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Table of Contents

The Word of YHWH as Theophany Richard A. Lammert.....	195
A Lutheran Understanding of Natural Law in the Three Estates Gifford Grobien	211
Martin Chemnitz's Reading of the Fathers in <i>Oratio de Lectione Patrum</i> Carl L. Beckwith	231
At the Edge of Subscription: The <i>Abusus</i> Doctrine of the Formula of Concord – <i>Doctrina</i> or <i>Ratio</i>? William C. Weinrich.....	257
Research Notes	270
A Response to Jeffrey Kloha's Study of the Trans-Congregational Church	
Book Reviews	276
Books Received	287

The Word of YHWH as Theophany

Richard A. Lammert

Most interpreters of the New Testament affirm that there are at least a few texts where “the Word” (ὁ λόγος) is a personal being, the Son of God (John 1:1, 14; Heb 4:12; Rev 19:13). The most widely recognized of these texts, the prologue of John, identifies the eternal Son as “the Word” who created all things (1:1–3) and “became flesh” (1:14) as Jesus, the incarnate Son. Many interpreters of the Old Testament, however, understand a very similar expression in the Old Testament, “the word of YHWH” (דְּבַר יְהוָה), as signifying merely a verbal word, spoken by God and heard by the prophet to whom “the word of YHWH came.”¹ The evident linguistic connection between the two terms is not readily extended to a theological connection. A close exegetical consideration shows, however, that the connection between the two is also theological: the word of YHWH is a theophany in several Old Testament texts.

I. The Word of YHWH as Divine Hypostasis

In the worldview of the Old Testament, divine attributes that are identified with God and yet exhibit some degree of independent identity—often called hypostases—play a much more prominent role than we in the Western world are accustomed to seeing. Charles Gieschen contrasts our typical (Western) way of viewing attributes, such as Word, as abstract concepts with the biblical (Eastern) way of viewing these attributes as tangible forms:

It has been affirmed through textual analysis that it is valid to speak of hypostases as aspects of God that have degrees of distinct personhood. It should be emphasized that our modern ways of conceptualization often resist giving a degree of personhood to these divine attributes or aspects. In spite of this, the textual evidence leads us to understand a world view that is based much more on tangible forms than abstract concepts. Thus, Name, Glory, Wisdom, Word, Spirit, and Power are not primarily abstract

¹ E.g., Jer 1:2, 4. The four-letter personal name of God in the Old Testament, יהוה, is transliterated as YHWH in this study rather than “Yahweh” or translating it with the title “the LORD” as in most English translations. The fact that the title “the word of YHWH” contains the divine name is significant: it links these visible manifestations to YHWH himself. Where his name is, there he is (e.g., Deut 12:5).

concepts in this world view; they are realities with visible forms.²

Gieschen's summary of his textual analysis serves as a base from which to view the exegetical evidence impelling us to understand several of *the word of YHWH* accounts in the Old Testament as actual theophanies, or appearances of God in visible form.

The major contribution to the study of the Word of God in the Old Testament is the work of Oskar Grether, *Name und Wort Gottes im Alten Testament*.³ Despite having *Name* first in the title, the majority of the work focuses on the *Word* of God. Grether states the basis for his investigation in the foreword: "In the following work, Name and Word of God in the Old Testament will be investigated in their relation to revelation."⁴ Grether's point of departure appears to be conducive to understanding the word of YHWH as a theophany. Unfortunately, Grether exhibits the tendency of viewing the word of YHWH more as an abstract concept than as a personal being. In the following analysis, Grether's view represents one end of the spectrum of views on the word of YHWH as theophany, while Gieschen represents the other.

Grether collects all the word of YHWH (and related) phrases in the Old Testament, categorizing and examining them.⁵ He shows that the vast majority of the occurrences of the phrase occur in the prophetic literature. The few occurrences in the Torah are almost exclusively a reference to the covenantal word of God in the Ten Commandments. In the prophetic literature, however, the word of YHWH refers to what Grether calls the "prophetic Word of God." After his investigation of the word of YHWH in the Old Testament, Grether observes the following about *the word* as an hypostasis:

The hypostasization of the דבר [word] concept reaches its fullest development in the postcanonical time, that is, after the boundaries of the present work. Places such as Wis. 18:14 ff., where the Logos appears as a personality with a large measure of independence in order to kill the

² Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence*, *Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums* 42 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1998), 122. For a defense of hypostasis nomenclature, see 36–45.

³ Oskar Grether, *Name und Wort Gottes im Alten Testament*, Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 64 (Gießen: A. Töpelmann, 1934). This was Grether's *Habilitationsschrift*, presented at the Universität Erlangen in 1933.

⁴ Grether, *Name und Wort*, v. All translations of the German are mine.

⁵ All of the phrases that Grether examines are of the form דבר in the construct case plus יהוה, אלהים, and similar words. דבר in the absolute case has too wide a range of meanings (including "word," "thing," "event," "history") to provide any specificity.

firstborn of the Egyptians, is *not yet* found in the canon of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, the beginnings of hypostasization lie in it.⁶

It is this last statement of Grether's that we will investigate in detail. Is it only the *beginnings* of hypostasization of the Word that are to be found in the Old Testament, or is there *already* an hypostasization of the Word, with the word of YHWH appearing as a theophany in Old Testament texts?

It is difficult to answer this question. Grether admits that the decision is often more or less subjective.⁷ Granted that the decision is often subjective, one must consider upon what basis to make that judgment. Quoting G. Westphal, Grether himself gives us a basis upon which to make that judgment:

It is in any case a conspicuously fine distinction to notice in the use of the phrases *וַיְהִי דְבַר יְהוָה אֶל אֱלִיָּהוּ* [and the word of YHWH came to Elijah] (1 Kings 17:2, 8; 18:1; 21:17, 28), as long as Elijah is distant from Horeb, and *וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה* [and YHWH said], as long as Elijah is on Horeb and personally communes with Yahweh here (1 Kings 19:15). Thereby the voice that Elijah hears (v. 13) is designated as Yahweh's voice. One may conclude from this, that a deliberate distinction should be made here between mediate and immediate speaking with God. The Word, just as the Name, *plays a much more independent role in ancient times than we can feel*—we find ourselves here already on the way to a personification of the Word.⁸

Here Grether sounds surprisingly close to Gieschen. Since "the Word . . . plays a much more independent role in ancient times than we can feel," then we should be open—as faithful interpreters—to the possibility that word of YHWH is a title for YHWH's visible appearance or form. We must take into account that it is more difficult for us moderns than for the ancient Israelites to see a given account as a theophany.

II. An Examination of Word of YHWH Texts

Before we apply Westphal's axiom to Grether's analysis, we should note Westphal's own analysis of the Elijah pericopes. Westphal has concluded that there is a distinction between the "mediate" and the "immediate" speaking of God. In doing so, however, he is making a distinction that cannot be made exegetically. The biblical text stresses that (sinful) humans cannot see God and live: "Then Moses said, 'Now show me your glory.' And the LORD said, 'I will cause all my goodness to pass

⁶ Grether, *Name und Wort*, 150; (italics mine).

⁷ Grether, *Name und Wort*, 150–151.

⁸ Grether, *Name und Wort*, 151; (italics mine).

in front of you. . . . But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live'" (Exod 33:18-20). The knowledge among the Israelites that no one may see God and live is underscored by the incidents where an individual saw a person who was God, and marveled that he lived. Additionally, Deuteronomy ends by noting, "Since then [the time of Moses], no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face" (Deut 34:10). If no one other than Moses warranted face-to-face communication—and even that must have been mediated, since Moses himself could not see God and live—then no prophet can claim to have an "immediate" communication from God. Because one cannot understand *exegetically* any communication to be immediately from God, the distinction that Westphal has found in the text evaporates. Since the fall, God always mediates his presence to sinful humans.

In addition, upon closer examination, one sees that Westphal has been somewhat selective in his presentation of the textual evidence. He correctly notes that *וַיְהִי דְבַר יְהוָה אֶל אֱלִיָּהוּ* (and the word of YHWH came to Elijah) is used when Elijah is distant from Horeb, and *וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה* (and YHWH said) when he is on Horeb. However, he does not mention one other appearance of YHWH in the pericope:

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. . . . All at once an angel (*מַלְאָךְ*) touched him and said, "Get up and eat." . . . The angel of the LORD (*מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה*) came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." (1 Kings 19:3, 5, 7)

If *the word of YHWH* and *YHWH* represent two different types of mediation, then *the angel of YHWH* would seem to represent a third type. It is better, however, to understand these variations as different *titles* for the same mediation, not as different *types* of mediation. Furthermore, *the angel of YHWH* is understood as a theophany elsewhere in the Old Testament.⁹

Westphal has ignored an important piece of textual evidence. As soon as Elijah reaches Mount Horeb, the text continues:

There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him (*וַיְהִי דְבַר יְהוָה אֶלֵּי*): "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. . . ." He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD (*לִפְנֵי יְהוָה*), for the LORD (*יְהוָה*) is about to pass by." (1 Kings 19:9-10)

⁹ See, for example, Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 51-69.

The word of YHWH speaks to Elijah not only when he is distant from Mount Horeb, but also when he is on Mount Horeb. There is no fine distinction (*pace* Westphal) between the phrases used for the two different locations. The only distinction that appears in the text is between "the word of YHWH" and "YHWH." Both of them speak as YHWH; yet "the word of YHWH" tells Elijah that "YHWH" will pass by Elijah.¹⁰

Based upon the distinction between the two phrases that Westphal made, Grether applies that insight to a text from the Torah:

One could just as well [as the Elijah pericope] refer to the jahwistic report of the making of the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:1 ff.). At first (v. 1 and 4) it is the דבר [word] that mediates the interaction of Yahweh with Abraham. In verse 9, which orders the preparations for making the covenant, it says, "Then He spoke to him." Now Yahweh is thought of as nearer than before. Also indicative is the fact that in the history of the patriarchs only twice an expression composed with דבר is used for the speaking of God, otherwise however the verb אָמַר [to say] is used. Undoubtedly the expression "and the דבר יהוה [word of YHWH] came" stresses the distance between the speaker and the one spoken to more than "and He spoke" and perhaps occasionally an intention ruled in the choice of the expression. But that is by no means regularly so.¹¹

Using Westphal's distinction, Grether arrives at a false dichotomy. The context hardly allows one to say that YHWH is nearer in Gen 15:9 (where YHWH himself speaks) than in Gen 15:4 (where the word of YHWH speaks). In Gen 15:5, the word of YHWH takes Abram outside; such a manifestation must be "near" Abram.

From the same pericope, Gieschen concludes that this is an account of a theophany:

The phenomenon described seems to begin with a vision (15.1), then progresses to a manifestation that comes to Abram in order to speak and lead him outside to see the stars (15.4-6), then concludes with the smoking fire pot and flaming torch going between the sacrifices that Abram prepared (15.7-21). There is good reason to compare this theophany to those involving the Angel of YHWH in subsequent portions of the OT. Thus, the Word of YHWH could be considered to be an angelomorphic figure, especially by later interpreters in the first century CE.¹²

The biblical text itself provides support for Gieschen's conclusion that the

¹⁰ See the discussion of this pericope by Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 105.

¹¹ Grether, *Name und Wort*, 151.

