther in action so that we might seek better to engage, assess, and then divide rightly the word of truth.

It has been said that more books have been written about Luther than any other figure in human history except for Jesus Christ.[7] Yet there are only a handful of books on Luther's Christology and that handful is not always as helpful as one might wish. In the centuries after "the case of Luther," Luther and the Reformation had become a kind of football up for grabs, fought over first in theological/confessional circles and then in the wider political and cultural arena. Having barely survived the Enlightenment and nineteenth-century progressive idealism, Luther underwent a renaissance about a hundred years ago. Prior to World War I, German culture had lauded Luther as arguably the most influential German to date,[8] but not all agreed. Critics from Roman Catholic, liberal, and leftist ranks chipped away at Luther's pedestal so that, in the wake of the war, some Protestants thought it time to regroup and revisit his role. Luther was reexamined primarily as a theologian by Karl Holl, Friederich Gogarten, Erich Vogelsang, and others.[9] The trend was set by Holl with his

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[7] So says John Todd, a Roman Catholic historian, in *Luther: A Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), xvi. His book added to the pile.

[8] A 2003 a poll done by ZDF, the "Second German Television Network," still had Luther second, standing only behind Konrad Adenauer among all-time influential Germans. Karl Marx placed third, perhaps a DDR memory dying hard. For the ZDF story, see "Best Germans: Adenauer Beats Marx and Luther," *About.com Web site* (About, Inc., a part of the New York Times Company, 2007), http://german.about.com/cs/culture/a/bestger.htm.

[9] Nineteenth-century Lutheranism (Protestantism) had lost sight of the Reformation long ago, instead selling its birthright for the blessing of the state. In a closed, mechanical universe, the old Luther-era way of thinking that presumed accepting at face value both the biblical stories and the theology that went with them had given way to a message that set forth moral and cultural goals for what the church was to do. While the church had been a great civilizing agent for centuries, in the era of the modern

"Was verstand Luther unter Religion?"[10] The result? Luther's primary intention and contribution was once again seen as fundamentally theological.

Is it enough, however, to characterize Luther's primary thrust as "theological"? In fact, Holl did not quite hit the target, though others that followed would do better. For Holl, Luther's Reformation was primarily theocentric. Compare that with the Luther statement mentioned earlier: "One doctrine rules in my heart, namely, faith in Christ."[11] Holl's attempt at recovering Luther was progress, certainly better than what had been championed, but Luther still was not in focus.[12] Since Holl, theology regained some attention, at least for a time, though *Geistesgeschichte* has fallen out of favor and, within history, the study of theology per se is not what it once was. Instead theology has become part of cultural studies or even a mask for the history of power politics, as one can see from a look at professional societies' conference programs.

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state the inculcating of moral/cultural values could probably be better done by the state itself. Yet church could still play an assisting role, adding a certain eternal *gravitas* to the efforts. So the church applauded efforts to establish and inculcate a *Kultur* that had little to do with the gospel Luther once treasured. Yet Luther still played a role as a rallying point, praised for his heroic stand that inspired high moral sacrifice and furthered nation building. Efforts to refocus began against that background. See James M. Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Saviour: German Evangelical Theological Factions and the interpretation of Luther, 1917–1933* (Toronto: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000). Others in the revival were Werner Elert, Emmanuel Hirsh, and Paul Althaus.

[10] In *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1928), 1:1–110. Available in English as Karl Holl, *What Did Luther Understand by Religion?*, ed. James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense, trans. Fred W. Meuser and Walter R. Wietzke (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977). Yet while Holl sought to reemphasize the theological, he did not give up on the argument for the Reformation as the seedbed of modern, progressive German culture. See Karl Holl, *The Cultural Significance of the Reformation*, trans. Karl Hertz, Barbara Hertz, and John Lichtblau (New York: Meridian Books, 1959). Nor did Holl succeed in convincing others in the Luther Renaissance to follow precisely in his footsteps. Gogarten, for example, criticized Holl for being still too intent on order—moral law—in his view of Luther.

[11] *LW* 27:145; WA 40.I:33.

[12] Regin Prenter registers essentially the same complaint. In "Luther on Word and Sacrament," he discussed Holl's view of Luther's exegesis, which again comes out as theocentric. Instead, wrote Prenter, "To Luther the Bible is a book which bears witness to God's decisive action, that is, his judgment and forgiveness in and through the incarnate, crucified, and risen Jesus Christ." In *More About Luther*, Jaroslav J. Pelikan, Regin Prenter, and Herman A. Preus, Martin Luther Lectures 2 (Decorah, IA: Luther College Press, 1958), 77.

Yet theology still survives with studies of Luther on Christ (or Christology), though the titles gravitate toward Luther on soteriology, leaping in already at that point, with fewer major works about Luther on Christ. When it comes to studies that start or stay more with Christ, there are only a few. Before the Luther Renaissance, Theodosius Harnack had a study with many useful observations, though it homogenized the reformer at the expense of the historical particulars.[13] Erich Seeberg, on the other hand, recognized historical development, but he was more interested in trying to find philosophical underpinnings that he thought drove Luther.[14] More recently, there is the very readable work of Ian Siggins.[15] His study moves beyond St. Paul and highlights the Johannine elements in Luther's thought, along with Luther's efforts to take his cue from what went on in the early church leading up to and through Chalcedon. With Siggins, however, the pendulum may have swung too far. More John is fine, but it comes at the expense of Paul. Plus, Siggins takes a dogmatic rather than a historical tack, which winds up sacrificing too much context.[16] Yves Congar has also written on Luther and Christ, arguing that for Luther the human nature is downplayed so much that it seems simply to tag along as the place where the divine alone holds sway.[17] Congar argued that Jesus' humanity is the real focus, dependent on the divine, yet where salvation really takes place even as the humanity sets the pace for the life of the believer. He thought that Luther, because he was so fixed on Christ in action, failed to deliver a balanced Christology that covers all the necessary points one expects to find in a *locus* on Christ.[18]

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[13] Theodosius Harnack, *Luthers Theologie mit besonderer Beziehung auf seine Versöhnungs- und Erlösungslehre*, vol. 2, *Luthers Lehre von dem Erlöser und der Erlösung*, 2nd ed. (Munich: C. Kaiser Verlag, 1927).

[14] Erich Seeberg, *Luther Theologie: Motive und Ideen*, vol. 2, *Christus: Wirklichkeit und Urbild* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1937).

[15] Ian D. Kingston Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

[16] Context! Students ask, "What did Luther say about . . . ?" and the historical department drives them crazy by replying, "When?" Context matters. Compare the rich young man with Jesus in Matthew 19 to the jailor at Philippi in Acts 16. One can go overboard, of course, and refuse ever to make a summary statement about Luther's thought, and perhaps the gulf between early and late Luther is not quite as wide as some might argue. Still, attention to context helps highlight nuances and makes any attempt at a summary picture all the richer.

[17] Yves Congar, *Dialogue between Christians: Catholic Contributions to Ecumenism*, trans. Philip Loretz (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1966).

[18] Congar's model for a *locus* on Christology was Thomas Aquinas. The preference for Thomas will surface again in the "New Catholic" revisionist view of Luther.

Perhaps the most helpful work about Luther on Christ is by Marc Lienhard. He stayed with the historical flow in Luther's thought over his life, showing growth and development along with simply highlighting different accents in different circumstances.[19] That approach immediately reminds the reader that nothing happens in a vacuum. Luther is not arbitrary, nor is he out of balance (contra Congar), but rather he does indeed have principles and anchor points that he applies in context. It takes vigorous, honest critical thinking on the part of the modern reader to grasp what Luther thought. There is plenty to find on Luther's view of Christ, but the approach often starts with soteriology and then backs into Christology, the "economic" approach that moves from his work to describing the person. Yet there is something to be said for starting with Christ and moving into the work, particularly when, as we shall see, *who* Christ is affects *what* he does on man's behalf. The Augsburg Confession begins with Article III and then moves to Article IV concerning justification.

When looking through the eyes of Luther, what kind of Christ does one see? Mindful of the caveats, one can highlight some of the ways Luther emphasized Christ at various times during his life and reform efforts. Initially, Luther's Christ was no friend but rather the judge enthroned on the rainbow with a leveling sword and consuming fire—not arbitrary or unfair, just all too righteous for Luther's eternal good. God had set the standard to attain, but how much was enough? One never knows. Whatever is brought to the table never measures up. The church offered means—sacraments and supplements—but it wisely remained ambiguous (yet encouraging) when it came to getting from here to there. So who wanted to take a chance, and who would challenge the church?

Luther, however, found a new Christ. There were some theological helps to push Luther along as he began his odyssey. The first five centuries of the church had much to say about Christ and clearly prized him.[20] How the

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[19] Marc Lienhard, *Luther, Witness to Jesus Christ: Stages and Themes in the Reformer's Christology*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982).

[20] Luther eventually came to the point where he noted the contribution of the *consensus quinquesaecularis*, but he did not feel obligated to it when he thought Scripture said otherwise. His Worms speech is a prime example. Later Lutherans wanted to defend their catholicity, but they, too, came to balance the historic voice of the church with exegetical results. A recent study is Quentin D. Stewart, "Catholicity or Consensus? The Role of the Consensus Patrum and the Vincentian Canon in Lutheran Orthodoxy: From Chemnitz to Quenstedt" (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, 2006).

fathers sorted through Christology, especially the two natures relating to who Christ is and what he does, took time to sink in for Luther, but deep roots would develop. Augustine's talk of grace also helped, though Luther would later leave him behind. Incarnation would be seen not simply as entrance but the whole life and work of Christ through cross and resurrection, and it was incarnation for a purpose. The realization and implications of this did not spring up overnight, but it can be seen by the time Luther took up the task of professor. His early classroom work—the *Dictata super Psalterium*—shows evidence of this.[21] Early talk of an indwelling Christ smacks of the neoplatonic in Augustinianism, but it seems as if Luther used that coincidentally; it was part of his tradition rather than an intentional program.[22] The point is that Luther did not change cleanly or sharply all at once. There was a tie to the old but also a definite shift going on.

More important is what Luther seemed consciously to be doing. He found Christ regularly in the Old Testament.[23] While some of his explanations may seem too allegorical for our taste, one should not throw out the baby with the four-fold bathwater. Luther would get beyond the *quadriga*. His use of the *quadriga* actually helps highlight breakthrough ideas. For example, as Christ stands in front of Moses in the burning bush—incarnation—Luther starts to think of the active participation of

[21] For example, when Luther deals with Christ as God incarnate in Psalm 90 (WA 4:53; *LW* 11:195), when he talks of Christ as God on the highest possible sense in Psalm 11 (WA 3:93), and when he has God as Christ bring grace in Psalm 99 (WA 4:125; *LW* 11:277–278). These places do not just use the vocabulary but show an awareness of the significance.

[22] As time passed, the church fathers themselves became more coincidental to Luther in this sense: they were certainly closer to Christ than was Luther, but that did not make them somehow inspired or guarantee they would necessarily be correct by virtue of chronological proximity. They, too, were human and capable of missing something in the prophetic/apostolic message. So while honored, they were not automatically privileged. Luther came to see them rather like how we grow in our view and understanding of our own parents. A later, more nuanced relationship need bring no disrespect but might actually mean a richer appreciation for what they contributed. See Scott Hendrix, "Deparentifying the Fathers: The Reformers and Patristic Authority," in *Auctoritas Patrum: Contributions on the Reception of the Church Fathers in the 15th and 16th Century*, ed. Leif Grane, Alfred Schindler, and Markus Wriedt, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz 37 (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1993), 1:55–68.

[23] For example, Luther tied the presence of God at Sinai to Christ's presence, and the bush burning reminded Luther of Christ: blazing divinity tied to that which was there before Moses' eyes in the bush burning (humanity), God came in a desolate place no one would choose even as Christ came to Mary of low regard. WA 3:385; *LW* 10:324–325.

both natures, distancing himself a bit from Augustine, whose neoplatonic bent tended to see the accomplishment of salvation depending more heavily on the divine flowing through the humanity, while for Luther it was more integrated. Instead of God being hidden afar, divinity was right in front of him (in Christ), though hidden in humanity—God in the bush prompted this thinking. This right-in-front-of-you emphasis could be a reflection of nominalism, but Luther would not keep the emphasis simply for that reason. The Bible mattered. That Luther would not simply repeat the standard line is seen in his rethinking of grace, which was there not merely to assist or enable (as Luther once learned from the nominalist *via moderna*) but to save completely, totally.[24] In another example of change, he saw God fully involved, not only in high-spirited, upbeat moments, but also in sorrow and suffering. It is not just the church as the body of Christ that suffers (as Luther once learned), but God in Christ as well.[25] In short, Luther from the start stood by the historical expressions of the church in the creeds and the Christological work of the fathers heading toward Chalcedon. He also reflected the tradition of his teachers, as is natural. Yet the heritage did not seem really to provide the answers or the comfort he sought. So alongside the nod to tradition, there is evidence in Luther's earliest work for the start of what would become a significant shift in how Luther saw the incarnation and what it means.

When it came to medieval theology's influence, we know that Luther understood more of High Scholasticism than was once thought. He simply does not spend much time there because his own context was Late Scholasticism or nominalism.[26] There Luther resonated to the immediacy of God in Christ and the stress laid on the two natures, each doing what is proper to it; nominalism's distinction of the two natures, however, seemed also to keep them less than integrated. Luther would come to talk less about individual natures and more about the whole person. Moreover, his view of the beyond of Christ's work also changed. Luther found no real comfort in Scholasticism's Christ, who might have cleared a path and shown a way, yet still left those trusting him to take up the example set

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[24] Reinhold Schwarz, "Gott ist Mensch: zur Lehre von der Person Christi bei den Ockhamisten und bei Luther," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 63 (1966): 289–351.

[25] Erich Vogelsang, *Die Anfänge Luthers Christologie: nach der ersten Psalmenvorlesung* (Berlin; Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1929), 18–19.

[26] Denis R. Janz, *Luther and Late Medieval Thomism: A Study in Theological Anthropology* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983), and *Luther on Thomas Aquinas: The Angelic Doctor in the Thought of the Reformer* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989).

before them and to follow him, hoping to meet the expectations set.[27] In comparing Luther and the nominalists, the crucial question is not where one finds similarities but where one finds differences as well as how and why those differences are significant. Some have argued for continuity: in the long light at the end of an era comes an ingathering of the best from that fading age, reaping the fruit of the nominalist thought and sowing seeds for the Reformation to carry on.[28] There are always likely to be connections, but what about the dissimilarities and the apparent methodological change?

Luther's new view of Christ came as he learned to read the Bible differently, not through Aristotle's syllogisms but from the texts themselves.[29] This is a small sentence, but probably the biggest point when it comes to how Luther sees Christ. A change in method brings a change in the outcome. The "New Learning" of Renaissance humanism provided tools of the languages to read the texts,[30] coupled with history and the

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[27] A view captured by the well-known statement, *Facientibus quod in se est.*

[28] Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963). Oberman argued for a line of thinking from Augustine through Gregor of Rimini and on to Luther, so that Luther's contributions were really the germination of seeds transmitted and sown in the *via gregorii*. Unfortunately the path seems to trail off. Apparent similarities in a kind of associative method or approach are problematic in history and do not really seal the case. The methodological debate is part of this exchange: Heiko A. Oberman, "Reformation: Epoche oder Episode," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 68 (1977): 56–111, and Leif Grane, "Lutherforschung und Geistesgeschichte: Auseinandersetzung mit Heiko A. Oberman," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 68 (1977): 302–314.

[29] If there is any doubt about method being key, see the following: Leif Grane, *Modus loquendi theologicus: Luthers Kampf um die Erneuerung der Theologie (1515–1518)*, Acta theological Danica 12 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975); *Contra Gabrielem: Luthers Auseinandersetzung mit Gabriel Biel in der Disputatio Contra Scholasticam Theologiam, 1517*, Acta theological Danica 4 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962); "Die Anfänge von Luthers Auseinandersetzung mit dem Thomismus," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 95 (1970): 241–250; and "Luther and Scholasticism," in *Luther and Learning: The Wittenberg University Luther Symposium*, ed. Marilyn J. Harran (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1985), 52–68. On the tributaries that fed Luther's reform, compare: Heiko A. Oberman, "Headwaters of the Reformation: Initia Lutheri—Initia Reformationis," in *Luther and the Dawn of the Modern Era: Papers for the Fourth International Congress for Luther Research*, ed. Heiko A. Oberman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 40–88, and Lewis W. Spitz, "Headwaters of the Reformation: Studia Humanitatis, Luther Senior, et Initia Reformationis," in *Luther and the Dawn of the Modern Era*, ed. Heiko A. Oberman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 89–116.

[30] Where and when Luther first had contact with Renaissance humanism remains an open question, but the contact was early. Already in Erfurt he began to study Greek with fellow monk Johannes Lang, and the Hebrew study tools of Johannes Reuchlin

sense to see the Bible as God's story of redemption. Rather than the product of a harvest, Luther's Christ seen from various angles and in various ways stemmed rather from biblical roots. As Luther read the Bible, he saw Christ in the life of God's people, engaging them in both the Old and New Testaments in terms of sin and the promise of saving grace, and he expected God to deal with him (and with any believer) the same way.

Several things were going on at once that helped Luther see Christ differently. For some time, Renaissance humanism had been bringing pressure on the tight grip that Scholasticism held on the universities. Scholasticism understandably did not want to share, and that approach—touting syllogisms used in dialectical argument—dominated higher learning. Renaissance humanism saw a role for logic, which was part of the classical curriculum. Man did not live by syllogisms alone. There were other angles to consider, including rhetoric and the maddeningly interesting vagaries of life as seen in the study of history.[31] Yet Scholasticism held on tight at the universities while humanists complained. That was one factor: the ingredients for a new way of thinking were available. The second thing that helped Luther was his own appointment as professor at one of those universities. Wittenberg was relatively green and without entrenched traditions. To attract a wide range of teachers and students to this "academic Siberia" at a slow spot on the Elbe River, Elector Frederick's men not only left it to the *via antiqua* and *via moderna* to sort it out among themselves as to which would hold sway, but the door was opened also for humanists. The university's charter specifically mentioned "posie and the arts." Throw into this mix a newly minted professor who was expected to add his two-cents worth to the

gave him access to Hebrew. Luther seems to have been largely self-taught. See Helmar Junghans, "Der Einfluss des Humanismus auf Luthers Entwicklung bis 1518," in *Lutherjahrbuch* 37 (1970): 37–101, and *Der junge Luther und die Humanisten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985).

[31] Humanists would tout a core of grammar, poetry, rhetoric, history, and moral philosophy, branching out from there. It was not simply what was done but how it was done: with a certain elegance and engagement. See Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic and Humanist Strains* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961); *Medieval Aspects of Renaissance Learning: Three Essays*, ed. and trans. Edward P. Mahoney, Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies 1 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1974); Charles G. Nauert, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Hanna H. Gray, "Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24 (1963): 497–514; and Lewis W. Spitz, "Humanismus/Humanismusforschung," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. Horst Robert Balz et al. (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986) 15:639–661.

theological scene. Like countless new academics, Luther scrambled to do those first lectures, looking for new angles and for things to say from the lecture pulpit. At the same time, he had his own theological questions to answer. Working on both, he found help in biblical tools from some of the humanists. They helped him see the Bible, and Christ, differently. Convinced that he was not alone in his struggles, Luther took his new ideas into the classroom where appropriate, and others rallied to this theology. That only encouraged Luther to press for change in the program at Wittenberg. In his first years as professor, he pressed for the hiring of humanists and the phase-out of scholasticism.[32] In a sense, the Reformation was the product of cultural and educational reform.[33] Method mattered! Change the method and new results come.[34] Others came close at times, and Luther certainly acknowledged earlier voices that were cut off, but no one seemed to be quite able to get a whole-Bible grasp of things in the same way as Luther, a man with a metanarrative before the buzzword was

[32] For Luther's September 1517 "Disputation against Scholastic Theology," see *LW* 31:3–16; WA 1:220–228. In theses 43, 44, and 50, Luther said that it was wrong to say one needed Aristotle to become a theologian, and, in fact, that the opposite was true: it is only without Aristotle (that is, without his logic) that one truly becomes a theologian, for Aristotle was to theology as darkness was to light.

[33] Luther's efforts to replace scholasticism with humanists at the university can be followed in Walter Friedensburg, ed., *Urkundenbuch der Universität Wittenberg*, Geschichtsquellen der Provinz Sachsen und des Freistaates Anhalt, Neue Reihe 3 (Magdeburg: Selbstverlag der Historischen Kommission, 1926), and *Geschichte der Universität Wittenberg* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1917). Luther's wider contacts in the decade are the subject of Timothy P. Dost, *Renaissance Humanism in Support of the Gospel in Luther's Early Correspondence: Taking All Things Captive* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001). See also Max Steinmetz, "Die Universität Wittenberg und der Humanismus (1502–1521)" in *450 Jahre Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg*, vol. 1, *Wittenberg 1502–1817*, ed. Leo Stern et al. (Halle: Selbstverlag der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 1952), 103–139, especially 108–112; Karl Bauer, *Die Wittenberger Universitätstheologie und die Anfänge der Deutschen Reformation* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Siebeck [Paul Mohr], 1928); and Maria Grossmann, *Humanism in Wittenberg, 1485–1517* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1975). One recounting of Luther's efforts at curriculum change is Robert Rosin, "The Reformation, Humanism, and Education: The Wittenberg Model for Reform," *Concordia Journal* 16 (1990): 301–318. A longer, more recent study is Jens-Martin Kruse, *Universitätstheologie und Kirchenreform: Die Anfänge der Reformation in Wittenberg (1516–1522)* (Mainz: von Zabern, 2002). On Luther's approach to education, see Robert Rosin, "Luther on Education," *Lutheran Quarterly* 21 (2007): 197–210.

[34] In a 1518 letter to his old teacher Jodokus Trutfetter, Luther wrote: "I believe simply that it is impossible to reform the church if the canons, the decretals, the scholastic theology, the philosophy, logic as they now are not uprooted and another study installed." WABr 1:170.

invented.[35] As Luther approached his professional task, he would read the verse but quickly "window out" to see the larger pericope, the chapter, the book, and the whole Bible, finding connections across the board, even as he zoomed back in on the verse(s) at hand. This was fluid but certainly not without focus. In the end, Luther's thinking about the Bible revolved not so much around a unifying idea as around a unifying person: Christ.

What came from all this? Enough groundwork has been laid to show why these ideas are significant and where they might lead. Some of the insights from the early years have already been mentioned. Luther certainly wanted to be in step with the creeds, and he paid attention to the fathers and knew the church traditions. As he sorted out his own theological problems, looking for a loving God, it was in the Scriptures that Luther really looked to find Christ. One can see the results in a strong influence of St. John with God dwelling among us, but St. Paul also is prominent with Christ's saving righteousness and also the indwelling motif. There really was no part of Scripture that dealt with justification that did not somehow influence Luther. He came to see a Christ who was immanent, close at hand. While both natures were involved, Luther showed a preference for talking of what the whole Christ does rather than for sorting them out. As problems would arise in the years to come, Luther would emphasize one nature or the other, prompted by the issue at hand.

Another early contribution that has not been mentioned, and one that would hang close to the center of Luther's thought through his life, was the role Christ's divinity plays in the whole person. Because Christ is God, he is in control, and he can (and does) accomplish all according to his good pleasure, in his love. With God acting that way, what role could man have? How foolish, how insulting to mix in man's work with what God is doing. Monergism in salvation began to emerge as an early and important theme; it was personal for Luther, because he could not find peace as long as he kept offering up his own paltry efforts. Instead the way was by faith, resting in the hands of God regardless of what comes—even *resignatio ad*

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[35] Christopher Ocker, *Biblical Poetics before Humanism and Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), is really a book about medieval exegesis. In an impressive study, Ocker argued that what is touted as revolutionary in the Renaissance and Reformation was to be found already in medieval exegetes. In fact, similarities and continuities have been noted from the start by no less a scholar than Paul Oskar Kristeller who wrote of the *ars dictamini*. Cf. note 31. The question really seems to be how much these earlier voices put the pieces together and how much they realized what the sum of the parts actually produced. Luther did.

infernum, trusting that what comes is God doing so for good.[36] Monergism also kept Luther on course when he looked at medieval mystics. His first publication was an edition of the *Theologia deutsch* (with Luther's preface),[37] a contemplation of the cross and Christian life in the vein of the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas á Kempis. Luther also thought highly of John Tauler, for example, and St. Bernard.[38] But what attracted him was not the thought of being somehow absorbed into God, and there was no thought of fanning some scintilla of leftover godliness to move from purgation to illumination and then union. Rather, Luther was attracted by the personal coming of God in Christ to embrace the sinner.[39]

One last insight or contribution from Luther's first Wittenberg years was how he came to see Christ entering God's plan for salvation. Prior to Luther, the exegetical tradition put forth a view of salvation with a history that ran from Genesis until Christ entered and then redirected that history, a long flow interrupted. In this case, we are fortunate to live on the "back side" of Christ's change. Luther rethought all that. While Galatians 3:19-4:7 was a key passage and was part of lectures later in that first decade, the ideas that would come together there were perking already in the first Psalms lectures. What was the different view? Salvation history was not a matter of law first, then Christ, and now gospel. Rather the real history occurs in each individual who becomes conscious of how things once were under the boot of the law and how they now are with Christ having entered into his life with saving grace grasped in faith. This was not to dismiss God acting in history from Genesis onward; the activity was there with the promise of the Messiah and then Christ and now the church. The

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[36] Although Luther was still sorting through new ideas, the ideas of commitment and trust are present in the Romans lectures. See WA 56, 57; *LW* 25.

[37] WA 1:378-389; *LW* 31:71-76.

[38] Luther described Tauler's theology as "a theology that is more sensible than all the universities' scholastic doctors." WA 1:557; *LW* 31:129.

[39] Bengt R. Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics: A Reexamination of Luther's Spiritual Experience and His Relationship to the Mystics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976); Theo Bell, *Divus Bernhardus: Bernhard von Clairvaux in Martin Luthers Schriften* (Mainz: von Zabern, 1993); and Heiko Oberman, "Simul gemitus et raptus: Luther and Mysticism," in *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, ed. Steven Ozment (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 219-251. The *via negativa* certainly reminded one that comprehending God himself was finally impossible; but the direction was really wrong: not man to God, but God needs to come to man in the suffering and death of Christ. Mysticism was certainly all around Luther, not only as a professional theologian but also as a monk. Rather than the mystical ladder, Luther found benefit in the talk of the personal connection of Christ and the believer, the union, even the exchange—a theme that he would develop more in just a few years.

point rather was that throughout this history everyone was always, no matter when, saved by God the same way: by promise. It started with promise to Adam and more promises—particular promises yet all tied to Christ—and it still is a matter of promise: this baptism is promise of entry into the kingdom, this cross and empty tomb are yours, this body and blood is for you for the forgiveness of sins. Christ is always there throughout all of those promises, meeting each believer in a very real, existential (not existentialistic) way. God, particularly God in Christ, acts alone, and Christ comes to sinners, meeting them where they are in a very concrete way in the promise put into their ears. That was a huge rethinking of Christ and his role in salvation.[40]

In the pressure-packed years of 1517 through 1521/22, Luther wrote several dozen things for varied audiences. None was a specific treatment of Christ, but there were significant themes to be seen. For example, while Luther's Ninety-five Theses were aimed obviously at correcting indulgence abuses, behind them was the idea that Christ, not the pope, ruled the church.[41] It was not Rome's place to peddle forgiveness, and people should not heed false calls of peace but focus instead on the cross where God came. Clinging there would surely bring tribulation, but also entrance into the kingdom. Christ could claim the church by virtue of having suffered and died for it. The church's sufferings were not to gain indulgence, but because as Christ's body it also endures the scorn of the world. These theses thrust Luther into the spotlight, though the *Disputation against Scholastic Theology* perhaps struck a deeper blow with its focus on method. What Luther himself offered instead rested not on syllogisms supporting a *quid pro quo* rise to salvation but on Christ, cross, and faith.