¹² Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 103-104.

word of YHWH in this text is a theophany:

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision (אַבְרָם בְּמַחְזָה אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר): . . . Then the word of the LORD came to him (וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל אַבְרָהָם): "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." He took him outside and said (וַיֹּצֵא אֹתוֹ הַחוּצָה) "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the LORD (וַיֵּאֱמֶן בַּיהוָה), and he credited it to him as righteousness. He also said to him, "I am the LORD (אֲנִי יְהוָה), who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." . . . On that day the LORD made a covenant (בְּרַת יְהוָה) with Abram. (Gen. 15:1, 4-7, 18)

Gieschen notes that the word of YHWH not only speaks to Abram but also takes him outside. The word of YHWH here is obviously more than a title for a verbal event; it is a title for a personal appearance of YHWH. Abram accepts the statement made by the word of YHWH as if it were YHWH's own word: Abram believed YHWH. Then the word of YHWH identifies himself as YHWH. At the conclusion of the pericope, YHWH makes a covenant with Abram that same day. Since the only figure—other than Abram—who has been introduced in the text so far is the word of YHWH, it is reasonable to conclude that the word of YHWH is the same YHWH who made a covenant with Abram.

After Grether's analysis of Genesis 15, he continues with an examination of Jeremiah 13. He again relies on the false dichotomy between mediate and immediate speech of God; he does not allow his judgment to be influenced by the tendency within the Old Testament texts to present attributes of God (e.g., word, name, glory) as concrete, personal realities—a tendency Grether himself had noted. Concerning Jeremiah 13, Grether states:

Undoubtedly the expression "and the דְּבַר יְהוָה [word of YHWH] came" stresses the distance between the speaker and the one spoken to more than "and He spoke" and perhaps occasionally an intention ruled in the choice of the expression. But that is by no means regularly so. Jer. 13:1, for example, introduces the speech of Yahweh to Jeremiah. [Discussion of various phrases in verses 2-8 follows], whereupon a "so Yahweh has spoken" (v. 9) followed. Where can one still establish a distinction in these nine verses between an immediate and mediate speech of God on the basis of the formulas "then Yahweh spoke" and "then the דְּבַר יְהוָה came"? The two formulas are, in spite of the different colorings of the expressions, used fully promiscuously (*promiscue*). If that is the case, then

one cannot maintain that with the expression *then the* דבר יהוה *came* we are "on the way to a personification of the Word." For then, the distinction with the plain "then He spoke" must appear more clearly.¹³

The key to the passage is Grether's comment, "The two formulas are, in spite of the different colorings of the expressions, used fully promiscuously." He maintains that, since this is the case, we cannot be "on the way to a personification of the Word." But his conclusion is not a given. If the Word has not yet become personified in any way, the two formulas, "and the word of YHWH came" and "and he spoke," could not be used successively. But the two formulas would be used successively if "the word of YHWH" was already understood to be a personal reality.

One cannot tell from the context, as Grether has already mentioned, which of these is the case. There is, however, certainly nothing in the text that *prevents* us from understanding the word of YHWH in these verses as a theophany. Applying the caution implied in Westphal's own comment above, we can conclude that Jeremiah has recorded a theophany; the word of YHWH that came to him was a visible manifestation of YHWH that he could see and still live.

Such is the conclusion of Gieschen when he looks at precisely the same phenomena as Grether (based, however, on the first chapter of Jeremiah, instead of the thirteenth):

This narrative follows the basic call *Gattung*. Here "the Word of YHWH" came to Jeremiah and spoke in the first person as YHWH (1.4, 11, 13; cf. 2.1). After Jeremiah's objection (1.6) and YHWH's verbal reassurance (1.7-8), Jeremiah relates that "then YHWH put forth his hand and touched my mouth" (1.9). What was the appearance of this "Word of YHWH" who was "YHWH" (1.7, 9a, 9b, 12; cf. 1.8, 15, 19) if he could be described as putting forth his hand to touch Jeremiah's mouth (1.9)? Is this not more than anthropomorphism? Here "word of YHWH" is most likely a figure in continuity with angelomorphic traditions that depict God appearing in the form of a man to a human.¹⁴

Gieschen applies the principle, "if there is no distinction between the word of YHWH and YHWH, then the two are synonymous, and the word of YHWH is a theophany."¹⁵ Grether applied the principle, "if there is no distinction between the word of YHWH and YHWH, then personification has not yet started."¹⁶ The two ends of the spectrum regarding hypostates

¹³ Grether, *Name und Wort*, 151-152.

¹⁴ Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 105.

¹⁵ This is my summary of Gieschen's approach.

¹⁶ This is my summary of Grether's approach.

are clearly delineated here.

Grether's unwillingness to see an hypostasis in Jeremiah does not mean that he does not recognize that the word of YHWH is developing aspects of an hypostasis: "*The development of the theology of דבר, which can be observed from Deuteronomy on, leads to its progressive objectification and hypostasization.*"¹⁷ He continues:

The more we regard the דבר as a principle that leads and rules over history, the more it achieves a larger independence, until it finally practices the function of Yahweh's messenger and representative. In this sense we find the דבר concept in the thirteenth chapter of First Kings: the man of God receives a command not from Yahweh, but דבר יהוה [by the word of YHWH] (v. 9) and to him something is said דבר יהוה (v. 17).¹⁸

Grether correctly notes that the word of YHWH appears as YHWH's messenger and representative. However, it is possible to say even more about the word of YHWH from the context. In the same pericope, a few verses after the ones to which Grether alluded, we read:

While they were sitting at the table, the word of the LORD came (דבר יהוה) to the old prophet who had brought him back. He cried out to the man of God who had come from Judah, "This is what the LORD says (יהוה אומר): 'Because you were disobedient against the mouth of the LORD (כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה) and have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you (אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ) . . .'" (1 Kings 13:20-21)

The disobedience of the man of God is "against the mouth of YHWH."

It is, of course, possible to understand *the mouth of YHWH* metaphorically,¹⁹ referring to an ambassador who has spoken faithfully what YHWH gave him to speak; if so, the word of YHWH could be said to speak from "the mouth of YHWH" and still be only YHWH's messenger and representative. In examining the occurrences of מרה אחרים (to be disobedient against the mouth) in the Old Testament, however, it seems reasonable to conclude something more specific.

The phrase *to be disobedient against the mouth* occurs in only six verses in the Old Testament: Num 20:24; 27:14; 1 Sam 12:15; Lam 1:18; and the occurrence here in 1 Kings 13:21 and 13:26. In every case, the "mouth" who has spoken is demonstrably YHWH, represented either directly by the

¹⁷ Grether, *Name und Wort*, 153-154; (emphasis mine).

¹⁸ Grether, *Name und Wort*, 154; (emphasis mine).

¹⁹ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in veteris testamenti libros* (Leiden: Brill, 1958), 565, define מרה אחרים as "against the order."

Tetragrammaton, or by a pronoun referring back to an immediately preceding Tetragrammaton. Both 1 Samuel 12:15 and Lamentations 1:18 refer in general to what YHWH has spoken; although no specific referents are given, it seems clear that the disobedience is against something that YHWH himself commanded.

In the case of Numbers 20:24 and 27:14, the reference to what YHWH commanded is clear: it is to the time when the children of Israel were at Meribah and needed water to drink. Exodus 17 unequivocally indicates that YHWH spoke to Moses, telling him what to do. Moses and Aaron were disobedient "against the mouth of YHWH," that is, against what YHWH himself had said. The context here in 1 Kings provides no reason for us *not* to understand that the disobedience of the man of God "against the mouth of YHWH" was disobedience against what YHWH himself spoke to him. In a similar way, the word of YHWH is a title for YHWH's visible manifestation; to see "the word of YHWH" was to experience a theophany.

Although Grether hardly emphasized the theophanic nature of the word of YHWH, his emphasis on the word of YHWH as primarily the "prophetic Word of God" is not without consequence for our understanding of the word of YHWH as a theophany. Grether's careful compilation of the occurrences of "the word of YHWH" (and related expressions) shows that the vast majority of the phrases are in the prophetic literature. A theophany of God as the word of YHWH is primarily associated with the prophets of Israel.

1 Samuel 3:1 supports this conclusion: "The boy Samuel ministered before YHWH under Eli. In those days the word of YHWH was rare [הָיָה דְּבַר יְהוָה נִדָּר]; there were not many visions [אֵין חֲזוֹן נִפְרָץ]." Because the author of the text probably wrote in a later period when there were more frequent theophanies of God, he could say that in "those days" (as compared to the writer's day) the word of YHWH "was rare." The explicit connection between the word of YHWH and "visions" appears to underscore that the word of YHWH is not simply a spoken or written word of God but a manifestation of God that appears in a vision. Grether says about this:

The דְּבַר on one side and revelatory dreams and visions on the other side do not build contradictions. Much more so, the דְּבַר in this period was frequently transmitted through dream and vision. So Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10) receives the דְּבַר that announces the fall of the house of Eli while he thinks

he is seeing Yahweh standing before him in his sleep.²⁰

If one understands the word of YHWH as a theophany, one would more readily say that the word of YHWH *himself* appears in the vision, announcing the word of prophecy. This can be demonstrated from the text.

The following text of Samuel makes no sharp distinction between the word of YHWH and YHWH (to use Grether's terminology, the two terms are used "promiscuously"). Thus, the impression is underscored that the two are the same:

Then the LORD called Samuel (וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה אֶל-שְׁמוּאֵל). Samuel answered, "Here I am." . . . Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" (וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה עוֹד שְׁמוּאֵל). . . . Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD (וְשָׁרָם יָדַע אֶת-יְהוָה): The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him (וְלֹא הָיָה דְּבַר-יְהוָה יְגִלָּה אֵלָיו). The LORD called Samuel (וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה עוֹד שְׁמוּאֵל) a third time. . . . The LORD came and stood there (וַיָּבֹא יְהוָה וַיִּתְיַצֵּב), calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." And the LORD said to Samuel (וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-שְׁמוּאֵל): . . . The LORD continued to appear (וַיֵּשֶׁב יְהוָה לְהִרְאֹה) at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through the word of YHWH (בְּדְבַר יְהוָה). (1 Sam. 3: 4, 6, 7-8, 10-11, 21)

This analysis of selected passages regarding the word of YHWH shows that they readily support the understanding of the Word as a theophany, a visible manifestation of YHWH. YHWH himself appears to the patriarchs and prophets, making known his revelatory word to them. This does not mean that all passages with the word of YHWH can be so understood. Some indisputably relate to the covenantal word of God in the commandments, or to other words. But this analysis allows us to conclude that several occurrences of the word of YHWH in biblical texts should be considered theophanies if the text indicates that the word of YHWH came and spoke with an individual or group.

When one grasps the word of YHWH as a theophanic expression, it is not surprising to find the Word as an hypostasis or theophany in the literature of the Second Temple period (such as the Wisdom of Solomon 18:15) or in the New Testament (passages in which *the Word* is a reference to Jesus Christ such as John 1:1, 14). When one views the word of YHWH as a theophany in the Old Testament, its explicit use as such in the Second Temple period and in the New Testament is understood not as a *development* of its use in the Hebrew Scriptures, but as a *continuation*. There is no lack of continuity of theology and language between the Old

²⁰ Grether, *Name und Wort*, 87.

Testament and the New Testament.