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[40] Perhaps the best-known proponent of this existential approach is Gerhard Ebeling. See Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung: eine Untersuchung zu Luthers Hermeneutik* (München: Kaiser Verlag, 1942), and "Die Anfänge von Luthers Hermeneutik," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 48 (1951): 172–230, available in English as "The Beginnings of Luther's Hermeneutics," *Lutheran Quarterly* 7 (1993): 129–158, 315–338, 451–468. An extremely thorough study of Luther's rethinking of Christ in salvation history (and also of Ebeling's treatment that still leaves questions) is Erik H. Herrmann, "Why Then the Law? Salvation History and the Law in Martin Luther's Interpretation of Galatians" (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, 2005). A look at how Luther could hang on to aspects of his older method yet rework them in service to this new approach is Timothy Maschke, "The Understanding and Use of Allegory in the Lectures on the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians by Doctor Martin Luther" (PhD diss., Marquette University, 1993). The Ebeling understanding does not jive well with efforts to champion a *theosis* approach to salvation.

[41] WA 1:229–238; *LW* 31:17–34.

These ideas appeared just months later in the 1518 *Heidelberg Disputation* where the famous and familiar theme of theology of the cross was pitted against theology of glory.[42] According to Luther, free will on man's part is a fiction, and it is rather by God's good grace and love that salvation comes. Incarnation was the key, not logic. Incarnation, God become man, defies logic—not only in terms of how but also why—except for the purpose of declaring the love of God. Thesis 28 of the theological set turned conventional thinking on its head: God's love does not find its object, it creates it; human love is drawn to what pleases it. Though there is nothing lovable in fallen man, nevertheless God creates that which God wants to love, and he does this in Christ. The answer comes not in human rising to God, which is impossible, but in God stooping, God loving in spite of—not because of—what man has to offer. Again, Christ was the focus of all this. Luther's 1519 "Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness" has that same Christ, one who stoops and gives what is needed for salvation, namely, righteousness won and offered.[43]

In 1520, Luther launched a sharp attack against Rome on several fronts with his *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* and *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church.* His *On the Freedom of a Christian* was less confrontational yet just as firm when it came to his picture of Christ.[44] Using the bride-bridegroom marriage image, Luther set forth what is called the *commercium admirabile,* the happy or joyous exchange. The groom assumes what is not his—the sin and thereby the wrath of God—and gives his status by virtue of his righteousness to the bride. This happens because of the incarnation, emphasized earlier in the treatise as Luther explained that the word is God's gospel about the Son made flesh, suffered, risen from the dead, and glorified by God's sanctifying Spirit. Bride and groom have a relationship, a bond, but that union is not a merger or fusion into one.[45] Each one still has an identity, and, in the case of the bride, Christ does not make her more than human, but rather brings new life, which opens new doors to all that is human.

A crucial point is underscored by this exchange motif: incarnation for Luther was not simply becoming human, just as the human nature was more than just a collection of traits. With a human nature, Christ not only

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[42] WA 1:353–374; *LW* 31:35–70. Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross,* trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976).

[43] WA 2:145–152; *LW* 31:293–306.

[44] WA 7:49–73; *LW* 31:327–378.

[45] The losing or emptying of oneself was a mystical theme Luther did not embrace, a point worth noting in the discussion about *theosis.*

entered into the created world but also entered into human plight, throwing in with man's lot and taking on man's sin. Mindful of passages such as 2 Corinthians 5:21 ("made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin") or Philippians 2:6-8 ("found in the fashion [appearance, form] of a man"), the phrase "become man" was tantamount for Luther to "become sin." The "becoming" describes not just some status or state of being but indicates a purpose: to take man's place, to redeem. Remember, "incarnation" was not simply the entrée but the full course: birth, life, suffering, death, and resurrection. While nothing was taken for granted and the temptations were quite real (and resisted), there was also a confidence that God is in Christ and would not fail but would press on till the end. The entire business defied logic, and Scholasticism's syllogisms toppled like a house of cards. The redemption that makes the Christian free cannot be argued logically.[46] Rather it is confessed, based on what God has revealed in the Scriptures. Despite the logical disconnects along the way, there are promises, especially the ultimate *promissio Dei* in Christ, that serve finally to anchor.[47] These Christ themes arose out of controversy and pressure, yet they were hardly exaggerations or distortions.[48]

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[46] It is also more complicated, with acceptable (biblical!) representations being not nearly as univocal as Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor* would suggest. Cf. Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

[47] Several years ago when teaching in Ethiopia I caught a ride home from church after a Good Friday service with a missionary and her granddaughter of about 4 or 5 years old. The missionary was explaining that while we always think of Jesus on the cross, this was the particular day when we remember what happened and that God wanted his Son to take away our sin, so God sent him and let him die on the cross. "Well," said the granddaughter, "I think God must be crazy." "I suppose so," the grandmother replied, "but God did it because he loves us and wants to save us." "Oh, that's good. Then it's okay. I'm glad." Incarnation, the whole life/work of Christ, defies logic, but childlike faith gets it.

[48] The use of "logic" in these last lines has to be balanced, and much revolves around just how "logic" is to be taken. To say that the message Luther put forth "defied logic" is not to say that the presentation does not hang together. Everything, in a sense, has a logic that makes it what it is. So, too, with Luther's thought or with biblical theology. The outside observer can examine what is said and judge whether the whole adequately reflects a connection of its various parts. The observer can say, simply put, "That makes sense. I understand what he is saying." Yet that is not the same as saying that what is said is true, as if the logic of the system guarantees its truth. That is particularly the case when dealing with matters of theology, climbing into the metaphysical realm, so to speak. While it is possible to say that what is claimed "makes sense" logically, that the message itself is coherent, it is impossible to prove the truth of those claims by logic, because the truths are in a higher realm that can be grasped only by faith. Christianity

When Luther wrote his postils in 1522, these themes appeared again, now as they arose from the Gospel and Epistle texts. These sermon abstracts were important, of course, for a practical reason. There were clerics in the field who were attracted to the Reformation and the gospel message, but they had received a theological upbringing and had no real hope of returning to Wittenberg for retrofitting. The postils served as their continuing education, a way of learning to think and preach evangelically. Even more, the focus on sermons underscored the idea that *Deus revelatus* is not simply God in Christ as if "revealed God" were some abstract category or some object for observation under glass in a museum. For Luther, *Deus revelatus* was God in the *preached* Christ—Christ engaged with man. While preaching may seem like a Sunday morning monolog on the surface, it is really a conversation along several lines: the preacher with people, but also the preacher with God, and certainly God with both.

It might have been more enjoyable to spend time writing postils, but Luther could hardly take a rest. In the early 1520s new problems arose in the form of more radical reformers who were not satisfied with what Luther had done, thinking that he had quit too soon. For them Luther was still too Roman Catholic. His view of Christ was a case in point. Christ had indeed become man and taken on flesh and human nature; but, as they saw matters, when Luther argued that Christ was present in the Lord's Supper, as he had always maintained,[49] he was casting aside this humanity. They thought that Luther must have been some kind of Docetist or Marcionite with a Christ that was, ironically, too spiritual for the

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involves information and historical facts, and there can be a logical consideration of the facts: things so or not? But that alone will not settle the matter, because that is not all there is to the Christian proclamation. Promises are attached to facts. The facts or events have to be there, but that still leaves man with the faith element. Absent the facts, faith tied to them counts for little. (As 1 Corinthians 15:14 says, "If Christ is not raised [fact, unique though it is], then our faith [promise: this is your resurrection as well] is in vain.") So when Luther turned away from logic, he was not saying that people must not think about the Christian faith. Rather he objected to what the broad reasoning process would inevitably produce if pressed to the end, because human nature is fallen. When left to itself, it is bound to lead astray. Build with the crooked timber of humanity and the house will never be plumb, though those involved may yet think it so. The point is that we must understand what was going on when Luther turned his back on the theological method that had staked its success on logic.

[49] Luther's *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* makes plain that the Lord's Supper is no sacrifice effected by the priest, but Christ's gift to man. WA 6:497–573; *LW* 36:3–126. By maintaining a sacramental presence in the elements, Luther was, in the minds of the sacramentarian critics, rejecting the human nature that they believed now precluded any sort of "real presence."

spiritualists. Luther countered sharply by trumpeting not the humanity but the divinity of Christ, reminding critics that God could and would, when he said so, be present. To deny that possibility—that reality!—had implications undermining any and all other promises of God. Much more could be said on how Luther understood the two natures and their connection in Christ, but, for the early radical/sacramentarian problem at hand, the fact of Christ's divinity and the interaction of the natures was enough, Luther thought, to dispatch the critics.

Rome had not forgotten either. Powerful voices argued that Luther had shown his true colors at Worms and was a libertine with talk of free grace in the person and work of Christ. The statement "unless I am convinced by Scripture or clear reason" (meaning a mind shaped by the word) flew in the face of both the tradition and the exegesis of the time.[50] Of course that exegesis was marked by syllogisms made standard fare in the twelfth century: if God is perfect and makes no mistakes, and if God gives people the law with the command to keep it, then there must be some way people could comply and be rewarded, if not on their own, then aided by grace. Such exegesis was logical, but not Pauline. Luther sought to banish this thinking from the university and the resulting theology, but it was the thinking Erasmus defended, albeit in a very elegant, sophisticated fashion. The bad blood stemmed from the mid-1510s when Luther had criticized Erasmus's idea that Christ freed the believer from the obligation of the ceremonial but not the moral law. Erasmus watched Luther plow ahead and concluded that this man was a threat to the church and questioned Luther's penchant for vigorous rhetoric. Luther, knowing of Erasmus's high anthropology, criticized him without mentioning him by name when

[50] The complaint is still made today. Joseph Lortz, pioneer of the "New Catholic" view of Luther, agreed that the church needed reform, but in the end Luther "war nicht vollhörend," that is, he did not listen to the wider counsel of the church. The famous thesis runs through Lortz, *Die Reformation in Deutschland*, 2 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1940). Lortz much preferred Thomas Aquinas and thought Luther was blinded to the wider tradition by the inferior nominalist *via moderna* thought of his day. Had Luther listened to the wider church, Lortz thought he might have found his answers in Thomas, and Luther would have rendered saint-like service to the church. Needless to say, Lortz's view does not mesh with Oberman's view that Late Scholasticism provided the positive fruit and the seeds Luther planted. It does, however, mesh with Yves Congar, who thought Thomas provided the balanced Christology that Luther lacked. The New Catholics shifted in the generation after Lortz with such men as Erwin Iserloh, Daniel Olivier, Peter Manns, and Otto Hermann Pesch, who all in various ways concluded that Luther was actually correct in his theology, especially in his view of Christ and salvation. Luther was catholic—with a small c—and should have been given a place in the Roman Church then and now.

Luther, in his 1523 preface to Ecclesiastes, said that Ecclesiastes preaches against the free will which some people foolishly maintain. Erasmus then went public with his *Diatribe*, his *Freedom of the Will*, and Luther let fly with his *Bondage of the Will*.[51] It was not done lightly. Erasmus was no rank amateur, and Luther knew this was a theological death match. The immediate focus was the human will and its ability (or inability) to respond to God in faith and life. Behind that question was a fundamental argument over Christ. Erasmus propounded a kind of *philosophia Christi* where there certainly was faith, but Christ also served as a model to be imitated in fashioning the Christian life and finishing salvation. Although Erasmus was metaphysically tone deaf and hated the Scholastics, he actually echoed their basic approach. Christ was an *exemplum* for faith and life leading to salvation. Luther's Christ was an *exemplar*, not simply the model but in fact a substitute, a vicar, the stand-in for the happy exchange; for Luther, salvation was certain and complete. The life that comes, which can certainly be Christ-like, is pure fruit on a redeemed tree, the works of the new man of faith. It remains a crucial divide: Christ as savior and enabler, or Christ as savior.[52]

In the latter half of the 1520s, Luther again clashed with sacramentarians, this time with Zwingli.[53] The person and work of Christ were at the heart of the matter. Lutheran critics give Zwingli the Nestorian label. His early humanist interests literally introduced him to Erasmus and neoplatonism, and Zwingli never quite escaped the *philosophia Christi* tendencies.[54] In

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[51] Erasmus tried one more reply in his two-part *Hyperaspistes*, sending it to Elector John with a complaint that Luther had behaved badly with his rhetoric. John was amused and sent it to Luther, who was enraged that Erasmus would continue the fight. Friends redirected Luther's energy to more immediate problems, arguing that Luther had effectively dispatched Erasmus. Luther fumed privately, and when he needed a semester's lecture topic in 1526–1527 as a filler while most of the university had fled Wittenberg for Jena due to the plague, Luther settled on Ecclesiastes. He never mentioned Erasmus by name, but Luther had him in mind as free will was again sent packing. See Robert Rosin, *Reformers, The Preacher, and Skepticism: Luther, Brenz, Melanchthon, and Ecclesiastes* (Mainz: von Zabern, 1997).

[52] On the clash and the complex aftermath, see Robert Kolb, *Bound Choice, Election, and Wittenberg Theological Method: From Martin Luther to the Formula of Concord* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005).

[53] On this exchange see Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1959; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003).

[54] In Zürich outside the Wasserkirche at the Limmat River is a statue of Zwingli holding an open book. It is meant to be a Bible, but biographer Oskar Farner suggested it could be interleaved: one page of Scripture and one page from the classics.

order to preserve the majesty of the divine Christ, he could not conceive of Christ in the Supper. Luther responded that—although it was mind-boggling and might seem poor taste to ask the risen and ascended Christ to be in the bread and wine—if Christ said he wanted to do that and promised to be there with forgiveness, life, and salvation, then Christians ought to take him at his word and give thanks. After an escalating paper war, both sides met at Marburg—Zwingli seeking credibility to rank with Luther's reform, and Luther going because his prince said that he had to go. Honest observers expected little, and they were right. In the language battle, Luther proved the better rhetorician in showing that "is" actually means "is," especially when Christ says so. Luther was also better at going back to the ancients, in this case the fathers, when it came to how human and divine natures could interact. Zwingli simply could not and would not accept the *communicatio idiomatum* because in his mind it demeaned the divine Christ. Besides, for Zwingli the weight of the matter fell not on the promise "for you" but on "do this" as a command to re-enact in some sort of commemorative way.[55] For Luther, how this could be was no more a problem than any other aspect of the incarnation, from manger to cross and out of the tomb. In this context Luther repeated one of his early ideas: the divinity of Christ overwhelms any problems as Christ takes care of things. It is the whole Christ, both natures, in the Lord's Supper. A mere human could not be sacramentally present in this way; the divine is evident. It is Christ's body and blood, a matter of the incarnation; it is given and shed for forgiveness, again, a matter of the incarnation.

To be sure, there is much more to include on Luther's view of Christ. There are, of course, more texts to decipher and more themes to include,[56]

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[55] It is rather like weekend war re-enactments. Say we gather to "re-fight" the Battle of Bull Run. The exercise is interesting, and it calls to mind what once was done, which can be uplifting or upbuilding in terms of one's patriotism and respect for those in the original fray. But it hardly carries the same profit or benefit. This perspective comes from Zwingli's definition of "sacrament" as a pledge or declaration or statement of intent—ideas he gleaned from the Latin poet Varro. See Ulrich Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1981).

[56] Theosis is one of those, but I wonder if that angle, prompted by dialogs with the Eastern Orthodox Church, will have the staying power of the incarnational focus, or if it offers the same surety. Time, of course, will tell. Some years ago at the first North American Forum for Luther Research held at Luther Seminary, Gerhard Forde gave a plenary address in which he had occasion to comment on just those questions. He had his doubts. Forde said he could imagine Christ crucified on Good Friday with family and followers distraught at the foot of the cross, and then Christ suddenly would look

but the few texts handled here certainly mark Luther's as a wonderfully precious, evangelical view of God in Christ for humanity. God became incarnate—not just as man, but as sin for us. This Christ suffered, meaning God suffered—another mind-boggling concept that Luther asserted. Because of the happy exchange, his relationship with the Father and his life-bringing righteousness are given to people. When the church suffers, it is also an eschatological reminder of the deliverance still to be won but already assured, even as Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, lives, and reigns to all eternity.[57] Luther left behind in the catechism what he uncovered along the way. The faith is not simplistic, but the core is simple; thinking about it can be very humbling. Remember the famous line: When it comes to theology, a certain modesty is called for.[58]

"Men fear death, as children fear to go into the dark," wrote Francis Bacon.[59] Death is the last enemy, the threshold at which Satan has a last chance to snatch at faith. The fear of death is all too human. Because of the

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down and say, "Don't worry, folks, it's just a metaphor." To Forde, Luther's thoroughgoing incarnation with God and man in Christ seemed a lot more solid.

[57] The impact of Luther's God-man Christ incarnate was brought home to me while teaching at Concordia Lutheran Seminary in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. A visitor to class asked the students why they had decided to become pastors. Given the culture and the financial sacrifices, it was a good question. The first student to speak said that he had grown up in a time when they were told there was nothing but the material world around them. Then a friend assured him that it was not so: there was indeed a God who created the world and because of all the trouble and our sin came into the world as Christ and died for him. It was a simple presentation, but the student said that it had made all the difference in his life, and so he thought it was important to do as much as he could to tell others and to serve those who already know. That started a chorus of "me too" from the others. They reprised the basic themes we have seen. Later that week, at the ordination of the national church's first Kyrgyz-speaking pastor, there was a similar story but with more at stake. The missionary who preached the ordination sermon told of this pastor's earlier life. He had been a policeman—not a bad job—but he had a troubled life with no purpose or hope as he saw things. So he went into his apartment bathroom and slashed his wrists. His wife managed to save him, and a Christian friend talked to him about the Christian faith: there is hope and certainty because God himself came into this world, dying and being resurrected, for us. The preacher said that this new pastor would always carry those scars to remind him of who he once was, but he would also know that there are scars borne by another, Christ, who had made him what he now was and who would continue to come in his word proclaimed and in the Sacraments.

[58] Wenn zur Theologie kommt, eine gewiße Bescheidenheit gehört dazu.

[59] Francis Bacon, "Essays, Civil and Moral," in *Essays, Civil and Moral and The New Atlantis by Francis Bacon; Areopagitica and Tractate on Education by John Milton; Religio Medici by Sir Thomas Borwne*, ed. Charles W. Eliot, Harvard Classics 3 (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1909), 9.

human and divine Christ, however, Luther had another take on death with his motto, though not his own words but the promise from God: "I shall not die but live and declare the works of the Lord" (Ps. 118:17).[60]

Response to Robert Rosin

Naomichi Masaki

This is a marvelous opportunity to discuss theology with brothers in the pastoral office who still care about Luther and the Reformation. As Dr. Rosin stated, "When it comes to theology, a certain modesty is called for." As "beggars," we would like to be *unter den Schriften*, remaining pupils of Christ. In addition to highlighting a few points from Dr. Rosin's presentation, I would like to add one particular area of Luther's confession of Christ which has gone unmentioned and which I have been asked to present: that is, the place of Christ in the liturgy.

Dr. Rosin's paper gave a splendid and learned overview of Luther's confession of Christ. For such a large topic—Luther's view of Christ—he offered helpful insights and observations in a brief space. Whether Luther had a "Christology" was a good question, and he rightly demonstrated that Luther's understanding of Christ derived directly from the Scriptures while being well-informed by the church's dogma on Christ. As Werner Elert observed in his *Der Christliche Glaube*, Luther's Reformation may be seen as a tearing down of the theological premises of medieval Roman Catholic thought on the relation between Christ, the church, and the world.[61] This included Luther's rejection of the inadequate image of Christ as a lawgiver and an example. The church can never be content with the doctrinal statements from one time in the past, otherwise the church would place the authority of her dogma above the authority of the gospel. Luther's greatness, in the context of Late Scholasticism, rested in the fact that he did not strive to teach anything new, but, as St. Paul wrote, "that

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[60] "Ps. 118 remained Luther's favorite throughout his life. The words 'I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord' [Latin, Ps. 117: *non moriar sed vivam et narrabo opera Domini*] were his personal motto." *LW* 14:45 n. 4. For Luther's commentary on Psalm 118, see *LW* 14:41–106; WA 31.I:65–182.

[61] Werner Elert, *Der Christliche Glaube: Grundlinien der Lutherischen Dogmatik*, 3rd ed. (Hamburg: Furche, 1956), 17–55. Most of the fifth edition has been translated into English as *The Christian Faith: An Outline of Lutheran Dogmatics*, trans. Martin H. Bertram and Walter R. Bouman (Columbus: Lutheran Theological Seminary, 1974).

which I received, I handed over to you" (1 Cor 15:3). For Luther, the doctrine belonged to Christ, not to us.[62] Doctrinal theology was not a systematic theology in a modern sense of the term, like the theology of Schleiermacher, but homology.

The best place to confess doctrine may not be in dogmatic textbooks, synodical by-laws, or popular devotional books, but in the liturgy where the means of grace are going on: the place of our Lord's giving and our receiving. Luther was very careful in his life so that he would never diminish his dear Lord Jesus Christ. In *The Three Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Faith, 1538,* he wrote: "All heresy strikes at this dear article of Jesus Christ."[63] Dr. Rosin's observation is correct: "Luther's thinking about the Bible revolved not so much around a unifying idea as around a unifying person: Christ." For Luther, "Christology" was an afterthought, a confession. His point of departure was not doctrinal formulations of the church but the apostolic witness of Scripture.

Dr. Rosin's procedure—presenting Luther's thought chronologically with the circumstances in full view—was helpful, though he could have allowed Luther to speak more for himself. It is also the case that Dr. Rosin needed more space to include the christological problems of the sacramentarian controversies during the mid- and late-1520s. Individual points of Dr. Rosin's interpretation may be questioned. For example, when he posted the Ninety-five Theses, did Luther actually have as clear an understanding of the gospel as presented by Dr. Rosin? Luther was speaking against the paper of indulgences, but the reason for his opposition was not on account of his own clear understanding of Christ but on account of being offended by the hard process of salvation in the medieval Sacrament of Penance which included inner contrition of the heart and outer mortification of the flesh. Theses 94 and 95 read: "Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ, their head, through penalties, death, and hell; and thus be confident of entering into heaven through many tribulations rather than through the false security of peace."[64] Throughout the Ninety-five Theses, Luther did not

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[62] This point is demonstrated by an anecdote from class. One day a student commented on Matthew 28:18-20 by saying, "Our theology of baptism, then, is well supported by this passage." This is a wrong way of speaking. Matthew 28 does not support *our* theology of baptism; rather, our confession of baptism is derived from these words of our Lord. We never fit our Lord's words into our system; his doctrine fits him! The words of the Lord are the *viva vox*, the living voice of Jesus.

[63] WA 50:267, 18; *LW* 34:208.

[64] WA 1:238, 16-19; *LW* 31:33.

once use the word "faith." In his *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses, 1518*, Luther wrote: "Perfect contrition does not need his absolution."[65] This sounds similar to the pietism of Philipp Jacob Spener.[66] Despite such open questions, Dr. Rosin has given a masterful treatment of Christ in Luther's thought.

Three more things stood out in Dr. Rosin's paper. The first was the importance of *promise* as God's way of salvation in Christ. Although the *proprium* of baptism or the Lord's Supper was not always presented as one may have wished, Dr. Rosin emphasized "the personal coming of God in Christ to embrace the sinner" in Luther's thinking together with Christ's "right-in-front-of-you" vitality. Ian Siggins observed that Luther "is less comfortable (and less clear) when he moves from the concrete to the abstract, from the historical to the ideal, from the practical to the theoretical."[67] Oswald Bayer maintains that Luther's thought on the promise of God in Christ does not describe what will happen in the future but something which takes immediate and present effect.[68] The second was

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[65] WA 1:550, 36; *LW* 31:117. Latin : *perfecta autem eius absolutione non eget.*

[66] ". . . and further more it [forgiveness pronounced by the pastor] is a reassurance that sin is not about to be forgiven, but that it has already been forgiven previously." Philipp Jakob Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht von dem Amte der Versöhnung* (Frankfurt am Mayn: Zunnerisch-und Junischem Buchladen, 1716), 3:414. Thus, Spener viewed the forgiveness of sin as bestowed not at holy absolution itself. Rather, holy absolution was a confirmation of what had already happened internally. His focus was on the process of regeneration *in nobis*. A pastor was supposed to ask whether a believer was repentant enough and was progressing in good works enough. He thus functioned as a judge, while Christ was seen as an example to follow. Here a certain similarity with the medieval Roman Catholic Sacrament of Penance may be observed.

[67] Ian D. Kingston Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 1–2.

[68] On the motif of the promise in Luther's theology, Oswald Bayer wrote: "The term 'promise' (*promissio*) is the center of Luther's theology. When he says that God promises, he does not refer to something in the future that we may anticipate. The promise is not only an announcement that will only be fulfilled in the future. It is a valid and powerful promise and pledge that takes immediate and present effect. A good comparison is the text of English banknotes: 'I promise to pay the bearer on demand the sum of X amount of pounds. London, for the governor and company of the Bank of England, Chief Cashier.' With this understanding of the term 'promise' Luther was moving along the lines of medieval German legal thinking that used the word *promissio* to describe the way a ruler bound and committed himself at his enthronement. This was how God also committed himself in the *promissio* pronounced in his name. He was bound by it and will stick to it and keep it. Faith lays hold of God by accepting and counting on the given promise, and therefore it lays hold of the 'faithfulness of God, of his truth, his

the presentation of Luther's happy or joyous exchange. Dr. Rosin's description of the incarnation as the cause of joyous exchange initially may have produced some uneasiness, making one suspicious of reading Luther according to Hegelian or Eastern Orthodox accents. I still wonder whether it may be helpful to include "the full course" of Christ's birth, suffering, death, and resurrection in the single term "incarnation." Yet Dr. Rosin's intention was to show how for Luther the incarnation of Christ meant not only "to become man" but "to become sin" in man's stead. Third, Dr. Rosin was right when he said that for Luther *Deus revelatus* was not an abstract theological category but "God in the *preached* Christ" who engages man. While found in Luther's 1522 postils, it is also found in his other writings, such as his *The Bondage of the Will, 1525*. In this work, Luther not only described the distinction between the "God preached" and "God hidden" but also presented "God *preached*" as "God revealed, *offered*, and *worshiped*." [69] The preached Christ is Christ offered for man and worshiped by man.

This opens the topic of the liturgy in Luther's confession of Christ. In *Against the Heavenly Prophets, 1525*, Luther left this clear statement:

> We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is *achieved* and *won*. Second, how it is *distributed* and *bestowed* on us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But He has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the Lord's Supper or the sacrament. There He has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the Gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world.[70]

In this passage, Luther was clear on the role of Christ as the redeemer who accomplished forgiveness on the cross, what Dr. Rosin described as the motif of incarnation. This is not the only thing, however, that this passage says about Christ. Luther was equally clear in confessing Christ as the deliverer of the forgiveness he won on the cross. Christ is not just the content of preaching but he himself is the preacher and the one who bestows his body and blood. Furthermore, Luther confessed that such a distribution of the gospel takes place not only in the era of the New

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Word, his righteousness.'" *Living By Faith: Justification and Sanctification*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 51–52.

[69] WA 18:685, 3–5, 25–27; *LW* 33:139, 140. Emphases added. Latin: *de Deo praedicto, revelato, oblato, culto.*

[70] WA 18:203, 28–35; *LW* 40:213–214. Emphases added.

Testament but also in the Old Testament, as Dr. Rosin noted. In his *Sermon on the New Testament, that is, the Holy Mass, 1520,* Luther wrote: "In the mass we give nothing to Christ, but only receive from Him."[71] The rhythm of the Divine Service that Luther had in mind was the Lord's giving and man's receiving. The one who gives in the liturgy is Jesus himself. Throughout his *Lectures on Genesis,* Luther earnestly catechized his students, future pastors, to know for certain this utterly wonderful thing that even Abraham, who rejoiced only in faith and in spirit, did not have.[72]

Elsewhere Luther expounded on Christ's role of distributing each of the means of grace. In *The Confession Concerning Christ's Supper, 1528,* Luther wrote, "[Christ] distributes this death through preaching."[73] That same year, in *Concerning Rebaptism,* Luther wrote, "We can hardly deny that the same Christ is there at baptism and in baptism, indeed, He is the baptizer Himself."[74] The same is true of holy absolution, as discussed in a 1540 table talk:

> This ought especially to be taught, that confession is not made to man but to Christ. Likewise it is not man but Christ who absolves. But few understand this. Today I replied to the Bohemians, who insist that God alone remits sins and are offended by my little book on the keys. Wherefore one should teach that men make confession to Christ, and Christ absolves through the mouth of the minister, for the minister's mouth is the mouth of Christ and the minister's ear is the ear of Christ. It is to the Word and the mandate that one should pay attention, not to the person. Christ sits there, Christ hears, Christ answers, not a man.[75]

It is also true of the Lord's Supper, as Luther made clear in *The Sacrament of The Body and Blood of Christ – Against the Fanatics, 1526*:

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[71] WA 6:364, 23; *LW* 35:93.