III. An Overview of Other Scholarship on Word of YHWH

A careful exegetical consideration of the Old Testament shows that Gieschen is correct in pointing us to understanding the word of YHWH as an hypostasis. There are shortcomings in Grether's reluctance to see actual hypostases in the Old Testament. However, an examination of subsequent scholarly literature shows that some think Grether has gone too far in identifying hypostases in the Old Testament. These exegetes prefer to see a complete *lack* of hypostases in the Old Testament (widening our spectrum of views on the word of YHWH as theophany). Representative of this view is G. Gerlemann, who writes in the *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*:

In the discussion about the so-called hypostatization of divine actions and attributes, דבר has also played a not insignificant role. The independence and personification of the דבר, which first reaches its greatest development in postcanonical time, already appears in its beginnings in the Old Testament. . . . It is however questionable, whether one may isolate the "hypostatization" of divine attributes from the general tendency to make abstract things personal and alive, which is at work overall in the Old Testament. Human affects and activities are personified and made independent as often as divine attributes are: wickedness, perversity, anxiety, hope, anger, goodness, truth, etc. (Ps. 85:11 f., 107:42; Job 5:16, 11:14, 19:10, and often).²¹

Bruce K. Waltke, in a parenthetical comment to the main article by Earl S. Kalland on דבר in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, cites the three passages Isaiah 9:7, Psalms 107:20 and 147:15, and approvingly refers to Gerlemann's summary: "Gerlemann rightly calls into question the almost universal interpretation that sees the word in these passages as a Hypostasis."²²

Gerlemann questions the understanding of the Word as hypostasis by comparison with metaphors in the Hebrew language that are demonstrably more "metaphorical." Linguistically, however, his argument does not hold up. Every language uses metaphor, and some of those metaphors are "stronger" than others. If I say, "My anger boiled over when the court spoke," I have used two metaphors. But if I argue that my

²¹ G. Gerlemann, "דָּבָר," in *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, 2nd ed. (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1975), 1:col. 441-42.

²² Earl S. Kalland, "דָּבָר," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:180; (emphasis mine).

anger cannot *really* boil over, therefore the court cannot *really* speak, the court can very quickly persuade me of my error by citing me for contempt of court. The metaphorical nature of the first metaphor does not destroy the actual force of the second metaphor.

A representative viewpoint citing and mainly agreeing with Grether (now in the middle of the spectrum) is W. H. Schmidt, writing in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*.²³ Most theologians could probably be found somewhere in this area of the spectrum. There are some scholars, however, who understand the word of YHWH as a theophany as Gieschen does. Terence E. Fretheim, author of the "Word of God" entry in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, states that "the most important critique . . . is that the word of God as verbal event, particularly associated with the theophany, has been neglected."²⁴

Fretheim supports his understanding of the Word of God as theophany with this evidence:

Theophanies are in fact the vehicle for the most common and most articulate revelations from God. . . . Usually this entails the speaking of words by God, appearing often if not always in human form (cf. Genesis 18; Judg 6:11-18; Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1), even in those contexts where the divine presence is veiled by fire or cloud (cf. Exod 3:2; 24:9-11;...). The word of God is thereby delivered through personal encounter in a quite direct way through a verbal communication, often "face to face" (cf. Exod 12:6-8). . . . The reception of the word of God in vision and dream is only a variation of the theophanic mode of revelation (cf. Gen 28:12-13; 1 Kgs 3:5; 9:2; cf. Gen 31:11-13; 15:1). . . . The word of God in dream and vision thus retains its character as personal encounter.²⁵

According to Gerlemann and Waltke, too much emphasis has been placed on Word as hypostasis. Fretheim argues that the idea of the word of YHWH as theophany has been neglected. What kind of understanding does one find in commonly accessible, standard commentaries? A brief sampling of mainstream, scholarly commentators on each of the pericopes cited above show that Fretheim's assessment is far closer to reality than that of Gerlemann and Waltke. A cursory overview of some commentator's viewpoints on some of the pericopes examined above bears

²³ W. H. Schmidt, "דְּבָרַי," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis et al. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977-), 3:84-125.

²⁴ Terence E. Fretheim, "Word of God," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:965.

²⁵ Fretheim, "Word of God," 6:965.

this out.

E. A. Speiser (*The Anchor Bible*), John Skinner (*The International Critical Commentary*), Gerhard von Rad (*The Old Testament Library*), and Gordon J. Wenham (*Word Biblical Commentary*) consider the word of YHWH in Genesis 15 only as a verbal encounter, with no inkling of a theophany mentioned.²⁶ The pericopes in Jeremiah do not fare any better than those in Genesis. John Bright (*The Anchor Bible*) fails to make any particular note about the word of YHWH in either Jeremiah 1 or 13.²⁷ The closest that any commentator comes to calling the word of YHWH in Jeremiah a theophany is William L. Holladay (*Hermeneia*): "the phrase . . . covers both verbal and visionary material."²⁸

The only pericope of those examined where commentators find a theophany is the third chapter of 1 Samuel—although even here not universally. P. Kyle McCarter, Jr. (*The Anchor Bible*), for example, apparently limits the content in the first few verses to a mere sound.²⁹ Walter Brueggemann (*Interpretation*) comes much closer to calling the appearance of YHWH to Samuel a theophany.³⁰ The only commentator who specifically calls the appearance of the word of YHWH in the third chapter of 1 Samuel a theophany is Ralph W. Klein (*Word Biblical Commentary*), although his view of the word of YHWH as theophany is not very forceful.³¹

IV. Conclusion

Based upon this cursory overview, one must agree with Fretheim that

²⁶ E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 111–112; John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, The International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1910), 277–280; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: a Commentary*, Rev. ed., The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 183; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987), 327.

²⁷ John Bright, *Jeremiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), 7, 95–96.

²⁸ William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1–25*, ed. Paul D. Hanson, *Hermeneia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 32.

²⁹ P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes & Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 8 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 98.

³⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 25; he does call the appearance a "dream theophany," but the emphasis appears to be on *dream*, since he also uses the phrases "dream report" and "dream narrative."

³¹ Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary 10 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983), 31.

the word of YHWH as theophany has been neglected. As one begins to grasp the theophanic nature of this phrase in some texts, however, some of the richness of the Old Testament can be seen. The connection of the Old Testament "word of YHWH" with the New Testament "the Word" is much more than a linguistic connection—it is a theological one as well. The Word of YHWH, who took on a visible manifestation from time to time, spoke not only on behalf of YHWH, but also *as* YHWH. God came to his people, not in his glorious majesty, but tangibly as the Word of YHWH. That same Word came to His people, enfleshed as Jesus Christ. The Son is not a new appearance on the scene but one who has been present from the time of creation, personally communicating with his people.³²

Although modern critical scholarship often opposes such a view, this understanding has strong historical roots. Only a few references can be given here.³³ The New Testament readily testifies to this connection of the Son with the Old Testament: It was Jesus who led His people out of Egypt (Jude 5); the Apostle Paul says that it was Christ who was with the people of Israel in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:1–10). Nor was Luther reticent about finding the Son in the Old Testament. Based on 1 Corinthians 10, he writes:

If Christ was contemporaneous with the children of Israel and accompanied them [1 Cor 10:4], if it was He from whom they drank spiritually and on whom they were baptized spiritually, that is, if the children of Israel believed in the future Christ as we do in the Christ who appeared; then Christ must be true and eternal God. . . . It follows cogently and incontrovertibly that the God who led the children of Israel from Egypt and through the Red Sea, who guided them in the wilderness by means of the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, who nourished them with bread from heaven, who performed all the miracles recorded by Moses in his books, again, who brought them into the land of Canaan and there gave them kings and priests and everything, is the very same God, and none other than Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of the Virgin Mary.³⁴

Bringing this overview to the present, we have Gieschen as a modern representative of Luther's viewpoint.³⁵

³² See Charles A. Gieschen, "The Real Presence of the Son Before Christ: Revisiting an Old Approach to Old Testament Christology," *CTQ* 68 (2004): 105–126.

³³ Additional references can be found in Gieschen, "The Real Presence."

³⁴ Martin Luther, "Treatise on the Last Words of David" (1543), English translation from 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), 15:313.

³⁵ It is perhaps of more than passing interest to note that two of the commentators reviewed who were among the strongest proponents of the word of YHWH as

This understanding of the word of YHWH as theophany can also be related to the office of the holy ministry. In addition to his accurate analysis of the lack of emphasis on theophany, Fretheim also understands the implications of a correct understanding of this Old Testament phenomenon for the doctrine of the ministry. This Old Testament worldview, therefore, also has considerable implications for our own New Testament worldview. Fretheim clearly shows the connection between the worldview of the prophets and our own worldview as he elaborates on the word of YHWH as theophany. His thoughts are worth quoting at length:

In view of the importance of the theophany in any understanding of the word of God, one can say that the word of God so given is an embodied word. God assumes human form in order to speak a word in personal encounter. The word spoken is the focus for the appearance, but the fact that the word is commonly conveyed in personal encounter is of considerable significance. "Visible words" have a kind of import that merely spoken words do not. They render the personal element in the divine address more apparent and give greater directness and sharper focus to the word spoken. Words so spoken have the capacity of being more persuasive and effective. They also make clearer that the source of the word is not "of their own minds" (Jer. 23:16) but outside of the human self; God *appears* in order to speak.

This understanding of word is also seen in the fact that it is conveyed to the larger community in and through a human figure such as a prophet, who not only embodies the word of God but also engages in certain symbolic acts which give flesh to the word (e.g., Isaiah 20). The prophets, however, move beyond the theophanies at one point in particular. God does not just appear, speak a word, and then leave. God leaves the word behind imbedded in the prophet.

The idea of the embodied word becomes particularly apparent in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In Jer 1:9 (cf. 15:16; Deut 18:18) the word of God is placed by God's hand directly into Jeremiah's mouth; the word is conveyed into his very being without having been spoken. This is graphically portrayed in Ezek 3:1-3; the prophet ingests the word of God. The word of God is thereby enfleshed in the very person of the prophet. It is not only what the prophet speaks but who he is that now constitute the word of God. The prophet conveys the word in a way that no simple speaking or writing can. The people now not only hear the word of God from the prophet, they see the word enfleshed in their midst. The word of God is not a disembodied word; it is a personal word spoken in personal

theophany are also Lutheran, both pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Terence E. Fretheim is Elva B. Lovell Professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary, and Ralph W. Klein Christ Seminary-Seminex Professor, Emeritus, of Old Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago.

encounter.³⁶

This "embodied" word was also found among the prophets, who spoke the word that God spoke to them. God did not speak personally to everyone of the children of Israel; instead, he spoke personally through the prophets, who embodied that word, and who spoke it personally to those around them. In the same way, pastors speak the word of God that has been given to them. They "enflesh" the word in the midst of the people, communicating that word not as mere automatons or rote speakers, but as those who have been personally affected by the word, and now speak that word as "a personal word spoken in a personal encounter."

³⁶ Fretheim, "Word of God," 6:966.

A Lutheran Understanding of Natural Law in the Three Estates

Gifford Grobien

Both Martin Luther and the confessions of the Lutheran church use the term “natural law” as common parlance and without substantive explanation. Yet, the natural law is little considered in modern Lutheran scholarship, leaving it to a theoretical and relatively undefined theological locus.¹ For example, the natural law is typically defined in accordance with Romans 2:14-15 as the law which is written on the hearts of all humans, but detailed content of this law is little developed. If law commands, what, specifically, does the natural law command? Additionally, how does the natural law relate to the more central Lutheran treatments of the law, such as the three uses or functions of the law, or the dynamic of law and gospel? This essay will suggest a method for restoring the natural law to a more prominent place in Lutheran theology, providing fundamental material for reflecting on these broader questions about the natural law. Specifically, I will argue that the Lutheran teaching on the *estates* or life stations is the appropriate context for discerning and practicing the content of the natural law. In these estates—in the naturally imposed relationship to the neighbor—the commands of God are presented concretely. We will discover that, in Luther's understanding, the natural law teaches people to worship God, follow the Golden Rule, and love others as oneself.² These very general precepts are applied in the life stations, by which a person is placed into certain relationships with other people and positions of particular activity. In this context of given activity and a definite neighbor, a person is able concretely to ask how he would want to be treated and act accordingly in love for his neighbor.

In this demonstration, we will suggest that the natural law need not be relegated to obscurity or mere theoretical reflection. Rather, by

¹ For a recent summary of scholarly opinions, see Antti Raunio, *Summe des Christlichen Lebens: Die “Goldene Regel” als Gesetz der Liebe in der Theologie Martin Luthers von 1510-1527*, Bd. 160, *Abteilung für abendländische Religionsgeschichte*, ed. Gerhard May (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2001), 13-52. For the natural law in the Lutheran confessions, see, e.g., *The Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration*, V.22.