[72] For example, "But [Abraham] saw [the day of Christ] only in faith and in the spirit. But we see this glory face to face. We hear God speaking with us and promising forgiveness of sins in Baptism, in the Supper of his Son, and in the true use of the keys. These Abraham did not have, but he saw in the spirit and believed. Therefore our glory is greater; but because we do not take care of it or thank God enough for such great gifts of grace, our studious concern for power and pleasure is greater." WA 42:514, 31–37; *LW* 2:353. See Naomichi Masaki, "Genesis as Catechesis: Sacramental Instruction of Dr. Martin Luther according to his *Lectures on Genesis 1535–1545*" (STM thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, 1997).

[73] WA 26:295, 34–35; *LW* 37:193.

[74] WA 26:156, 34–36; *LW* 40:242. See also *LC* IV, 10.

[75] *Table Talk,* no. 5176 (1540). WATR 4:695, 1–9; *LW* 54:394.

> There [in the sacrament] my Lord has given me His body and blood in the bread and wine that I may eat and drink. They are to be my very own so that I may be certain that my sins are forgiven, that I am freed from death and hell, that I have eternal life and am God's child and an heir of heaven. Therefore I go to the sacrament to seek such things.[76]

It is crucial for us to recognize that the foundation of Luther's confession of Christ as the preacher, baptizer, absolver, and administer of the Lord's Supper was Jesus' mandate and institution of them. Luther spoke of the means of grace and the Office of the Holy Ministry in *On the Councils and the Church, 1539*: "[Jesus] Himself is there and will do everything Himself."[77] He said this on the basis of Christ's mandate and institution.

According to Luther, pastors do not float around with nothing given them from the Lord. Nor do preaching, baptism, absolution, and the Lord's Supper float around as abstract functions seeking someone to carry them out. Luther confessed Christ and his continuous ministry on earth not only with the means of grace but also with the office of the holy ministry. In the words of Theodor Kliefoth, a nineteenth century theologian, Christ instituted not only the *Gnadenmittel* but also the *Gnadenmittelamt*, the office that delivers the means of grace.[78] Both belong together for the sake of the delivery of the gifts.[79]

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[76] WA 19:506, 30–507, 15; *LW* 36:350. See also Luther's *That These Words of Christ, "This Is My Body, etc." Still Stands Firm against the Fanatics, 1527*: "We know, however, that it is the LORD's Supper, is called thus, not the Christians' supper. For the Lord not only instituted it, but also prepares and gives it himself, and is himself cook, butler, food, and drink, as we have demonstrated our belief above." WA 23:271, 8–11; *LW* 37:142.

[77] WA 50:647, 28–30; *LW* 41:171.

[78] Theodor Kliefoth, *Acht Bücher von der Kirche* (Schwerin and Rostock: Stiller, 1854), 18–19, 187–212.

[79] In *Concerning the Order of Public Worship, 1523*, Luther saw the connection between *Gottesdienst* and *Predigtamt* in such a way that when one is perverted the other also may be corrupted. When the centrality of the Lord's giving in the Divine Service is impoverished, the place of Jesus in the Office of the Holy Ministry may be substituted by the work of the church. WA 12:35, 2–18; *LW* 53:11. In *The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests, 1533*, Luther wrote: "Our doing only administers and gives such baptism, ordained and constituted by Christ's mandate and institution. For this reason He alone is and remains the one true, eternal baptizer who distributes His baptism daily through our doing and ministry until the day of judgment. So our baptizing should properly be called an administering or giving of the baptism of Christ, just as our sermon is a giving out of the word of God. . . . So, too, it is not by our doing, speaking, or work that bread and wine become Christ's body and blood, much less is it by the chrism or consecration; rather it is caused by Christ's ordinance, mandate and institution." WA 38:239, 27–240, 3; *LW* 38:199. Cf., Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the*

Luther's confession of Christ in the liturgy is an important addition to Dr. Rosin's observation of the "right-in-front-of-you" vitality of Christ. In the dynamic flow of the Lord's speaking and giving and man's receiving and living out in the world, Christ is not far but near. He is not just an object of worship and devotion but he is the doer and distributor of the fruit of the cross. For Luther, Jesus' ministry continued in the means of grace and through the office that serves them.[80] Dr. Rosin deserves our thanks for his wonderful presentation. The church rejoices not in Luther's "Christology" but, as presented by Dr. Rosin, in his confession of Christ as our savior.

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Council of Trent, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 2:228–229.

[80] The Augsburg Confession reflects Luther's understanding of Christ. The purpose of Christ's ascension and session was "so that through the Holy Spirit *he* [i.e., Christ] may make holy, purify, strengthen, and comfort all who believe in him, also distribute to them life and various gifts and benefits, and shield and protect them against the devil and sin" (*CA* III, German text; emphasis added). The Augsburg Confession also confesses that the Holy Spirit, sent by Jesus, is given in the *externum verbum* through the *Predigtamt* (*CA* V), and that forgiveness which is thus received shows itself in the entire life of a Christian (*CA* VI).

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American Christianity and Its Jesuses

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

WWJD? So pervasive is the idea of Jesus in American culture that Christ's name need not even be mentioned in order to invoke him. But a deeper point underlies this: how is it that the name—or the letter—of Jesus can be invoked in such an authoritative way for what most Christians would claim is a highly secularized culture? After all, WWJD was and is an American phenomenon. Even where it impacted other nations, it was generally presented in the English of its American originators.

WWJD grew out of Charles Sheldon's 1896 novel, *In His Steps*.[1] Sheldon captured the essence of Christianity as he understood it in the phrase, "What Would Jesus Do?" In this Sheldon reflected the nineteenth-century model of moral government theology—Jesus serving primarily as a moral example rather than effecting a substitutionary atonement.[2]

In the late 1980s, youth ministers began putting "W.W.J.D." on buttons and bracelets. Local merchandisers picked up the idea and eventually WWJD found its way on to mugs, rings, bumper stickers, bookmarks, key rings, and other things.[3] The expression has inspired a myriad of variations, usually of a humorous character, though not always so. An example of the latter is the song "Craig" on Stephen Lynch's 2005 CD, *The Craig Machine*.[4] The song is the story of Craig, Jesus' unknown, neglected, wild, and fundamentally jealous brother.[5] Unlike Jesus, who turns water into wine, Craig turns water into . . . well, listen:

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[1] For a biography of Charles Sheldon, see "Charles M. Sheldon," http://spider.georgetowncollege.edu/HTALLANT/COURSES/his338/students/nbrooking/cms.htm (accessed February 16, 2007). Charles M. Sheldon, *In His Steps* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co., 1937).

[2] Sheldon's ideas coalesced with those that formed into the Social Gospel espoused by Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch, among others. Rauschenbusch later acknowledged his debt to Sheldon's novel.

[3] The irony, of course, is that Sheldon's social gospel is absolutely at odds with the commercialization of the phrase.

[4] Stephen Lynch, *The Craig Machine*, compact disc, © 2005 What Are Records. "Craig" is track 5 on the CD.

[5] "What would Jesus do? Summary," *BookRags Web site*, http://www.bookrags.com/What_would_Jesus_do%3F.

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Cuz when Craig's in sight
We'll party all damn night.
I don't turn water into wine
But into cold Coors Light.

The punch line of this violent and profane song is the following:

And now the question for you
Is not "What Would Jesus Do?"
But where will you be
When the Craig Machine comes partyin' through?
And if the Lord will allow
You've got to ask yourself how,
When, who and why and where is your messiah now?

Not surprisingly, Lynch fans began to ask "WWCD?" or "What would Craig do?"

The phrase, and the variations it has generated, has also been used for political, satirical, and, of course, theological purposes. Consider the following examples:

"Who Wants Jelly Donuts?"

"What Would Jesus Drive?"

On *The Simpsons*, Ned Flanders shows Homer a movie guide put out by his church, titled "What Would Jesus View?"

Also on *The Simpsons*, Homer was surprised to learn that the "J" in WWJD stood for Jesus; he thought it was for Geppetto.

In a *Family Guy* episode, Jesus drove a car with a front license plate reading "WWID?" namely, "What Would I Do?"

"What Would Scooby Do?"

And plenty more could be cited.

Needless to say, belief in "God" runs high among Americans. Belief in Jesus runs high as well. Surveys, often appearing around Christmas or Easter, perennially inform us of the distinctively American trait of seeing Jesus as a personal hero, cultural icon, primary model for life, philosophical model, and there are plenty of other images. This plethora of Jesuses characterizes the history of Christianity and other religions in America.

To this end, several recently appearing books pick up the question of how Americans have viewed Jesus. *Jesus in America: Personal Savior, Cultural Hero, National Obsession* by Richard Wightman Fox traces the many ways that Americans have conceived of Jesus and presented him to their neighbors. Fox captures well the many Jesuses of the American scene:

> Benjamin Franklin understood Jesus as a wise man worthy of imitation. Thomas Jefferson regarded him as a moral teacher. The assassination of Abraham Lincoln, which occurred on Good Friday, was popularly interpreted as paralleling the crucifixion of Jesus . . . as one preacher put it: "Jesus Christ died for the world, Abraham Lincoln died for his country." Elizabeth Cady Stanton appropriated Jesus' message to champion women's rights. George W. Bush named Jesus as his favorite political philosopher . . . . As we have seen in recent presidential elections, the name of Jesus is often thrust into the center of political debates, and many Americans regularly enlist Jesus, their ultimate arbiter of value, as the standard bearer for their views and causes.[6]

Fox chronicles the variety of American Jesuses. He shows how the image of Jesus held by significant historical persons influenced American history. It led to Columbus's voyage of 1492, the expeditions of the Spanish missionaries, the establishment of the Puritan and Pilgrim colonies, the American Revolution, the American Civil War, and the abolition of slavery. It spurred social and cultural movements spanning from the emergence of organized labor to the counter-culture of the 1960s. Finally, he brings the story to its end in the almost universal appeal of Jesus in the contemporary period.

An even more helpful book is Stephen Prothero's *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon.*[7] Like Fox, Prothero considers several concrete ways in which distinctively American versions of Jesus have been advanced. More importantly, however, is Prothero's thesis: The nineteenth century was the century of Jesuses in America. During that century, a number of distinctively American Jesuses emerged.

The remainder of this paper will look at three different "versions" of Jesus within American Christianity during the first half of the nineteenth century. First, Barton Warren Stone (1772–1844) defined a Unitarian and

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[6] Richard Wightman Fox, *Jesus in America: Personal Savior, Cultural Hero, National Obsession* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004). This book summary appears on the front flap of the dust jacket.

[7] Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003).

Arian version of Jesus on the Kentucky frontier. At the same time, within American Lutheranism a radical expression of rationalism exhibited itself in the second oldest Lutheran synod in America, The Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of New York. Frederick Henry Quitman (1760–1832) defined the gospel as the free response of the willful subject to the divine government revealed in and through Christ. Finally, Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875) articulated a perfectionist vision of moral government theology that explicitly and purposefully denied forensic justification and the idea of imputation. In each case, Fox's and Prothero's claims that Americans were intently determined to fashion their own version of Jesus was borne out, and the effects of this remain evident in the present.

I. Barton Warren Stone (1772–1844)

Biography

Barton W. Stone was born in Maryland on December 24, 1772. Largely unchurched during his youth, he was nevertheless surrounded by a plethora of denominations, all of which he questioned theologically. After an intense personal religious experience, he joined the Presbyterian church and later became a pastor in this denomination. He did so, however, with reservations. He could never quite bring himself to accept the confessional standards of the Presbyterian tradition because of certain doctrinal points. As such, his relationship with his tradition was a tension-filled one. As one biographer has put it:

> He had grave doubts about some of the points of doctrine of the Presbyterian Church. Before he joined this church he had a long conversation with two Presbyterian ministers, relating to them the state of his mind on some points which disturbed him. These ministers wished to retain so promising a young man for the Presbyterian Church. They asked him how far he would be willing to subscribe to the Confession. He replied: "As far as it is consistent with the word of God." This showed his great respect, even while he was in the wilderness of confusion, for the word of God. When he was ordained as a minister in the Presbyterian Church, he gave the same answer to the presbytery—that he would subscribe to the Confession only so far as it was consistent with the word of God.[8]

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[8] Henry Leo Boles, *Biographical Sketches of Gospel Preachers* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1932), 29. Pages 28–32 are also available online as H. Leo Boles, "Barton W. Stone," *The Restoration Movement Web site* (Scott Harp, 2000), http://www.therestorationmovement.com/stone,bw.htm (accessed February 1, 2007).

It is possible to explore any number of points where Stone was formative for the American Christian experience. His key part in the great Cane Ridge Revival and his instrumental role in the formation of the Restorationist Movement/"Christian" tradition are noteworthy. For the task at hand, the topic will be limited to a brief consideration of his Christology.

Unit/Arianism

From early in his ministry, Barton Warren Stone was the object of significant controversy due to his stances on the doctrines of the Trinity and Christ. To be blunt, Stone had, at the very least, Unitarian leanings in respect to the Trinity and Arian leanings in respect to the person of Christ. Both affected his doctrine of the atonement.