² The Golden Rule is commonly understood as doing to others as you would have them do to you (Matt 7:12; Luke 6:31).

understanding the stations as the locations to discern and carry out the law of God, the natural law can be restored to a more prominent place in Lutheran thinking. Why do this? Precisely because this concrete use of the natural law serves to improve and deepen our appreciation for the divine law in general. Indeed, the natural law is the fundamental locus of the law for the human person. As Luther himself taught, the natural law, when considered by the Christian and applied to the Christian in his vocation, becomes the ground for understanding and obeying the Ten Commandments, the revealed law.

One final word at the outset to those who are skeptical of the natural knowledge of the law: this essay assumes the Lutheran anthropological teaching, which denies the natural ability of fallen man to fulfill the law. But this anthropological teaching does not deny that we should strive to learn the law and obey it. Even though we fail to understand and fulfill the law completely, the natural law serves, as does all divine law, to curb outwardly evil behavior, reveal our sin by our inability to keep the law, and assist in teaching the Christian how to apply the law according to the Spirit. While this essay emphasizes this third function, it assumes the others. Fundamentally, the natural law is taught in the Scriptures, perceived (however imperfectly) by reason, and serves as part of the full teaching on the divine law. Thus, reflection on the natural law does not mean perfect or even a uniform and robustly systematic understanding of its content. Reflection on the natural law does not mean fulfillment of it. A favorable treatment of the natural law does not assume generally uniform behavior across human societies. Rather, to affirm the natural law and consider its content is to walk in the path of Luther and the confessions, understanding the law in its proper theological context.³

I. Luther on the Natural Law

Luther teaches four distinct aspects about the natural law. First, it is the law written on the hearts of all, that is, divine law known to men

³ *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* IV.7. The term "created order" and others may also be used generally as synonyms to "natural law" throughout this essay. When any distinction between created order and natural law is to be made, created order will typically refer to the essential way of things prior to the fall of humanity into sin, while natural law may refer to the way of things as they might be distinguished after the Fall. But I do not make a sharp distinction, because, even though the nature of humanity has been corrupted by the fall, its nature has not *changed*. Furthermore, the will of God remains the same, incomprehensible as it may be, so that the command of the natural law itself does not change, even if the human perception, understanding, interpretation, and obedience to it does.

according to their created nature. Second, it is the principal of the Ten Commandments both in time and in context. Third, it is not to be confused with blind instinct, physicalism, or fatalism, but is specifically contrary to these so that the human person must engage the natural law with reason and the will. Fourth, it is defined as the Golden Rule or the principle to love one's neighbor.

That the divine law is written on the hearts of all men by nature is evident to Luther by Romans 2:14-15.⁴ Although Luther refers to biblical summaries of the law when he describes the natural law, he also insists that the law is written on the heart. In fact, the reason that any outward commands, even biblical ones, have force is because the law is written on the heart already. Preaching and teaching do not introduce fundamentally unknown concepts of the law but engage the basic, internal knowledge that right and wrong exist. Preaching and teaching help fill in what is right and wrong, but that there is good to be pursued and evil to be avoided is granted to men already in his creation. To be sure, after the Fall, this knowledge is feeble, unclear, vaguely defined, and always distorted so that what a man defines as good is really just what seems best to him at the moment. Preaching and teaching are offered to fill in this vague and unclear content and to make up for the feeble conviction of the internal law, but they would not be felt or acknowledged by a man if by nature he did not recognize the force of law in the first place. This internal recognition of the law is simply knowledge of right and wrong, and this knowledge is given the name "natural law."⁵

Lutheran ethics gives primacy to the Ten Commandments, as their prominent place in the Small Catechism demonstrates. How, then, do the Ten Commandments relate to the natural law? For Luther, the Ten Commandments, as issued in their historical and cultural context, are limited to the Hebrews under the Old Covenant. The Ten Commandments were not given to gentiles or the church, and therefore, in a strict sense, do not apply to gentiles or to the church. Luther explains this understanding by insisting that a proper biblical hermeneutic requires the reader to determine to whom the passage of Scripture is addressed. All Scripture is

⁴ "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them" (ESV). 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), 35:164-168 [henceforth LW].

⁵ LW 40:97.

the Word of God, but certain meanings apply only to certain addressees. One example of this particularity of meaning is the Ten Commandments, which are given to the Hebrews whom God brought up "out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."⁶ In this primary sense, the Ten Commandments do not apply to all nations or to Christians.⁷ In fact, in this sense, they no longer apply to anyone, for the Old Covenant has been abolished and succeeded by the New Testament of Christ.⁸

Christ's teachings, on the other hand—including the gospel, the Golden Rule, and the command to love one another—have been preached to all nations.⁹ Because Christ came to save all men and to have all things that he taught preached to all nations, so the natural law is included in this teaching and applies to all men. Thus the natural law, not the Ten Commandments, actually has the valid claim over today's church.

However, Luther goes on to acknowledge that, in a broader sense, the Ten Commandments are still valuable and applicable insofar as they agree with the natural law and inasmuch as they expound the natural law and reveal to men where they still fall short in fulfilling the natural law.¹⁰ The natural laws were never so orderly and well written as those by Moses. Because of the fallen nature of man, discernment of the natural law is severely weakened. The Ten Commandments served not only the ancient Israelites, but also still serve the faithful in all generations by expressing the basic precepts of the natural law. When the civil and ceremonial laws (such as the prohibition of images and requirement to rest on the Sabbath) are expurgated, the natural law is fundamentally and clearly expressed in the Ten Commandments. In this way, the Ten Commandments are still beneficial and applicable.

Note closely Luther's argument. He does not argue for the natural law by using the Ten Commandments as its basis but rather judges the Ten Commandments according to the natural law. Insofar as the Commandments conform to the natural law, they may be received, but

⁶ Exodus 20:2.

⁷ LW 35:167-170.

⁸ Luther also argues that the particularity of the First and Third Commandments prove that they were issued only to the Israelites and not all men. The First Commandment prohibits idolatry in part by forbidding physical statues and images, but idols are declared to be nothing according to the New Testament (1 Corinthians 8). True idolatry is a matter of the heart, not outward images. Likewise, with the Third Commandment, the command to remember the Sabbath does not require all men to rest on Saturday, but to hear and learn the word of God. See LW 40:95.

⁹ LW 35:171.

¹⁰ LW 35:166, 171.

where the Commandments depart from the natural law, they are to be rejected as impinging upon Christian freedom. "Moses' legislation about images and the sabbath, and what else goes beyond the natural law, since it is not supported by the natural law, is free, null and void, and is specifically given to the Jewish people alone."¹¹ With these words, Luther reminds us that the Ten Commandments, as those specific commands revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai, are neither from eternity nor for all people but given to the Israelites whom God redeemed from Egypt and promised to establish in Canaan. Rather, the divine law is more fundamentally written into God's creation as the natural law (Rom 1:20, 2:14-15). It is neither a law given only to some men, nor is it a law that applies only to some, but it is given to all and calls all to obedience. Thus the natural law, in these properties of universality and precedence, serves as the rule for interpreting the Ten Commandments, not the other way around.

How does the natural law function for Luther? Is it a code of ordinances that are mystically understood in the mind of a person? Is it instinct that drives a person to do what is natural, without him reflecting on it? This question—which is of fundamental importance to those who would think about the natural law today—did not appear to hold the same place of primacy in the mind of Luther. At least, he never analyzes the natural law this way in any extended sense. For him, the natural law is equivalent to the Golden Rule. It seems self-evident to Luther that a person has this knowledge as part of his nature. Nevertheless, the predominance of sin in Lutheran understandings of human anthropology has made many contemporary Lutherans agnostic or skeptical of the natural law and its effective place for each human. Luther also clearly held this strong understanding of the corrupting effect of original sin.¹² Yet he was also able to assume the role of the natural law. By examining various comments in his Table Talk, we are able to get guidance from Luther on how to appropriate the natural law into the human anthropology resulting from the Fall.

First, Luther rejects the notion that the natural law works as an instinct. Strictly speaking, it is not what "is common to men and beasts....[for] there is no law in animal but only in man."¹³ Law is unique to human beings, and commands what *ought* to be done, not simply what is. Luther cites examples: one does not command five plus three to be

¹¹ LW 40:97

¹² See, e.g., *The Bondage of the Will*, LW 33.

¹³ LW 54:103.

eight, but it *is* eight. Mathematics is not a law, but simply what is. In a similar way, one does not command a sow to eat, for it simply eats without the command. No law—no precept—directs instinct, so instinct is not properly called law, natural or otherwise.¹⁴ Natural law, on the other hand, says not how things are but commands the way things ought to be. Consequently, to understand and obey, intellect and will are required of those who would obey this command. A person must both know and understand the command as well as the desire and be able to carry it out for him to be able to fulfill it.

Luther offers further reflection on the operation of natural law in another Table Talk. Here he gives a simple yet explicit definition of the natural law: "Natural law is a practical first principle in the sphere of morality; it forbids evil and commands good."¹⁵ It is a "light" created by God. It is distinguished from positive law, which conforms to natural law but takes circumstances into account. By this distinction, positive law consists of decrees particular to a nation, culture, and time to bring people into conformity with the natural law. In the case of theft, the positive law applies the natural law of "do good and not evil..." to situations related to property by categorizing kinds of theft and punishing them. The natural law may seem general and even vague, merely forbidding evil and commanding good, but it is actually the character of natural law to be general so that it applies in all situations and times through its practical articulations in positive law. The natural law is supposed to be general and universal—do good and forbid evil—so that it can be applied in all places and under all circumstances. Thus, natural law may always need the positive law to expand and apply it, but, on the other hand, the natural law serves as the principle for all positive law.¹⁶ In fact, every positive law must be subject to a wise interpreter and executor of the law, one who reflects on the general principle of the natural law, because every positive law must be executed with exceptions when necessary. To judge a law without the consideration of particulars and exceptions would be the greatest injustice. Indeed, this would be to turn the law into a tyrant, treat

¹⁴ LW 54:103.

¹⁵ LW 54:293. This is strikingly familiar to Thomas Aquinas' definition of the natural law: the first principle of human action or practical reason that "good is to be done and ensued, and evil is to be avoided" (*Summa Theologiae* II-I.94.1-2). This suggests that Luther generally took for granted the late medieval (scholastic) opinions on the natural law, feeling no need to adjust them, and therefore spoke of the natural law in the context of this assumed, common understanding.

¹⁶ LW 54:293.

the ought as an is, and reduce the law to blind act.¹⁷ To summarize Luther's thinking, then, the natural law is the divine law written on the hearts of men, who perceive it, understand it, and apply it as positive law using their natural capacities, notably reason and will.

Can the natural law be given further articulation? To command good and forbid evil is easily manipulated by every man who would determine good and evil according to his own sinful nature. Are there precepts or aphorisms that would state what the natural law is in all situations, while not being so vague as to be hijacked by the sinful nature? For Luther, the natural law may be stated generally and universally in a few statements. First, the natural law commands the worship of God. "[T]o have a God is not alone a Mosaic law, but also a natural law, as St. Paul says (Romans 1), that the heathen know of the deity, that there is a God. This is also evidenced by the fact that they have set up gods and arranged forms of divine service, which would have been impossible if they had neither known nor thought about God."¹⁸ Second, the natural law includes the Golden Rule: "'So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets'" (Matt 7:12).¹⁹ Third, "the natural law teaches . . . 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Romans 13:9).²⁰ These precepts set further parameters for the pursuit of good and the avoidance of evil. Specifically, pursuing the good means to worship God, to do unto others as one would want done to himself, and to love one's neighbor as oneself. The fall has distorted man's understanding of the good and corrupted his ability to discern and apply the good to others. Nevertheless, the validity of the natural law remains even after the Fall; those good things that a man desires for himself in his egoistic, self-idolizing state are what the natural law commands that he provide in love for others.

II. Stations – Estates – Mandates

The natural law commands relationship. It commands right worship of God, which is the relationship between Creator and creature, and love for the neighbor. It commands goodness in these relationships, goodness that is faithful submission to God and service to the neighbor. Thus, the natural law commands *relation* to God and to neighbor. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says these relations become "concrete in certain *mandates of God* in the

¹⁷ LW 46:100-102.

¹⁸ LW 40:96-97.

¹⁹ LW 40:96-97.

²⁰ LW 40:96-97. See also LW 45:128, "For nature teaches—as does love—that I should do as I would be done by [Luke 6:31]."

world....work, marriage, government, and church." By connecting the life stations with the concept of mandate, Bonhoeffer makes the connection between the natural law and the life stations. It is within the life stations that a person begins to perceive the needs of the neighbor, thereby having the opportunity to do unto the neighbor as he would want done to himself. Bonhoeffer preferred to call the stations *mandates*, because they are "imposed tasks [*Auftrag*]" rather than "determinate forms of being."²¹ That is to say, the stations call for an active response to others whom they encounter. This avoids a determinist understanding of natural law, which would claim that simply by being placed into an order one would conform to that order. Rather, by being placed under a mandate, a person is commanded to obey the will of God, yet still must choose to obey this mandate or rebel from it. A husband does not fulfill God's will regarding marriage simply by being married, if he fails to love his wife, desire children, or raise them in the fear of God and with education. Rather, fulfilling the will of God in the mandates means living according to the command of God with respect to the mandate. "Only insofar as its being is subjected—consciously or unconsciously—to the divine task is it a divine mandate," Bonhoeffer says. Fulfilling one's duty in the estates is not automatic; it requires obedience to what they command.²²

Bonhoeffer reflects the kind of argument found in Luther. In his own day, Luther saw monasticism creating a false distinction in holiness between the "religious" and the "common" people. Luther argued instead that holiness is exercised by all people according to their stations in life. He labeled these stations the church, government, and the household. By obeying God's commands in these stations, Christians lived holy lives.

Although he referred to the life stations as mandates Bonhoeffer emphasizes, in harmony with Luther, their origin in the command of God to defend their changelessness in nature. That is, the mandates or stations are part of the created order. They are divinely commanded, but they are commanded in the word of creation. They are neither developments of history that change in various epochs, nor are they institutions of earthly powers. Creation has its shape according to God's design. Even after the Fall, everything persists and survives only because of God's continued upholding (Job 12:9-12, Acts 17:28). The limits and boundaries imposed upon creation by the word of God do not change just because the human

²¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Reinhard Krauss, et. al., vol. 6 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr. and Victoria Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 68-69.

²² Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 70.

person disobeys them and loses his capacity to fulfill them because of a fallen nature. The nature is fallen, not essentially changed or destroyed. The expectations of God imposed upon Adam at the creation persist in the world after sin.

For example, Adam is placed in the garden to work at the moment of his creation (Gen 2:15). He is not merely commanded to work, work is given him as his worldly reality. This mandate remains after the Fall, and is fulfilled even by Cain and his descendents (Gen 3:17-19; 23; 4:2; 5:29). Likewise, marriage is established at the creation, in which man and woman are created together to enjoy creation, rule over it, and procreate (Gen 1:26-30).²³ Government, for Bonhoeffer, has no distinguishable mandate before the Fall but is instituted after the Fall for the protection of creation. Yet the mandate for government, at least over creation, if not over other human beings, can be seen already prior to the Fall (Gen 1:26-28). Human beings are given dominion to rule over the earth and all of creation, acting as God's representatives.

All people have a place in all estates; the estates are universal. A person is either a magistrate of some sort or a citizen, a spouse and parent or child, and a pastor, layperson, or unbeliever. All people have at least one station in all three of these estates; even widows, orphans, or atypical household members still have a place in a household. These estates mark the places where people are to obey the law of God and practice holiness; in particular, by fulfilling whatever one's duties are as a member of that estate. A parent might practice holiness by teaching children; a judge by punishing criminals and freeing the falsely accused, a layperson by attending services, participating in them, and praying. In this way, Luther rejected a special holiness that could be obtained by monastics, and taught the holiness of all through obedience in life stations.²⁴

Although the concept of estates has been criticized with respect to its applicability to modernity due to its associations with a static society, the general concept is still readily applicable. Even in today's mobile society, every person is either a citizen, resident, and/or some kind of servant of government (acknowledging that for some people both situations are the case need not undermine the theology of the estates); a relative (even in alternative family structures, the teaching still calls for appropriate respect, relationship and love, whether as single parent, roommate, or foster child),

²³ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 70-71.

²⁴ LW 37:364. This framework of estates is also assumed in Luther's Large and Small Catechisms.

and either a pastor, layperson, or non-Christian (even the non-Christian has, in this understanding, the duty of holiness to repent and join the church). All people are, therefore, members of these estates; the estates serve as a framework in which to consider the obligations upon humanity according to the natural law.

The stations do not serve to separate people of different stations, but they integrate the necessary work and offices of creation between people. The stations establish relationships and create opportunities for love of one another. A person is not a magistrate so he can get away from the common people; he is a magistrate so he can love and serve the people by carrying out justice for them. A person is not a father to mistreat or ignore his children; he is a father to raise them in the fear of God, to teach them, and to provide for them. A person is not a layman in order to avoid the commands of holiness and righteous living; he is a layman in order to fulfill holiness by receiving the gifts of God in the services of the church and loving his neighbor in whatever his need might be.

Finally, human life is not to be distinguished into two categories of worldly and spiritual. Human life is both. Life in the world is the place of human existence before God; this world is where God has placed us for now. The stations are the specific places he has given us to live as a person accountable before God. Government over the earth, work in this world, and love within the household are temporal stations with eternal implications; the spiritual life, on the other hand, is not a mystical life which takes a person out of this world, but the spiritual life has worldly implications.²⁵ These stations persist beyond the Fall, in spite of human rebellion against them. It is the duty of a person not to resign oneself to fallenness or to pursue this rebellion. Instead, to live in the stations given by God is to fight against the temporal effects of the Fall by persisting in love for one's neighbor even in the face of sin and its effects. These outwardly good works are beneficial in this world whether the person doing them is a Christian or not.

Yet what, exactly, is this connection between the life stations and the natural law? How does the correspondence of these two loci give us further insight into the divine law and the Christian life? The natural law, by definition, is general. It does not give precise commands or require intricate codes of conduct. It says merely, "Love." On the other hand,

²⁵ Oswald Bayer, *Freedom in Response: Lutheran Ethics, Sources and Controversies*, trans. Jeff Cayzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 94; cf. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 69-70.

people are placed in particular relationships and circumstances in the stations, which, strictly speaking, do not of themselves command people what to do. May husbands treat their wives as servants? May kings take bribes? We learn many answers from God's word, yet we learn them also from the natural law: Love. When the command to love is conjoined with the estates, we are given relationships, circumstances, and the right intention by which to determine loving action on behalf of the neighbor. The estates provide the relationships and circumstances; the natural law teaches the proper intent. Using these criteria, reason determines the action to be taken. In our examination of the estates that follows, we will offer some further details and examples of this interplay with the natural law.

Church

Man—a being able to hear and to respond—is a creature that is to be responsible to his Creator. The fact that, apart from the Holy Spirit, a man responds to God's call only in unbelief does not nullify that a man is held responsible by God to fear, love, and trust in him. All men hear this call (Rom 1:19-21); because it goes out to all men, it can be described as *natural*. This call to worship is the primordial establishment of the church.²⁶ Thus all men, not just Christians, stand in relationship to the church, even if that relationship is one of exclusion. This is not to say that every person is a Christian, anonymously or otherwise. A person is a Christian when he has been granted faith by the Holy Spirit to respond to the call in faith and love. Nevertheless, all men respond to God's call in one way or the other, either in faith or unbelief, so that all men stand in some relationship to this estate of the church, either in it or outside of it. The church, then, is the estate in which we hear the word of God for our benefit, and respond to this word in faith, praise, thanksgiving, and love, or, alternatively, in unbelief. The church is the place in which the natural law “to worship God” is fulfilled.

At first, the church appears different from the estates in being oriented to the spiritual and eternal, while the household and government seem oriented to the earthly. Yet the church actually serves to maintain the unity of a person as he stands both before God and in the world. The church serves as the place of the preaching of Jesus, in whom and for whom all things were created, so that Christ is to be preached as the mediator of creation and receiver of all authority both in heaven and on earth.²⁷ Witness to Christ occurs not only directly by the preaching of the

²⁶ LW 1:103; Bayer, *Freedom in Response*, 93.

²⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 73.

Scriptures, but also indirectly through the good works of the Christian priesthood in the world (2 Peter 2:9-12). The word of Christ preached by the church primarily forgives sins, yet it does so to Christians who remain in the world and serve those in the world through love.

The command to love, therefore, calls pastors not to use their positions for favor and earthly advantage but to serve their parishioners with the gospel. The command to love calls laymen to give attention to the work of their pastors and to provide for their bodily needs. It calls all in the church to look out for the needs of others, and to forgive. To be sure, much detailed guidance for love within the church is given in Scripture, but even the Scriptures do not direct the action of every specific situation. Rather, the call to love, contextualized by one's place in the church, serves each person in determining the loving action needed for the neighbor in that moment.

The church, then, serves as a place where the natural law is both taught and carried out. It is taught in the Word of God, revealing who the God is that we are to have, that he is Jesus Christ the man, who suffered and died for sins, and now reigns with all authority both in heaven and on earth. The natural law is taught by the exposition of the love of neighbor. And the natural law is carried out by Christians sanctified in Christ and bearing witness to him by good works in the world.

Family and Labor

In Luther's era, the household served as the unified location of family and economic life. People generally worked in the home or in very close association to home life. Labor and family responsibilities were not divided. With the effects of mass production, technology, and specialization, labor has become separated from the home, so that one's occupation and one's family are viewed as two distinct realms of responsibility. Because of this development, Bonhoeffer separates this original estate of the household into two: family and work, or labor. In the estate of labor, some are supervisors and others are workers or employees.²⁸

The estate of the family includes relationships of the husband and wife, and of parents to children. The household is not merely a building with a number of individuals who happen to live together. The household is an institution in which a man and a woman learn to love one another in absolute selflessness and service to each other, in which God's

²⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 68-70, 68 n. 75.

perpetuation of humanity is accomplished through procreation, and by which young people mature and learn the fear of God and love of neighbor through a thorough education. Parents learn and exercise love for children who give little tangible return. Children learn respect for the law and for others through this relationship.²⁹ If the church is the estate in which man lives his spiritual vocation of faith, thanksgiving, and love, the household is the fundamental estate of man in living out his temporal vocations of love for other people.³⁰

Consider further the way Luther discusses the marriage relationship. The command of God for a man to be joined to his wife as one flesh (Gen 2:21-24) and to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:26-30) is more than just commands; they are an ordinance of creation. This "natural and necessary" relationship is built into the created nature of man and woman, just as they have other bodily operations and inclinations. The urge for a man and woman to enjoy sexual relations is properly exercised in marriage, within which the resulting children are nurtured. To avoid satisfying this urge or to satisfy it in ways other than in marriage is to go against God's created ordinance. To violate this natural inclination by satisfying it outside of marriage is to fail to love those with whom one has committed this fornication, adultery, or homosexuality.³¹ It is a violation of natural law. Thus, marriage, in this very concrete, bodily, and established manner, serves men and women in obeying the divine law by putting sexual urges in their proper place of procreation, nurturing, and serving. As much as any other vocation, one's place in the family teaches love.