The first stumbling block for Stone was the doctrine of the Trinity as confessed by the church catholic. While he accepted the biblical designations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he rejected the language of three persons in one divine essence as a human philosophical construct that was fundamentally contrary to reason. To speak of three persons was to speak of three separate entities, three "gods." Since the Bible clearly affirmed that there was only one God, such language was anti-biblical. Yet the question of how to deal with the language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit presented him with problems. His solution was to speak of the Son as the first creation of the Father and the Spirit as the power of God.[9]

This, however, only solved part of the problem. What of the verses of Scripture that spoke of the oneness of Father and Son? Stone's solution follows:

> They are one, or agree in their testimony. . . . To say these three are one God, would contradict the original; for the word *hen*, translated *one*, is in the neuter gender, and can not agree with the word *God*. Nor is it correct to say, these three are one being; for Paul and Apollos are said to be one—I Cor. iii: 8. "Now he that planteth and he that watereth are (*hen*) *one*." No one imagines that they were one being; but agree, that they were two distinct men engaged in one work, in one spirit. Our blessed Saviour prays the Father, that all believers might be (*hen*) *one*, even as he

[9] R. N. Gillmore, "R. N. Gillmore's From Revival to Restoration," *Restoration Movement Web site* (Hans Rollmann, 1999–2005), http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/pp/PP021.HTM (accessed February 2, 2007). Also available in print form as R N. Gilmore, *From Revival to Restoration*, Provocative Pamphlets No. 21 (Melbourne: Federal Literature Committee of Churches of Christ in Australia, 1956), 5.

> and the Father were (*hen*) *one*. Now as all believers are not one substance nor one being; and as they are all one, *even* as the Father and Son are one; we must then conclude, that the Father and Son are not one substance, nor one being. This is further evident from John x: 30, "I and my Father are (*hen*) one," says Jesus. Yet in the same Evangelist he said, "*My Father is greater than I.*" John xiv: 28. If they were one substance, or one being, there could be no comparison; as *one* can not be greater or less than itself. The fact is, all believers are one in spirit, purpose, and mind—and this is the oneness which our Lord prayed they might have—this was the oneness of Paul and Apollos.—This appears to me to be the oneness of the Father and the Son.[10]

Turning to Christology, Stone explores the ramifications of his trinitarian thought for the person and work of Christ. Jesus may be labeled "Son of God" in a sense, but not with the meaning that he is essentially equal to the Father.

> That the Son of God was very and eternal God, and yet eternally begotten, is a doctrine to which I can not subscribe; because the terms eternal Son, eternally begotten, are not found in the Bible. As they are human inventions, by human reason they may be tried, without the imputation of impiety. According to the before cited articles, the Father and Son are one eternal substance. The voice of reason is, that the same individual substance can not beget itself, nor be begotten by itself. Therefore the substance of the Son was never begotten nor born. If it be granted, that the substance of the Son was eternal, and therefore never begotten; but still urged that the Son was eternally begotten; then it must follow that, what was eternally begotten had no substance, and therefore, was not a real being. This is virtually to deny the Son.[11]

What is the bottom line? "If language conveys ideas, it is plain that the act of begetting implies a previous agent; and that the agent and the act must precede the thing begotten; therefore the Son could not be eternally begotten."[12] The incarnation compromised, it is not surprising to find that Stone's idea of the atonement is affected in basic ways.

> Let us turn to the cross and ask, who is he that suffers, bleeds and dies? The articles before quoted say, That the second person of trinity was

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[10] Barton W. Stone, "An Address to the Churches (Mathes Edition 1859)," http://thriceholy.net/Texts/Stone.html (accessed January 29, 2007).

[11] Stone, "An Address to the Churches."

[12] Stone, "An Address to the Churches."

> united with our nature, that the two whole and entire natures, Godhead and manhood, were *inseparably* united, *never to be divided*, very God and very man in one person, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile the Father to us. Hence we must conclude that the very God suffered, yea, *truly* suffered!—that the very and only one God was crucified! yea, was dead!—and buried too!!—and continued three days and nights under the power of death!—for the two natures, Godhead and manhood, are *inseparably united never to be divided*—therefore as the human body was in Joseph's tomb, so must be the Godhead too!—All this was done and suffered by the very God, say our brethren in the forecited, articles, to reconcile the Father to us! Here is certainly the notion of two distinct Gods held forth—the one an unchangeable God; the other a changeable one—the one a living God; the other a dead, buried one—the one reconciling; the other reconciled! But as all acknowledge that there is but one only *living* God; therefore we must conclude that the one that was dead was not that one only living and true God. And as all acknowledge the one only living and true God is *without passions*, therefore he that suffered such exquisite *passion* on the cross, was not the only living and true God.[13]

Thus, simply, Jesus cannot substantially be God.

> All must acknowledge that the only true God can not suffer; for he was as happy during the suffering of Jesus, as he had been from eternity. I ask again, who suffered on the cross? Our brethren say that the Son was very and eternal God; then it follows that the Son did not suffer nor die; for very and eternal God can not suffer nor die. I repeat the question, who suffered on the cross? The answer must be, according to these opinions, not the Son of God who came from heaven, but a mere man, born of Mary thirty-three years before. How then is the love of God commended in his death? Let our brethren, who continually say that we deny Christ, and the virtue of his blood—let them beware lest they be found, at least in words, doing it themselves.[14]

Stone's views concerning the Trinity and his idea of Christ and the atonement were branded absurd, unscriptural, and heretical by his colleagues in the Presbyterian ministry. Taking advantage of the freedoms offered by the American frontier, he simply moved out from under their jurisdiction and continued to teach and preach according to the intended

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[13] Stone, "An Address to the Churches."
[14] Stone, "An Address to the Churches."

sense of the Scriptures—as he read them.[15] The historic doctrine of the Trinity was an absurdity, and the notion that Jesus was God was simply a rational impossibility. Trinitarian speculation that centered on three persons in one divine essence and Christology that spoke of two natures in one person simply did not communicate the biblical truth.

> Arius asserted that Jesus Christ was a created intelligence of the highest order, and Athanasius contended he was *begotten, not made* . . . and to this [Athanasius] have I subscribed long ago, as the most probable. See my letters to Doc. Blythe. I acknowledge that much speculation has been used on both sides of the long vexatious question. I, like many others, have indulged in it; but convinced of its inutility, and bad effects in society, have for several years back relinquished these speculations, and have confined myself to the language of scripture in my public teaching.[16]

Rather, Stone argued for the strict use of only biblical terminology to describe God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.[17]

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[15] "When all his disguises are stripped off, one opponent said, he stands convicted of occupying Arian, Socinian, and Pelagian ground. . . . Stone did indeed believe personally that the doctrine of the trinity as taught by the Westminster Confession was an incomprehensible absurdity. He evidently did understand Christ to be a created being who had been made equal with the Father in name and office. For him, the atonement was not expiatory, but a reconciliation brought about when people are conformed to the nature of God, that is, become holy. That state of holiness is a result of one's salvation through faith, faith being an act of the will and intellect, believing the written word of God. In the case of none of these doctrines, however, did Stone believe that one who held another idea was not a true Christian. These were matters about which the scriptures were not absolutely explicit and therefore could not be made terms of Christian fellowship." Douglas A. Foster, "The Springfield and Cumberland Presbyteries: Conflict and Secession in the Old Southwest," *Restoration Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (1990), http://www.acu.edu/sponsored/restoration_quarterly/archives/1990s/vol_32_no_3_contents/foster.html (accessed February 2, 2007).

[16] Barton W. Stone, "The Editor's remarks on brother H. Cyrus' letter, No. 2," *Christian Messenger* 9 (July 1835): 163.

[17] Some interpreters dispute Stone's Arianism, claiming that later in life he had moved beyond it. It is important to note, however, that he never disavowed his earlier position. What does appear to have changed was the manner in which he discussed Christology. According to John Mark Hicks, "For Stone's part, while he had earlier flirted with Arianism, by his death he had rejected all such speculative language and come to rest only, he claimed, in the words of Scripture. Stone acknowledged his debt to Campbell for rejecting speculation and 'expressing the faith of the gospel in the words of revelation.' In his last decade, his Christological statements are replete with biblical phrases without extended speculation as to their ultimate ontology." John Mark Hicks,

Summary

Barton Stone hoped to restore true, biblical Christianity from the impurities foisted upon it by human philosophical speculation. To the end of his life, however, Stone remained unconvinced that traditional, creedal Christianity accurately reflected the biblical witness. "If a doctrine be revealed, however mysterious it may be, I will humbly receive it. My reason shall ever bow to revelation; but it shall never be prostrated to human contradictions and inventions. Pious and good men have received such doctrines. God loves and pities them; and so will I."[18]

It is not surprising that Stone's Unitarian and Arian leanings affected the manner in which Stone viewed Christ's atoning work. As we will see with Charles Finney below, Stone held to a view of the atonement usually called the moral influence, or moral government, theory. That is, Jesus died to demonstrate self-sacrificing love. However, Stone and Finney were not the only ones who adopted the moral government theology. That perspective also made itself felt within the Lutheran tradition.

II. Frederick Henry Quitman (1760–1832)

Biography

Friedrich Heinrich Quitman was born in Westphalia, Germany—on an island in the Rhine—on August 7, 1760. He died in Rhinebeck, New York, on June 26, 1832. He attended the university at Halle and studied both philosophy and theology. In the year 1781, he was ordained to the ministry by the Lutheran consistory of Amsterdam and was sent as pastor of the Lutheran congregation on the island of Curagoa in the West Indies. He remained until the uprising of 1795, which drove him and his family to New York. His intention was to return to Holland where a life-pension awaited him, but the depressed conditions of Lutheranism in New York led him to stay. He accepted a call from the united congregations at Schoharie and Cobleskill, New York, where he remained about two years. In 1798 he accepted a call from four congregations near Rhinebeck, New York, serving until his retirement in 1828 (by then he was simply serving

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"What Did Christ's Sacrifice Accomplish? Atonement in Early Restorationist Thought" (Society of Biblical Literature Conference, Chicago, Illinois, November, 1994), http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/studies/whatdid.htm (accessed February 2, 2007). That being said, Stone's contemporaries remained unconvinced. See Thomas Cleland, *The Socini-Arian Detected, A Series of Letters to Barton W. Stone, and Some Important Subjects of Theological Discussion, Referred to in His "Address" to the Christian Churches in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio* (Lexington, Ky.: Thomas T. Skillman, 1815).

[18] Stone, "An Address to the Churches."

one congregation). Well-known in larger theological circles, Harvard awarded him a Doctor of Divinity in 1814. In 1807 he was elected president of the New York Ministerium, a post that he held until 1825.[19] He also served as the chairman of the board of trustees of Hartwick Seminary, just south of Cooperstown, New York, which was founded in 1815. He was not a particularly prolific writer, but he did publish several important texts, including a *Treatise on Magic, Evangelical Catechism,* and *Three Sermons on the Reformation,* as well as editing the *Hymnbook of the Ministerium of New York.*[20] The first of these had little to do with theology. The others, however, are evidence of radical rationalism's brief flourishing in the Lutheran church in the United States.[21]

Radical Rationalism

The religion of Jesus, in Quitman's mind, was a simple thing. In his *Evangelical Catechism* he defined the kingdom of God as "every institution which God has employed, and continues to employ for raising man to higher moral perfection."[22] This straightforward, practice-oriented religion had been corrupted by the ministers of the church who convoked "ecclesiastical assemblies, in order to establish and enforce their opinions

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[19] Harry J. Kreider, historian of the New York Ministerium, has provided the invaluable service of transcribing the minutes of the Ministerium from 1807 to 1818. A copy of this transcription may be found in the collection of the Concordia Historical Institute in Saint Louis, Missouri. The minutes show the pivotal role played by Quitman in leading the Ministerium.

[20] Frederick Henry Quitman, *A Treatise on Magic, or, On the Intercourse between Spirits and Men with Annotations* (Albany, NY: Balance Press, 1810); Quitman, *Evangelical Catechism; or A Short Exposition of the Principal Doctrines and Precepts of the Christian Religion, For the Use of the Churches Belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the State of New York* (Hudson, NY: William E. Norman, 1814); Quitman, *Three Sermons, the First Preached before the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Convened in Christ's Church , in the Town of Claverack, on Sunday the 7th of September, 1817: and the Second and Third on the Reformation by Doctor Martin Luther* (Hudson, NY: William E. Norman, 1817); and Quitman, *A Collection of Hymns, and a Liturgy, for the Use of Evangelical Lutheran Churches; To Which Are Added Prayers for Families and Individuals* (Philadelphia: G. & D. Billmeyer, 1814).

[21] Biographies of Quitman are limited. See "Frederick Henry Quitman," *Evangelical Review* 10 (October 1858): 183–190; John G. Morris, *Fifty Years in the Lutheran Ministry* (Baltimore: Printed for the Author, 1878); and Douglas Stange, "Frederick Henry Quitman, D.D. (1760–1832): The Flowering of Rationalism in the American Lutheran Church" (unpublished essay, in the library of the Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO). For an analysis of the theology of Quitman, especially in his hymnal, see Benjamin A. Kolodziej, "Frederick Henry Quitman and the Catechesis of the American Lutheran Enlightenment," *CTQ* 70 (2006): 341–366.

[22] Quitman, *Evangelical Catechism,* 43.

and decrees by excommunicating and anathematizing all those, who dissented from them."[23] The simple gospel of the Scriptures is that God has a "merciful disposition" toward humankind, which is revealed in the sending of

> his only begotten Son into the world, that through his mediation, or through his doctrine, life and death, man should be delivered from ignorance, and superstition, from sin and misery, and conducted to the possession of truth and the enjoyment of everlasting life. Every one, that is willing to accept of this gracious offer, and to demonstrate his faith in the Redeemer by sincere love to God, and an active zeal for the welfare of his neighbours, may rely upon the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and thus be rendered meet, by the means of grace, which the Gospel commends, for the enjoyment of eternal felicity, which Jesus himself is to impart to his true believers after having rescued them from the grave.[24]

In contrast to this simple gospel are those systems that are, in the words of Quitman, "too narrow and circumscribed, to leave room for the expansion of the human mind, too obscure and intricate, to illuminate the understanding, too brittle, to support the mind under affliction and doubt, and too frigid, to warm the heart with love to God, and charity to men."[25] Dead orthodoxy was, for Quitman, quite as serious a threat as the dogmatism of Rome. Luther and true Lutheranism, according to Quitman, appealed to the better qualities of the human person. "Man is a progressive being, capable of improvement. The more he exerts the faculties of his mind, the more he may be said to comply with the purpose for which they were bestowed."[26]

Quitman provided a vehicle for the improvement of the human mind with his *Evangelical Catechism*. In it one sees the brief flowering of Quitman's rationalistic Lutheranism. In the first place, Quitman takes up the Apostles' Creed and offers an exposition of it. Noting that the Creed was not written by the apostles proper, but rather reflects their doctrine as they learned it from Christ and recorded it in the Scriptures, Quitman takes up question of God. Notably absent in his discussion of God is any use of the word "Trinity." Though he speaks of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, nowhere does he carefully work out the relationship of the three persons in one divine essence. His position is vague to say the least,

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[23] Quitman, *Three Sermons*, 5; emphasis added.
[24] Quitman, *Three Sermons*, 8.
[25] Quitman, *Three Sermons*, 11–12.
[26] Quitman, *Three Sermons*, 12.

particularly in respect to the relationship of Father and Son. As he puts it when posing the question of why God is represented as Father, "This title is given in the first article to God, chiefly to *signify* his *near relation* to our Lord Jesus Christ."[27]

Not surprisingly, as Quitman turns to the doctrine of Christ, one finds that his trinitarian theology affects his understanding of Christ's person and work. Jesus is called "the only begotten son of God," but the meaning of this is not explored. He is also given the titles of savior, redeemer, and messiah, but only insofar as he is the divine example, set apart to excite human imitation.