In work, likewise, new value is created for service to the people of Christ. Agriculture, trade, industry, service, science, and art fall under this mandate. Labor is not just a way to make a living, or a means to develop one's own character, interests or skills. Labor is the way that not only my needs are met, but also the needs of my family, boss, coworkers, customers, and suppliers. Through production, buying, and selling, worldly sustenance is provided for all people. Labor is service to the neighbor. It is an expression of God's love to his creation. He does not forsake people and beasts, even after the Fall; through the mandate and estate of labor, he provides the produce of the earth, the goods of manufacturing, the efficiency of technology, and the beauty of art, all for

²⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "A Theological Position Paper on State and Church" in *Conspiracy and Imprisonment, 1940-45*, trans. Lisa E. Dahill, vol. 16 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 520.

³⁰ Bayer, *Freedom in Response*, 93.

³¹ LW 45:18-21

the benefit of humanity. Therefore, understanding work as a service to the neighbor can provide deeper perspective on the responsibilities of work and the ways to carry out this service.³²

Government

Service in the earthly state, in the pagan conception, is the highest end of the human person. This is contrary to biblical government and eschatology, which points to the eternal kingdom of God as the highest end. Yet, for the pagan, with no sure concept of the afterlife, the earthly state becomes the highest end, the place for glory and eternity, if not in life, then in remembrance.³³ The natural, fallen end of man is earthly power. It is especially with respect to the state that natural law seems to lose its correspondence with the divine law. If the natural law suggests to the unbeliever that the earthly state is the highest end of the human person, then this natural law is in conflict with the divine law. For this reason, Bonhoeffer sees any attempt to ground the government in natural law as erroneous. Whether grounded in natural norms or given realities, natural law can establish the tyrannical state as well as the state governed by law, the people's state as well as imperialism, democracy as well as dictatorship. We secure firm ground under our feet only by the biblical grounding of government in Jesus Christ. If and to what extent then from this standpoint a new natural law can be found is a theological question that remains open.³⁴

Yet natural law itself is not the problem, but the misunderstanding of the fallen person in interpreting and carrying out natural law. Government is no less grounded in natural law than any other aspect of law, and other aspects of the natural law are just as prone to misinterpretation and abuse. The proper understanding of the human end occurs in Christ as the redeemer and reconciler of humanity to God, and the embodiment of God's love. The highest end is eternity in fellowship with God. Yet without an eternal perspective, the highest end can only be conceived of in terms of this world. In both cases, the natural law is at work, pointing the person to seek and achieve his highest end, whether that is (mis)understood in his obligations and duties to the state, or understood as his obedience to God in loving service to the neighbor.

Bonhoeffer is yet willing to see the connection of government to the natural law in the role of the second table of the Decalogue. Even in the

³² Bonhoeffer, "State and Church," 520.

³³ Bonhoeffer, "State and Church," 503.

³⁴ Bonhoeffer, "State and Church," 512-513.

case of a godless government, however, a providential correspondence exists between the contents of the second table and the law inherent in historical life itself. The failure to observe the second table destroys the very life that government is supposed to protect. Thus the task of protecting life, rightly understood, leads inherently to the upholding of the second table.³⁵ The state is not “grounded” in natural law, but carries out its role under the divine law through the connection between the natural law and the second table. Yet in the broader sense of natural law, as we have been speaking, government is grounded in the natural law, because it works for the good.³⁶

Luther also understood the government to be grounded in the fallen natural order. Natural man, as he exists after the Fall, is subject to the power of governing authorities to restrain those who would outwardly rebel against God's law. Cain, for example, feared the punishment of his governing authority, for he accuses God's publicizing of his crime against Abel to be more than he could bear—that he would be slain as soon as he was recognized as Abel's killer.³⁷ Creation as made good by God certainly was in no need of a coercive arm of government. However, that creation was made good *requires* that government be manifest after the Fall. Sin violates the goodness of creation. When Adam and Eve sinned, original sin was introduced into humanity and subjected all of creation to hardship and groaning.³⁸ Sin can in no way be purged from the heart, yet even sinful men recognize that evil actions can be restrained by a powerful authority to prevent an every-man-for-himself situation. Thus, while no coercive government is necessary in a good creation, the natural development in a creation that was good but has been infiltrated by sin and death is that a coercive, punishing authority be established to restrain outwardly the sin and death which would bring about the present destruction of creation.

With this in mind, Luther argued that to usurp authority from the government, through either corruption of the magistrates and judicial system or outright rebellion, were the “worst robbery,” for they were to take the very life of the one holding the office and violate natural justice.³⁹ The person who is a subject in relationship to the government, in considering the law of love, submits to the governmental authority for the sake of order and the restraint of evildoers, even when the actions of the

³⁵ Bonhoeffer, “State and Church,” 515.

³⁶ Bonhoeffer, “State and Church,” 510-511.

³⁷ Gen 4:13-14; *LW* 45:86.

³⁸ Rom 8:18-25.

³⁹ *LW* 46:26-27, 34.

government may not be personally appreciated or mutually agreeable. Subjects also love those in authority by carrying out their civic duty, whether serving on a jury, voting, or cooperating with authorities.

In the same way, those in government office exercise their power not for their own enjoyment or glory but in love and justice for their subjects. This underlying direction guides the motives of detailed and difficult decisions. Government defends against the chaos of sin by restraining with the sword evildoers who would use the sword. It exercises coercive power, because it opposes coercive power, but it does so in order to execute justice. It restrains evil and oversees order between people and families and other institutions in the world.⁴⁰

III. The Natural Law and the Christian in the Three Estates

Having considered very briefly these life stations or estates, we can now see how they provide contextual definition for the natural law. Each particular station implies relationships and circumstances for those who live in the stations. Yet the stations also leave some questions unanswered. Because the stations are lived out in time, unique circumstances, and various relationships, the responsibilities of those serving in these stations can never be delineated in advance with precise detail. Although the natural law may seem vague, theoretical, and even unattainable to man in his fallen state, when we consider the Christian life under the natural law as shaped by the three estates, the dynamic of law and gospel takes a very concrete form. A Christian, alive in the gospel by the work of Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, is free from the burden of righteousness through works. He is no longer bound to works that attempt in futility to please God. The need for asceticism or the establishment of a distinct way of living a holy life, different from the way unbelievers should live, is unnecessary. He does not need to find his salvation in his work of the estates. No separate class of living is necessary to distinguish a Christian before God; he is already distinguished in his righteousness before God in Christ as granted through forgiveness by the Spirit in the means of grace.⁴¹

Instead, in his freedom, the Christian works to make others free. A Christian is free precisely to keep on living in the world, in the estates established by God in creation, according to the natural law in the pursuit of what is good for others. His holiness is lived out in all of the estates. By making the created estates the place for holy living, the Christian avoids an

⁴⁰ Bonhoeffer, "State and Church," 509-510.

⁴¹ Bayer, *Freedom in Response*, 100-104.

enthusiasm that would set up some standard of holy living as an alternative to that created and instituted by God, such as Pietism, "holiness" movements, or the monasticism condemned by Luther.⁴²

For the Christian in the life stations, the import of the natural law becomes realized as fully as is possible in the fallen world. Whereas for the fallen, unregenerate man, the natural law is a mere spark or glimpse of divinity and the notion of good, the Christian has been regenerated by the Spirit and perceives the truth of God and the good—love for the neighbor. Lutherans emphasize the persistent sinful nature that continues to battle against the new man, such as is described in Romans 7. Yet in this passage, the Apostle Paul notes that this new man serves "in newness of the Spirit" (7:6), and that he "joyfully concur[s] with the law of God in the inner man" (7:22). The doctrine of *simul iustus et peccator* means that the inner man—Christ in us—is fully righteous, knowing, trusting, and loving God, and loving the neighbor. Thus Luther says:

Christians have in their heart the Holy Spirit, who both teaches and makes them to do injustice to no one, to love everyone, and to suffer injustice and even death willingly and cheerfully at the hands of anyone....[B]y the Spirit and by faith all Christians are so thoroughly disposed and conditioned in their very nature that they do right and keep the law better than one can teach them with all manner of statutes.⁴³

Luther is describing a *de facto* restoration of the natural law: a restoration of the understanding of the good that was written on the heart in creation, decimated in the Fall, and now restored by the regeneration of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is not a restoration of the natural law in the sense that by natural means the man has regained a natural ability, but it is a restoration of the knowledge and judgment regarding the good that was given in creation and now given graciously by the Holy Spirit.

In the inner man, the Christian knows the natural law by the Spirit. The *simul* doctrine reminds us that the old man of sin still fights against the inner man so that the work of the Spirit is not yet complete and the Christian does not habitually perceive the law or do it. Nevertheless, through continued repentance and availing oneself of the preaching of Christ and his body and blood—that is, through the means of grace and sanctification, the Christian deepens his knowledge of the natural law and

⁴² Bayer, *Freedom in Response*, 100–104.

⁴³ LW 45:89.

grows in his obedience to it. This kind of growth in knowledge and good works is exhorted throughout the New Testament.⁴⁴

As has been described above, the stations provide the settings, situations, and relationships for Christians to experience opportunities for love and thereby to grow in knowledge, good works, and sanctification. By encountering others, facing the circumstances imposed by these stations, and placing oneself in the situation of the neighbor, the Christian has concrete acts and relationships upon which to reflect and real experience to assist in the judgments about pursuing the good.

IV. Recouping the Natural Law through the Estates

In summarizing this essay, it should be noted that this discussion about the natural law is not meant in any way to uphold the natural law as the means for restoring some prelapsarian state. Nor is the natural law even a means for actually attaining perfect order and justice in this world. I reiterate the effect of sin in corrupting the very world in which we live, as well as marring the possibility of fully comprehending and carrying out the natural law. Any sense of natural law cannot restore a person ethically, or even "suggest the form of such restoration."⁴⁵ Only the gospel of Christ offers essential restoration through the forgiveness of sins.

The natural law, rather, is the expression of God's will in human relations to each other and the rest of creation. It commands worship of God, love of neighbor, doing to others as I would want done to me. When culturally and ceremonially specific details of the Ten Commandments are removed, the Commandments become the best summary of the natural law. They serve as God's law always serves: to restrain evildoers, reveal human sin, and teach the will of God. The natural law is not a deterministic form imposed upon humanity, but the command of God set forth in the very created essence and relationships of things. These relations are structured and delineated by the three estates. The catechism affirms this teaching when it instructs that a person "consider [his] place in life according to the Ten Commandments" and to confess his sins according to this consideration.⁴⁶ Precisely in this place in life does a Christian learn the law, and, as a consequence, his sin. Thus, the earthly freedom in which a person lives is shaped by the creation in which he

⁴⁴ Cf. 2 Peter 1:5-8; James 1:3-6; Romans 12:1-2; Hebrews 5:12-6:3.

⁴⁵ Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, vol. 1, trans. William Lazareth (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 445-447.

⁴⁶ Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther* (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), I.5.

lives, a creativity contingent upon God's absolute creation. The Spirit "forms and brings to expression *the appropriate pattern of free response to objective reality*."⁴⁷

The judgment of the natural law must be implemented with wisdom, according to the demands and circumstances of each special case. In secular courts, in some cases, a judge must hold strictly to the punishment of the law in order to punish and purge the evil. In other circumstances, a judge may be lenient, if he detects that the perpetrator is remorseful and seeks amendment of life. In judging oneself, a Christian is always asking what must be done for the neighbor according to what he would want for himself (the Golden Rule), and acting according to this prudential reflection.⁴⁸

This highlighting of the natural law is intended to incorporate it into an appropriate and useful place in the body of Christian teaching. Although it cannot be perfectly known and accomplished, it can be known to some extent and obeyed outwardly for the benefit of earthly order and justice. The extent to which the natural law can be understood and obeyed can only be discovered by each person as he lives his life within the estates, perceives the relations established in them by God, makes judgments regarding how these relations contextualize the Ten Commandments and the command of love, and, finally, acts according to these judgments.