> In the character of Jesus, as delineated by the evangelists there is something so excellent and divine, that few of his most violent enemies have attempted to find fault with it. His piety towards God, his zeal for the honour of his heavenly Father; his charity towards all men, his candour, disinterestedness and equanimity in all the various scenes of life; his liberality and forbearance with the frailties of others, and great plan for which he was sent in [*sic*] the world, are so conspicuous in every stage of his private and public life, and in particular in the hour of his last sufferings and death, that they could not fail to strike the unprejudiced mind, and shone forth with such luster, even when he was hanging on the cross, that the Roman Centurion . . . was induced to exclaim: Certainly this was a righteous man."[28]

This Jesus is "Lord" because, on the basis of his faithfulness in keeping God's law, "God has committed to him the government of his church."[29] The gospel is defined as follows:

> That God is a propitious father of the whole human race, that, as a pledge of this truth, he had sent his only begotten son into the world, so that if men repent of their errors and sins, and believing in Jesus Christ as their saviour, take him for their guide, he will not only pardon their sins, but also enable them, by the assistance of his holy spirit to lead a godly life, and in this way prepare them for a better and happier world.[30]

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[27] Quitman, *Evangelical Catechism*, 23.

[28] Quitman, *Evangelical Catechism*, 33.

[29] Quitman, *Evangelical Catechism*, 34.

[30] Quitman, *Evangelical Catechism*, 37. William Sutton claims that the moral government theology of Nathaniel William Taylor provided the theological substructure for the Second Great Awakening. See William R. Sutton, "Benevolent Calvinism and the Moral Government of God: The Influence of Nathaniel W. Taylor on

The resurrected and ascended Christ now lives to rule his church at the right hand of God, namely "he partakes of the divine government of the moral world."[31] Christ's example moves us to "faith," namely, "the condition of man's acceptance with God."[32] Quitman defines faith as "an impressive sense of the glorious perfections of God, and of his relation to men, as their creator, preserver, governor and judge, and a corresponding pious disposition, arising from it."[33] What, he continues, is faith in Christ? "A firm belief in the divine authority of Jesus, and of his doctrine and promises, expressed by a sincere zeal to cherish christian [*sic*] sentiments and dispositions, and to cultivate christian [*sic*] graces."[34] The centrality of reason and the freedom of the human will, already evident in the foregoing discussion of Stone, are also in the forefront of Quitman's treatment. To the question "Do you believe that man is deprived of free moral agency?" his catechism responds, "By no means; For if that were the case, how should God judge the world, and treat us as accountable beings? Besides this, religion addresses man as a free agent, and ascribes to him the power of choice and resistance."[35]

Without a meaningful trinitarian theology, Quitman's Jesus became little more than the man par excellence. His belief in Christianity as a basic, practice-oriented imitation of the life of Jesus was not unique, though it was perhaps more reductionistic than most of his colleagues. Still, Quitman was not alone in such sentiments. As his public ministry in New York drew to a close (1828), another figure burst onto the scene, similar in theological perspective to Quitman, who would transform Christian doctrine and practice in the United States. That man was Charles Grandison Finney.

Revivalism in the Second Great Awakening," *Religion and American Culture* 2 (Winter 1992): 23–47. Notably, however, Quitman's theology, which was contemporary with Taylor's, was also similar to it in some respects. Quitman was in correspondence with many of his contemporaries and even received an honorary doctorate from Harvard. Could there have been some cross-pollination between Quitman and Taylor? It is a question worth exploring.

[31] Quitman, *Evangelical Catechism*, 40.

[32] Quitman, *Evangelical Catechism*, 47.

[33] Quitman, *Evangelical Catechism*, 47.

[34] Quitman, *Evangelical Catechism*, 47–48.

[35] Quitman, *Evangelical Catechism*, 20.

III. Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875)

Biography

America has not, historically speaking, produced a large stable of well-known theologians. Jonathan Edwards is recognized as one of the few giants that America has produced. But how many have spent significant time studying Frederick Quitman or Barton Stone? In the early national period, however, the nation's first post-colonial theologian came to the forefront—one whose legacy stands above all other challengers. He is perhaps most accurately labeled America's theologian.[36]

Charles Grandison Finney was born in Warren County, Connecticut, on August 29, 1792, the seventh child of Sylvester and Rebecca Finney. His family moved to central New York two years later. When Finney was sixteen, the family moved yet again, this time to a small town called Henderson, New York, on the shore of Lake Ontario. Throughout his childhood, "Finney . . . heard very little preaching, and that mostly by uneducated and ignorant men, whose mistakes in grammar so impressed themselves upon his mind that they were the subjects of merriment to him to his dying day."[37] A series of teaching jobs in New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey left him unsatisfied, and he returned to Henderson. He found his mother ill so he remained in the area, studying law. He also began attending church, but found himself at odds with the church's confession and practice, particularly its heavy-handed, double-predestinarian Calvinism. He bought a Bible, started reading it, and became convinced that it was the word of God. Yet he could not commit himself fully to the demands of the gospel. After years of struggle as to whether he could truly "surrender all his worldly plans and submit his will without reservation to Christ," he gave himself to Christ on October 10, 1821, and began his study for the ministry under the pastor of his

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[36] This is not to diminish the stature or influence of Edwards, nor to challenge Richard Jenson's claim that Edwards is "America's Theologian." See Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Finney's practical influence, however, far exceeds that of Edwards.

[37] G. Frederick Wright, "Charles G. Finney - CHARLES GRANDISON FINNEY - Charles Finney 1792-1875," *Truth in Heart Web page* (Fenwick, MI: Truth in Heart, 1995–2007), http://truthinheart.com/EarlyOberlinCD/CD/Finney/Biography/finneybi.htm (accessed February 20, 2007). Also available in print form as G. Frederick Wright, *Charles Grandison Finney* (Boston, New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1891).

church.[38] He was licensed to preach by the Presbytery in 1824, three years after he marked his conversion.

While much has been written about the revivals of Finney in the burned-over district of New York, his revivalistic work at the Broadway Tabernacle in New York City, and his involvement with the abolitionist movement, the focus here is on his influential *Systematic Theology*.[39] First published in 1846, thirteen years after assuming a professorship at Oberlin College, its articles on the nature of the atonement and the doctrine of justification reveal a seriously deficient Christology.[40]

Moral Government Theology, the Atonement, and Justification by Faith

Lecture 25 of Finney's *Systematic Theology* addresses the doctrine of justification. In it he is dependent upon the moral law that he outlined at the opening of his lectures. The fundamental starting point for Finney is the moral government of God; that is, that God has created all things and rules all things under a moral law that is intrinsic to the divine essence and hence is a divine attribute. This moral law, which Finney later calls a natural law, is part of every man, and is "the law developed or revealed within himself; and thus he becomes 'a law to himself,' his own reason affirming his obligation to conform to this idea, or law."[41] While it is developed inside of man, moral law and its obligation is "a rule of duty, prescribed by the supreme Lawgiver, and external to self."[42] As it is a divine attribute, it is something that is independent of the will of God; he binds himself to it, and so is himself bound to it and binds every moral agent (including all human beings) to it. It "can never change, or be changed," and is "the unalterable demand of the reason, that the whole

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[38] G. Frederick Wright, "Charles G. Finney."

[39] Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology, Embracing Lectures on Moral Government Together with Atonement, Moral and Physical Depravity, Regeneration, Philosophical Theories, and Evidences of Regeneration* (Oberlin, OH: James M. Fitch; Boston: Crocker & Brewster; New York: Saxton & Miles, 1846). Available online as Charles G. Finney, "Finney's SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY 1846: Table of Contents," *The Gospel Truth Web site* (Orange, CA: Gospel Truth Ministries, 1999–2006), http://www.gospeltruth.net/1846ST/1846st_toc.htm (accessed February 2, 2007). For this paper, the expanded 1878 edition will be used. This has been reprinted as Charles Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, ed. Dennis Carroll, Bill Nicely, and L. G. Parkhurst, Jr. (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1994).

[40] Finney became president of Oberlin in 1851 and served in that capacity until his retirement in 1866. Notably, Oberlin was the first college in the United States formally to admit women and African-Americans.

[41] Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, 20.

[42] Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, 20.

being, whatever there is of it at any time, shall be entirely consecrated to the highest good of universal being, and for this reason God requires this of us, with all the weight of His authority."[43]

Just as the American government of Finney's day was based on the rule of law, so the moral government of God went as well. Finney calls the atonement "the governmental substitution of the sufferings of Christ for the punishment of sinners . . . it is a covering of their sins by his sufferings."[44] What does he mean by a governmental substitution? Basing his remarks on Grotius and Arminius, he claims that when Christ died on the cross, he suffered a penalty that substituted for the punishment due to sinners. The substitute for man's punishment, the Son of God, gives to men who accept his gospel a substitutionary payment for their sins. Human sin is not imputed to Christ and as such he does not receive the actual punishment due sinners. Indeed, he *could not* receive the actual punishment because it was not his to receive. For Christ to be punished for the sins of another would violate God's justice.[45] Continuing in point eleven, Finney writes that the death of Christ on the cross, which he calls "public justice," "could strictly require only the execution of law," and "an atonement . . . would more fully meet the necessities of government, and act as a more efficient preventive of sin, and a more powerful persuasive to holiness, than the infliction of the legal penalty would do."[46] Here Finney is clear: the atonement for sin is only the means to a greater end, or ends. He outlines God's options: either he sets up a payment by sending his Son to die on the cross, a kind of heavenly scholarship for which people may apply; or he metes out his punishment personally, administers it to all, and hopes that cures it. Thus, for Finney, God chooses the lesser of two evils, and gives the atonement a purpose that does not have the expiation of sin as the primary function but rather shows people what they owe when they sin so they will be moved not to sin. Echoes of American "can-doism" are easily heard, as in the voice of Poor Richard: "God helps those who help themselves."

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[43] Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, 21–22. The rhetorical similarity to the foundational American documents is readily apparent.

[44] Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, 211.

[45] Finney makes the same point in his notorious sermon, "Justification by Faith." See Charles G. Finney, "Justification by Faith," *The Gospel Truth Web site* (Orange, CA: Gospel Truth Ministries, 1999–2006), http://www.gospeltruth.net/1837LTPC/lptc05_just_by_faith.htm (accessed February 12, 2007).

[46] Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, 214.

Finney expands his points, arguing that because "Christ owed obedience to the moral law, both as God and man" and "was under as much obligation to be perfectly benevolent as any moral agent is," he could not obey the law for us, because he was bound to keep it for himself.[47] Further, the punishment theory of the magisterial Reformation made no logical sense, because "He need not certainly have both fulfilled the law for us, as our substitute, under a covenant of works, and at the same time suffered as a substitute, in submitting to the penalty of the law."[48] In short, Christ must either fulfill the law as our substitute and receive glory and honor, or suffer the substitutionary atonement. Christ chose the latter. If Christ suffered the actual punishment due to all humankind, Finney argued, then he would have ended up in hell, suffering eternal death billions of times over. That was the true justice due to mankind, and, being a moral governor bound to moral law, God could not set it aside by suffering the punishment himself; it simply was not lawful for him to do.

Finney opens his discussion of the nature of justification by first describing what it is not. He then describes the governmental lens through which he views the Scriptures, going through the American branches of government and seeing to which branches of God's moral government justification should be assigned. His thesis was: "[G]ospel justification is not to be regarded as a forensic or judicial proceeding."[49] Arguing governmentally, he states that pardoning, or setting aside executions, is not a power given to the judicial branch of government; those powers are given to either the executive or legislative branches. Justification, being "declared" righteous in a forensic or judicial sense, cannot occur if the person is actually guilty of the crime. For God to pronounce such a verdict would, again, violate the moral law—in other words, it would compromise God's own essence. As such, forensic justification is a logical and essential impossibility. "Gospel justification is the justification of sinners; it is, therefore, naturally impossible, and a most palpable contradiction, to affirm that the justification of a sinner, or of one who has violated the law, is a forensic or judicial justification."[50]

What then is the nature of justification? Justification does *not* mean being declared not guilty by an eternal court of moral law. It is an executive decision, a pardon that comes from the highest executive in the moral government of God: God himself. This kind treatment, of course, has

[47] Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, 218.
[48] Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, 218.
[49] Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, 360.
[50] Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, 360.

several strings attached to it, each a *sine qua non*. Before laying out those conditions, he again appeals to his idea that Christ owed obedience to this moral law as much as anyone else. According to Finney: "[Christ] was bound for Himself to love God with all His heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and His neighbor as Himself. He did no more than this. He could do no more."[51] So, how could Christ's obedience be applied to all humankind when legally it should only be applied to himself? Simply put: on the basis of several conditions.

The first condition for justification is the atonement. He makes a distinction between the ground, "the moving, procuring cause" of justification, and a condition, something that lays the groundwork. The atonement is a condition to justification, because, according to Finney, "the Godhead desired to save sinners, but could not safely do so without danger to the universe, unless something was done to satisfy public, not retributive justice."[52] It would be a gross violation of moral law for the simple act of atonement to be the ground of justification. It would cause the moral law to collapse, along with Finney's theory of God and his attributes. He also separates the atonement and justification not only logically, but theologically, by saying that people who believe that the atonement is the ground for justification put all the grace in the atonement and leave none for justification. Justification in this sense, says Finney, is *simply* a pronouncement, which has no power to motivate the "justified" to the sanctified life.[53]

The second condition for justification is the willful human act of repentance. He states, "It must be certain that the government of God cannot pardon sin without repentance. This is as truly a doctrine of natural as of revealed religion."[54] He continues, "It is self-evident that, until the sinner breaks off from sins by repentance or turning to God, he cannot be justified in any sense. This is everywhere assumed, implied, and taught in the Bible. No reader of the Bible can call this in question."[55] Man, as a moral agent, has the innate ability to choose to live in accordance with moral law and to ask for God's help to do so, or not. If he seeks God's will and fulfills it (certainly with the help of God), he will be justified. If he chooses not to, he will be damned.

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[51] Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, 363.

[52] Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, 363.

[53] Of course, Finney also held to perfectionism—a point that is beyond the scope of this paper but that fits perfectly within his larger theological system.

[54] Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, 366.

[55] Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, 366.

Finney's third condition for justification is a largely obvious one: faith in Christ. However, he chastises those who see it as the means by which the merits of Christ are apprehended. If faith is merely a "condition" for justification—that which passively receives the benefits of Christ's atoning work—the result will be antinominanism. Rather, faith is fundamentally active and has a quantitative character to it. That is, by virtue of exercising faith, faith grows and increases—one might call it a divine wellness program—which, if cultivated properly and consistently, will eventuate in the state of sanctified perfection. All of this is consistent with his basic theme of man as a free moral agent who, with faith active in love, may be said to be "justified."[56]

Summary

For Finney, Christ's work of living and dying on behalf of sinners did not objectively accomplish the payment for the sins of the world. Rather, Christ fulfilled the law, as he must, *for himself.* Beyond that, however, his faithfulness opened possibilities to those who obediently followed him in a life of obedience to the revealed will of God. Christ's death and resurrection did not accomplish salvation—they *made salvation a possibility.* The realization of that possibility remained the responsibility of the individual Christian who, by acts of the will, chose to live the obedient life. For Finney, this act of the will coupled with the obedient life is faith. Thus faith is knowledge, trust, assent, and act.

Finney's theology proved to be enormously attractive to Americans in the second third of the nineteenth century. No evangelist was more successful than he was, and his version of Jesus continues to be formative for many even in the present.

IV. Conclusion

In *American Jesus,* Stephen Prothero argues that the manner in which Americans have configured the person and work of Jesus provides a kind of looking glass into their self-understanding. If this is so—and Prothero makes a strong case—then the picture that emerges from our three examples is not a happy one. Take the following example. Notably absent from Finney's discussion of the Trinity, Christ, atonement, and justification, is the doctrine of imputation. In no sense is the sin of Adam imputed to Christ, nor is the righteousness of Christ imputed to humankind. The result necessarily is that Christ is reduced simply to an example, and moral government theology carries away any sense of Christ

[56] Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology,* 366.

meaningfully making a substitutionary atonement for sin. While this point of view finds its most sustained treatment in Finney's *Systematic Theology*, this study shows how pervasive this perspective was in the early national period. Indeed, John R. Fitzmier has repeatedly made the point in his lectures that one of the most striking theological characteristics of the early national period is the disappearance of the doctrine of imputation.[57] If this study has shown nothing else, it is the manner in which the doctrines of the Trinity, the person and work of Christ, the atonement, and justification were bound up together in the Jesuses that American Christianity produced in the early national period.

Response to Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

Rod Rosenbladt

I would like to thank Dr. Rast for providing a historical, empirical description of critical-rationalist theologians of the not-so-distant past. This critique is also valuable in the case of today's thousands of Schwärmerei groups. I would also like to offer a few thoughts in response.

First, it was refreshing to read a paper that braves stepping beyond the specialization approach which is now almost universal in American university circles. A bright young church historian does not bow to the ever-present "American university rules" of over-specialization (consciously patterned after German universities), and deigns to comment on some historical examples of bad *theology*—theology concerning which its adherents quote the text of Scripture but insult the text's truth claims a sentence later.

Second, he has provided excellent examples of what many of us were taught, namely, that to change one doctrine *always* has a deleterious effect on other doctrines—and that by necessity because the laws of logic cannot be transcended.

In the case of Barton Stone, Dr. Rast shows how equivocating about the Trinity leads directly and logically to deep problems with regard to the person of Christ. This in turn leads to real problems with the substitutionary nature of Jesus' atoning death. Stone's Unitarian

[57] Fitzmier, long-time professor at Vanderbilt Divinity School, is now the Executive Director of the American Academy of Religion. His claim is worthy of a more careful, sustained study.

tendencies logically forced him to an Arian view of Jesus Christ. Then his Arian tendencies logically caused his problems with the substitutionary work of Christ. Without grounding in trinitarianism, any penal view of the atonement becomes a repulsive caricature. In particular, vicarious substitution makes little sense if it was not the case that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19).

In the case of Frederick Quitman, Dr. Rast has exposited a quintessential Enlightenment optimism as an invader into American Lutheranism. According to Quitman: "Man is a progressive being, capable of improvement." In the words of Dr. Rast, "[Jesus] is also given the titles of savior, redeemer, and messiah, but only insofar as he is the divine example, set apart to excite human imitation." Rather than using the Reformation distinction between "things earthly" and "things heavenly," to the question "Do you believe that man is deprived of free moral agency?" Quitman answers simply: "By no means!" and "religion addresses man as a free agent, and ascribes to him the power of choice and resistance."

In the case of "America's theologian," Charles Grandison Finney starts from "the moral government of God" and arrives at "the unchanging moral law our whole being must be entirely consecrated; God requires this of us, with all the weight of His authority." As Dr. Rast observes, Christ did not, according to Finney, receive the actual punishment due sinners! Why not? Because he *could* not—it was not his to receive! As Finney wrote, "[A]n atonement . . . would more fully meet the necessities of government, and act as a more efficient preventative of sin, and a more powerful persuasive to holiness, than the infliction of the legal penalty would do." For Finney, the atonement for sin is only the means to a greater end: it shows people what they owe when they sin so they will be moved not to sin.

Third, the amount of space that Dr. Rast devoted to *concrete* examples was refreshing, examples of individuals who could not abide Christianity's biblical assertions regarding the Trinity, sin, the person and work of Christ, justification, and particularly imputed righteousness.

This is all the more important because the seminary curricula of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) spend little time on John Wesley, Charles Finney, or others like them. The reasons for this are different, of course. For all Lutherans, the claim of accomplishable perfection prior to death is repugnant, a view based on good biblical foundations. In the case of ELCA seminary training, student mastery of John Wesley and/or

Charles Finney is repugnant for at least two reasons: first, because it is not far from the pietism in which many of them grew up, and against which more than one professor has spent his or her whole life reacting; second, because Wesley was always quoting the Scriptures *as if they were true*—a real "problem"! As a consequence, the student at a liberal Lutheran seminary does not spend much time on Wesley or Finney.

In LCMS seminaries, it appears that for the seminarians to spend valuable time on Wesley, "circuit riders" like Peter Cartwright, lawyer Charles Finney, the "holiness bodies," Pentecostal and enthusiast churches, and the like is just not important enough to displace curricular time spent on more important subjects. Thank God for Dr. Thomas Manteufel! He is, hopefully for publication, writing the missing section on Wesley and revivalism for the comparative dogmatics textbook by F. E. Mayer.[58] Meyer has substantial treatments of Rome, of Eastern Orthodoxy, of classical Lutheranism, and of classical Calvinism, but Wesley received only a few pages.

In a way, this is understandable. Sociologically speaking, people choose between Lutheran theology and churches and Presbyterian or Episcopal theology and churches (lately perhaps more between these and Roman or Eastern Orthodox theologies). But surely *not* between Lutheran theology and the Schwärmerei mess of perfectionist bodies? Sociologically speaking, this is probably true, but now there are the multi-thousands attending mega-churches that call themselves "non-denominational." Who provides the intellectual backbone for the sermon content and curricula of such "non-denominational" churches? At best, John Wesley does—whether the pastor knows it or not! At worst, it is Charles Finney.

This makes the work of scholars like Dr. Rast all the more important. Studies like "American Christianity and Its Jesuses" are part of an important biblical critique. It is a critique not just of the dangers of an unbiblical Enlightenment optimism but rather it functions as well for the benefit of thousands and thousands of "non-denominational Christians." Though often their leaders have had no formal theological training—maybe not even a two-year Associate of Arts degree from a Bible school—they live, preach, and teach in the conceptual framework of Wesley's perfectionism. In these groups, issues such as sin, atonement, and justification are glossed over or ignored—even more than was the case with Dr. Rast's three examples of Enlightenment rationalism. In either

[58] F. E. Mayer, *The Religious Bodies of America*, 4th ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961).

case, these people end up with a Jesus who is finally a moral improver, that is, a model of moral living for sinners to emulate. In terms of law and gospel, Jesus is finally a newer, kinder, gentler Moses—but a Moses nevertheless. In terms Dr. Rast uses, both sides end up in a "moral government" view of the atonement. The connecting link is the stress on Christianity as a method of moral improvement of people—people who are basically good but need excitement! What Christianity finally is *not* is "To the one who does not work, but trusts Him who justifies the *wicked*, his faith is reckoned as if it were righteousness" (Rom 4:5). As Dr. Rast rightly tells us, "Finney's theology proved to be enormously attractive to Americans in the second third of the nineteenth century. No evangelist was more successful than he was, and his version of Jesus continues to be formative for many even in the present."

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Theological Observer

The Lost Tomb of Jesus?

On March 4, 2007, the Discovery Channel premiered a dramatized documentary with this intriguingly sensationalized title: "The Lost Tomb of Jesus." The title alone guaranteed that it would receive a wide viewing. The program explored the basic hypothesis that the Talpiot tomb, found in Jerusalem during a construction project in 1980, was the final burial place for Jesus of Nazareth and some of his family members. This documentary featured a visually impressive combination of sleuthing in Jerusalem to relocate the Talpiot tomb which had been cataloged and covered over again shortly after its discovery, the examination of archaeological evidence focusing on the inscriptions found on the ossuaries recovered from this tomb (that is, smaller limestone burial boxes in which the bones from one person were stored), statistical probability factoring, DNA testing, commentary by several archaeologists and biblical scholars, as well as the dramatization of several theoretical events from the first century. This production is the work of James Cameron, who directed the film "Titanic," and journalist Simcha Jacobovici, who also narrated the program. Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino have released a book, *The Jesus Family Tomb,* in conjunction with this TV special.

The huge problem with this documentary is how it strings together individual untenable pieces of evidence and then argues that the cumulative weight of this evidence supports the hypothesis that the Talpiot tomb was indeed the Jesus family tomb. All one needs is a single weak link to break such a chain of evidence, and this program presented a host of weak links. The first piece is among the weakest, namely, that one of the ossuaries from the tomb bearing the Aramaic inscription "Yeshua, son of Joseph" (in translation) once contained the bones of Jesus of Nazareth. Although the fact that Yeshua (Jesus) was a very popular name in first-century Judea is acknowledged, the fact that other ossuaries from the tomb bore the names "Maria," "Mariameme," and "Matthew" was enlisted, through the use of statistical probability and limited DNA analysis, to argue that this cluster of names existed because these were probably the ossuaries of Jesus, Mary his mother, Mary Magdalene, and his disciple Matthew. Since there was an ossuary for Jesus, it is theorized that the report circulating among the Jews that his body was stolen (Matt 28:13–15) was actually true; any "resurrection" of Jesus, therefore, is deemed a spiritual—not a physical—resurrection. The documentary side-steps the obvious historical question of why disciples proclaiming Jesus' physical resurrection would preserve the evidence that this did not happen in a marked ossuary of an elaborate tomb.

The stringing together of weak links, however, did not stop there. Although the reading of some of these inscriptions is confirmed by Frank Moore Cross, a

renowned scholar from Harvard, others are not. After proposing a very dubious reading of the ossuary inscription "Mariameme e Mara" as the name and title of "Mary [Magdalene] known as the Master" (probably better rendered from Greek as "Mary, also called Martha"), the program asserts that Mary Magdalene could have been secretly married to Jesus and after his death became one of the "Masters" within the early church in Jerusalem. Moreover, because one of the ossuaries found in the Talpiot tomb bears the inscription "Judah, son of Yeshua," the documentary even went so far as to theorize that this son was the fruit of the supposed marriage between Jesus and Mary Magdalene! To top it all off, the one ossuary that is missing from the original find is theorized to be the "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus" ossuary which is currently swirling in scholarly debate and legal controversy as to whether it is a forgery. Numerous scholars who have examined this same evidence since 1980 have not concluded that this is the tomb of Jesus; the coincidence of very common names simply does not support the hypothesis. Finally, it should be noted that these non-evidential assertions take on a historical flavor when you see them dramatized by fine actors in proper dress and setting. Similar assertions were made as part of the historical fiction of Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code*; the greater danger here is that they are presented to be possible historical facts in the context of a documentary.

In spite of the problematic content of "The Lost Tomb of Jesus," the Discovery Channel is to be commended for organizing the helpful discussion among a panel of scholars and theologians hosted by Ted Koppel immediately following the premiere. Many of the historical, scientific, and logical problems of the documentary were raised in this discussion. "The Lost Tomb of Jesus" ends up documenting more drama than history and more fanciful speculation than meticulous scholarly research. The timing of this premiere—a few weeks before Holy Week—is no coincidence; last year the media event was the publication of the (gnostic) *Gospel of Judas*. Pastors must not ignore such challenges, but need to meet them in the public square with careful scholarship in tandem with continued clear proclamation, as presented in the Scriptures, of the crucified and risen Jesus who lives and reigns to all eternity.

Charles A. Gieschen

For a significant, scholarly response to this documentary, see Buried Hope or Risen Savior? The Search for the Jesus Tomb, *ed. Charles Quarles (Nashville: B&H Academic, forthcoming in January 2008).*