⁴⁷ Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 25.

⁴⁸ LW 45:118-119, 128.

Martin Chemnitz's Reading of the Fathers in *Oratio de Lectione Patrum*

Carl L. Beckwith

Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586) is arguably the most significant Lutheran theologian after Martin Luther. He was a chief contributor to the Formula of Concord, provided the definitive Lutheran response to the Council of Trent, and stands out among his peers as one of the most able and discerning readers of the Church Fathers. His first published work, *Oratio de Lectione Patrum* (1554), introduces the reader to the historical context and theological significance of the normative Greek and Latin writers from the early Church. Although the *Oratio* dates from the beginning of Chemnitz's pastoral and theological career, it displays a sophisticated historical method and offers a generous appraisal of the wider tradition of the Church catholic. The concern of the following essay is to determine the manner in which Chemnitz reads the Church Fathers in this early treatise and how he addresses the points of agreement and disagreement between their theological efforts and his theological commitments.

I. Historical Context

When we consider Martin Chemnitz's early life and sporadic university training, his interest in and facility with the Church Fathers comes as something of a surprise. Chemnitz was born the son of a merchant and cloth-maker.¹ His lot in life was to continue in the cloth-maker trade. As a teenager, he displayed intellectual promise and was sent to the elementary school at Wittenberg by his widowed mother. Although he fondly remembers the great pleasure he had in hearing Martin Luther preach, he tells us in his autobiography that he remained at the school for only six months and profited little from the experience.

Various events in the life of the young Chemnitz, from the death of his father to the financial improprieties of his elder brother, prevented him

¹ For a fuller account of the life and thought of Martin Chemnitz, see Robert Kolb, "Martin Chemnitz," in *The Reformation Theologians*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002) 140-153; J. A. O. Preus, *The Second Martin: The Life and Theology of Martin Chemnitz* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994).

from studying at any particular school long enough to receive a degree.² In 1538, at the age of sixteen, Chemnitz entered the cloth-maker trade, abandoning all hope, he tells us, of returning to school.³ When Chemnitz least expected to pursue his studies, opportunities arose. From 1539 to 1546, Chemnitz developed a pattern of studying at a school until he exhausted his savings, leaving the school and working as a tutor or clerk to raise more money, and then, with his limited resources, returning to school as long as the money would last. It was through this process that he studied for one year at the University of Frankfurt an der Oder and one year at the University of Wittenberg. At this time, however, his studies were not in theology but grammar and astrology.⁴

The violence of war and threat of plague worked together to provide Chemnitz with an opportunity to pursue advanced work in the Scriptures and theology. When the Smalcald War broke out in 1546, the University of Wittenberg was closed, and Chemnitz was forced to leave.⁵ He followed his relative, Georg Sabinus, to the newly formed University of Königsberg in Prussia.⁶ While there, plague broke out, and Chemnitz retreated to the countryside. Away from the resources of the university, Chemnitz read what was available to him: Luther's postilla and Peter Lombard's *Sentences*.⁷ Luther taught him the Scriptures, and Lombard taught him the

² Chemnitz tells us in his autobiography that he and his brother, Matthew, were not "well disposed" toward one another. Perhaps for this reason Chemnitz willingly records the misfortunes of his brother. Matthew initially fared well in the family business and was praised by all. His misfortunes came when he fell in love with the wrong woman. His mother would not permit him to marry the girl and forced him to marry another. The marriage did not go well and, as Chemnitz tells us, "he drifted into a wild and wayward life and squandered all he had." Matthew died "a miserable death" in 1564. See, Martin Chemnitz, *Autobiography*, trans. August L. Graebner, *Theological Quarterly*, 3 (1899) 473 and 475.

³ Martin Chemnitz, *Autobiography*, 476.

⁴ During his one year at Wittenberg, Chemnitz heard Luther lecture, preach, and lead a theological disputation but profited little as his attention was on astrology. This training, however, allowed him to offer "astrological predictions" to several princes which in turn provided him with much needed income to continue his studies. See, Martin Chemnitz, *Autobiography*, 479.

⁵ Despite his departure from Wittenberg, Chemnitz remained in contact with Melanchthon. In 1549, Chemnitz wrote a letter to Melanchthon in Greek that asked what method he should use in studying theology. Melanchthon responded that "the chief light and best method in theological study was to observe the difference between the Law and the Gospel." Martin Chemnitz, *Autobiography*, 480.

⁶ Georg Sabinus (1508-1560) studied under Philipp Melanchthon at Wittenberg and married his eldest daughter, Anna. It was through Sabinus that Chemnitz became acquainted with Melanchthon in 1545.

⁷ Martin Chemnitz, *Autobiography*, 481.

Church Fathers.⁸ When the plague subsided, Chemnitz returned to Königsberg and was appointed the head of the ducal library from 1550-1553. Finally, Chemnitz had before him an extensive collection of biblical, historical, and theological works, and the time and financial security to pursue his studies. These three years of private study constitute Chemnitz's advanced training in the Scriptures and theology. It was also at this time that he immersed himself in the writings of the Church Fathers.

Theological disagreement with Andreas Osiander over the article of justification forced Chemnitz to resign his post at the ducal library. He departed Königsberg and returned to the University of Wittenberg. Chemnitz's theological talents were soon recognized, and he was asked by Philipp Melanchthon to lecture on the *Loci Communes*. From June to October 1554, Chemnitz lectured on the doctrine of the Trinity. In August, he was asked by the superintendent of Braunschweig, Joachim Mörlin, his old friend and theological ally from his days in Königsberg, to serve as his coadjutor. He accepted the position and delivered his final lecture at the University of Wittenberg in late October. On November 25, Chemnitz was ordained to the ministry and published his first treatise, *Oratio de Lectione Patrum*.⁹ Five days later, he left Wittenberg.

Chemnitz's first publication is impressive on many counts.¹⁰ His subject matter is the continuity of evangelical theology with the Church catholic; a subject that could easily betray his limited training in theology and the history of Christian thought.¹¹ It is remarkable that someone with

⁸ Martin Chemnitz, *Autobiography*, 481.

⁹ Although the publication of Chemnitz's *Oratio* is dated November 25, 1554, he likely delivered it prior to June 1554 when he began lecturing on Melanchthon's *Loci Communes*. Peter Fraenkel suggests May 16 or 27 as possibilities but does not provide any argument for these dates. Similarly, Irena Backus has proposed March 24, 1554. See, P. Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum: The Function of the Patristic Argument in the Theology of Philip Melanchthon* (Geneva, 1961) 268, n. 58; Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378-1615)* (Leiden: Brill, 2003) 244, n. 195.

¹⁰ Strictly speaking, according to Chemnitz, his first published works were two German almanacs from 1549 and 1550. Martin Chemnitz, *Autobiography*, 480.

¹¹ Although we do not seem to have the same urgency today to demonstrate the continuity of Lutheran theology with the church catholic, our Lutheran fathers exerted a great deal of labor on this issue. Numerous works from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries address this question, some more constructively than others. See, for example, Philipp Melanchthon, *De Ecclesia et de autoritate Verbi Dei* (1539); Georg Major, *Vitae Patrum* (1544); Matthias Flacius, *Catologus testium veritatis* (1556) and *Magdeburg Centuries* (1559-74); Johann Gerhard, *Confessio Catholica* (1634-37) and *Patrologia* (1653); Melchior Nicolai, *Lutheranismus ante Lutherum* (1658). In addition to these treatises, the

such limited training could write at the beginning of his pastoral and theological career a brief manual on how to read the Church Fathers. As remarkable and daring as Chemnitz's treatise is, however, we must not forget that it is his first attempt at addressing the role of the Fathers in the theological labors of the evangelicals and demonstrates only his initial engagement and understanding of the resources of the greater tradition of the Church. In the *Oratio*, we are not dealing with the seasoned and mature Chemnitz, who has weathered controversy and endured personal trial. Rather, the *Oratio* represents an early, courageous, and ambitious attempt, by a young and self-taught Chemnitz, to engage the great tradition of the Church and establish the points of continuity and discontinuity between the Fathers and the Lutherans.

II. *Oratio de Lectione Patrum*

Chemnitz begins his treatise by identifying a number of ways to discuss the proper use of the Fathers. First, a person could offer a lengthy reflection on the appropriate way to read the Fathers without risk or danger (*tuto*). Second, a person could demonstrate the fruitfulness of studying the Fathers in addition to the study of the Scriptures. Third, a person could provide a brief introduction to the major Latin and Greek writers of the early Church. Chemnitz follows this third, chronological approach. By proceeding chronologically, Chemnitz tells us that the reader will discover the occasions "when they [the Fathers] spoke somewhat improperly, when something should be eliminated as less than helpful, and how a later age might correct something which had arisen in time of controversy."¹² Such a method, argues Chemnitz, will expose not only where the dangers lie with the Fathers but also in what areas they spoke correctly and usefully.

Chemnitz nowhere explains why he thinks these are the only approaches an individual might take in discussing the use of the Church

many dogmatic works from this time demonstrate even more clearly the critical and constructive engagement of patristic thought by the Lutherans.

¹² For whatever reason, Chemnitz's editors posthumously published the *Oratio* at the front of his systematic theology, the *Loci Theologici*. The problem, of course, is that the final, published edition of the *Loci* represents the mature Chemnitz, who continued to study and learn from the Fathers for another thirty-two years until his death in 1586. In any event, the *Oratio* is to be found in the translations of the *Loci* and in manuscript editions of the *Loci*. The translation used throughout this essay is: Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, trans., J. A. O. Preus, two volumes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 27a. Hereafter, cited as Preus followed by page number and column. All Latin references for the *Oratio* are taken from Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici* (Frankfurt & Wittenberg, 1653).

Fathers. Indeed, it is disappointing to see that two of the three ways identified by Chemnitz are negative, including the course he chooses. He labors the point that the study of the Fathers is useful, *despite* the many infelicitous and improper statements that must be eliminated or corrected. The language used by Chemnitz is not language of expectation and opportunity but rather suspicion and duty. As we continue to read, however, we discover that this is not Chemnitz's understanding of the Fathers but rather the attitude of those for whom he is composing his treatise. He tells us in the introduction that he is writing at the request of friends. It is their concern that reading the Fathers is fraught with danger and perhaps unnecessary given the Lutheran commitment to *sola scriptura*.¹³ The young Chemnitz cautiously disagrees and proceeds with a restrained defense of the Fathers that identifies their many contributions that do not give offense. In his later works, the mature Chemnitz, the established professor and superintendent, will find no need to proceed cautiously in his reading of the Fathers or provide an apologetic rejoinder to those concerned with the use of the Fathers in articulating Lutheran theology. In the *Oratio*, however, Chemnitz's exuberance for the Fathers is muted and his goal modest. He offers for his friends a sympathetic reading of the Fathers, carefully identifying their strengths and weaknesses and thoughtfully showing how to read them with esteem and discernment.

Apocryphal Works

Chemnitz begins his review of the Fathers with two items claiming apostolic authority but lacking, in his estimation, historical credibility: the *Apostolic Canons* or *Constitutions* and a figure who writes under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite. He immediately dismisses the authenticity of the *Apostolic Canons* or *Constitutions* based on historical testimony,¹⁴ the fact that the canons increased in number over time,¹⁵ and the literary style

¹³ Cf. the Preface to the Epitome of the Formula of Concord (Tappert 465:2, 8; BSLK, pp. 767-69).

¹⁴ Chemnitz seems to regard the *Apostolic Canons* or *Constitutions* as one work with different titles. In fact, the *Canons* form the final chapter of the *Apostolic Constitutions* (ANF, VII, 500-505). With that said, the *Canons* were often circulated without the *Constitutions*. It is generally accepted that much of this material was compiled during the latter half of the fourth century in Syria, drawing heavily on earlier material like the *Didascalia* and *Didache*.

¹⁵ Chemnitz comments that the canons grew from 50 to finally 85 at the "sixth Council, around 677" (Preus, *LT*, 27b; *Loci*, 1653, 1). Chemnitz seems to be confusing the Trullan synod of 692 with the Sixth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople III in 680, which dealt with the Monothelite controversy. Chemnitz's confusion of these two councils is not uncommon and is quite understandable. The Trullan synod met to pass canons that would complete the work of the Fifth and Sixth Ecumenical Councils and

of the work. From his own research, only Epiphanius of Salamis defends the apostolicity of these canons, while Fathers such as Cyprian of Carthage demonstrate no knowledge of them. The literary inconsistency of the work and lack of early witnesses to their existence leads Chemnitz to reject their claim of apostolic authority. Despite the text's apocryphal nature, a careful reader will discover beneficial material on lay communion and the Apostles' Creed. The reader must exercise discernment, however, as the text advances ideas on virginity and baptism that are contrary to the Scriptures.

Chemnitz the historian emerges immediately and impressively in this opening discussion. He proceeds with a careful analysis of the *Apostolic Constitutions* and its historical reception, introducing the reader in a practical way to the tools necessary for the historical study of ancient texts. He canvasses the Fathers for comments on the *Canons* or *Constitutions* and determines that they are not apostolic but rather seem to have a fourth-century provenance. Although Chemnitz expresses concerns about some theological points in the text, his dismissal of its apostolicity and authority rests ultimately on his historical observations.

The second item of concern for Chemnitz is Dionysius the Areopagite. Chemnitz is aware of several works attributed to Dionysius: *The Celestial Hierarchy*, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, *The Divine Names* and some letters. As he did with the *Apostolic Constitutions*, Chemnitz begins by canvassing the Fathers to determine their appraisal of Dionysius and finds that none of them mention anything about the Areopagite, including Jerome's catalog of ecclesiastical writers. Moreover, Chemnitz notes that Dionysius' Greek is vastly different from classical and apostolic writers.¹⁶ He concludes, as

often went by the name Fifth-Sixth Council (*Penthekte* or *Quinisext*). In fact, the synod of eastern bishops met in the same "domed room," hence the name Trullan, where the bishops of the Sixth Council met. Moreover, the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea II in 787 recognized the canons passed at the Trullan synod as the completion of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, which ratified no canons. The actions of Nicaea II most likely account for Chemnitz's comment.

¹⁶ Chemnitz's comment here is well taken. Not only is the Greek of Ps.-Dionysius' texts more refined and complex than the Koine Greek of the New Testament, but also his reliance upon Neo-platonism (Proclus) and his three-fold mystical theology (purification, illumination, perfection) clearly differentiate him from the apostolic writings. The first historical mention of Ps.-Dionysius' works occurs in 553 at a colloquy at Constantinople. It is for this reason that many date Dionysius to the early sixth century. In the West, the Lateran Council of 649 used his works against the Monothelites and firmly established his authority. His influence was not lost on Thomas Aquinas, who in the *Summa Theologiae*, cites Augustine, Ps.-Dionysius, and John Damascene more than any other Early Church Fathers.

Luther had done before him, that the works attributed to Dionysius are not to be associated with the individual mentioned in Acts 17.¹⁷

After settling the question of the possible apostolic origins of these texts associated with Ps-Dionysius, Chemnitz turns to their theological value. He dismisses *The Celestial Hierarchy* and *The Divine Names*. Although there are numerous ceremonies found in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* that are contrary to Scripture, Chemnitz does identify two points of historical interest based on this work.¹⁸ At whatever time Dionysius wrote there was no practice of invoking the saints nor were there prayers for the dead to be delivered from purgatory.¹⁹ Finally, Chemnitz ends by praising Dionysius for discussing baptismal sponsors and their duties.²⁰

¹⁷ Luther offers many critical comments on Ps.-Dionysius. For two good ones, 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), 1:235 and 36:108 [henceforth *LW*]. Not everyone in the sixteenth century considered Ps.-Dionysius's works apocryphal. Georg Witzel, an early convert to Lutheranism who later returned to Rome and wrote against Luther, regarded Ps.-Dionysius as Paul's co-worker and therefore the most apostolic of all the Fathers. Witzel exploited the apostolicity of Ps.-Dionysius to argue against the elimination of ceremonies in the liturgy by the Lutherans. Witzel's concern is ecclesiology but his efforts are largely devoted to the witness of the Church Fathers. Here we see a clear example of the relationship between ecclesiology and patrology during this period, as is also seen with Philipp Melancthon's *De Ecclesia et de autoritate Verbi Dei* (1539). See, Georg Witzel, *Typus ecclesiae catholicae* (1540) 4-6, cited in Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity*, 46.

¹⁸ Cf. *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, 71 (Tappert 332; BSLK, 492).

¹⁹ Chemnitz's comment on the invocation of the saints is more an argument from silence than anything else. Dionysius does discuss the intercession of the saints and invocation several times (*EH* VII:561AB; Luibheid, 254-55). He does not, however, divulge the content of the invocation, except, as noted by Chemnitz, in his discussion of the "hallelujah" (*EH* IV:485AB; Luibheid, 232). Similarly, Chemnitz's comment on prayers for the dead is only partly correct. Dionysius does discuss such prayers at length. Chemnitz's point, however, focuses specifically on deliverance from purgatory or prayers that remit the sins of the recently departed. Dionysius rejects that such prayers could in any way affect the judgment earned in this life by the recently departed. He does urge, however, that it is our duty to pray that God will overlook the sins of the faithful who depart (*EH* II:556D; Luibheid, 251-52; *EH* III:560A-564B; Luibheid, 253-56).

²⁰ Dionysius discusses baptismal sponsors in *EH* at II:393B, II:393D, III:400C-401A, and VII 568BC (Luibheid, 201, 202, 206-07, 258-59, respectively). On baptismal sponsors in the Early Church, see also Tertullian, *On Baptism*, ch. 18 in ANF, vol. III, 678; Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*, xxi.4 in *The Treatise on The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, trans. Gregory Dix, revised by Henry Chadwick (London: Alban Press, 1992), 33; Egeria, *A Diary of Pilgrimage*, ACW, vol. 38 (New York: Newman Press, 1970), 123.

In dealing with these two apocryphal texts, Chemnitz reveals his skills as both historian and theologian. He critically examines the historical and literary circumstances of these texts to determine their claims to apostolicity. More significantly, and central to the question pursued here, Chemnitz does not free himself from the task of theologian in evaluating the content of these texts despite their false claims to apostolic authority. Chemnitz's commitment to the resources of the Church in articulating Lutheran theology is displayed in no better place than in his dealings with these two apocryphal works. No one would have criticized him had he, under the banner of *sola scriptura*, dismissed these works without comment because of their false apostolic claims. Instead, he engages their thought and comments on their strengths and weaknesses for the reader.

Ignatius of Antioch

Chemnitz begins his comments on the Fathers by commending the reading of Ignatius of Antioch but warning that many interpolations exist in the epistles available.²¹ Although Chemnitz's comment on Ignatius is brief and fails to identify for the reader the positive or edifying teachings to be found in his letters, he does provide a constructive example on how to deal with possible interpolations in patristic texts. He quotes a number of peculiar excerpts from the disputed letters circulating under the name of Ignatius and demonstrates how later Fathers, like Augustine, contradict the theology expressed by these statements. The assumption by Chemnitz seems to be that the orthodoxy of Ignatius will necessarily correspond to that of later witnesses like Augustine. Therefore, in the case of Ignatius, if a statement disagrees with a later writer or teaching of the Church, it is likely an interpolation.

By interpreting the writings of one Father through the lens of another, Chemnitz's practice appears to be simplistic and susceptible to the charge of establishing a patristic consensus on all theological topics. Indeed, at first glance, his handling of unacceptable statements in Ignatius' letters

²¹ The authenticity of Ignatius' letters has been complicated by the presence of a long, middle, and short recension of the letters. The long recension is not only an expanded form of the authentic letters of Ignatius, roughly identified as the middle recension, but also a collection of spurious letters associated with Ignatius. During the Reformation, the long and middle recension circulated in both Latin and Greek. It was not until the middle part of the seventeenth century that a consensus began to emerge on the authenticity of the middle recension. For further discussion of these issues and for an accessible English translation of Ignatius' letters, see *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2nd ed., trans. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, ed. Michael Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 79-118.

seems to undermine the careful historical and theological concerns demonstrated by him in his discussion of the *Apostolic Constitutions* and ps-Dionysius. We must be careful, however, in drawing too critical a conclusion about Chemnitz's interpretive move with Ignatius. He is not suggesting that the reader reduce the Fathers to a single voice or force a consensus of thought on them. His interpretive move to use one Father to clarify another in an effort to establish a historically reliable text is restricted to works that are known to contain interpolations. From this perspective, Chemnitz's recourse to later Fathers is a legitimate exercise in historical research. Although the modern reader will question Chemnitz's lack of sensitivity to the changing historical, theological, and political contexts of an Ignatius and Augustine, we must acknowledge that such concerns have less to do with Chemnitz's historical method and more to do with differing theological assumptions held by the modern reader as opposed to someone like Chemnitz. The ease with which Chemnitz is able to move from a second-century to a fifth-century author stems from his commitment to the truthfulness of the Scriptures and his assumption that the Fathers are engaged in faithful exposition of the Scriptures. If the Fathers shared the same task and sought to understand the same truth, then their conclusions should coincide, irrespective of changing historical circumstance. When they do not *and* we know that we are dealing with a defective text, as in the case of Ignatius' letters, we may conclude that these inconsistencies or discontinuities are additions and therefore not the genuine sentiments of the particular Father under consideration. This theological assumption permits Chemnitz to proceed with charity in his dismissal of questionable statements by the Fathers in texts that are known to contain interpolations.

Irenaeus

The first theologian whose writings are extant and not interpolated is Irenaeus of Lyon. Chemnitz remarks that only his *Against Heresies* survives in a rather bad Latin translation.²² He acknowledges the existence of some Greek fragments in Epiphanius and even mentions a rumor claiming that

²² Today we possess Irenaeus' complete treatise only in a fourth-century Latin translation. Many Greek fragments do survive and are conveniently collected, along with the complete Latin text, in the *Sources Chrétiennes* volumes of Irenaeus' work. For an English translation see *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1. Today we possess an additional work by Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, discovered in 1904 in a thirteenth century Armenian manuscript. This work is translated into English under the title *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* in the *Ancient Christian Writers* series, number 16.

an entire Greek text exists.²³ The presence of the Greek text would, Chemnitz argues, resolve the inadequacies of the Latin translation and perhaps resolve some of the difficulties found in Irenaeus' text.

Chemnitz's comment on Irenaeus is lengthy and reveals his great esteem for Irenaeus. He begins by insisting that Irenaeus' historical context must be known before an adequate appraisal of his theology can be given. By contextualizing the writings of the Fathers, we are better prepared, argues Chemnitz, to understand their approach to certain critical issues and resolve any inadequate statements made by them. Here we see Chemnitz allaying any concerns that may have arisen with his handling of Ignatius. Since Irenaeus' text is not suspected of containing interpolations, no recourse to the thought of later Fathers will explain away difficulties found in his text. With that said, Chemnitz is not content to dismiss statements or teachings by Irenaeus that cause offense. A good reader who takes seriously the task of the Fathers and assumes that they are attempting to expound faithfully the Scriptures must attend to historical context in order to understand why such problematic statements were made at all. It is only by establishing such a context that benefit can be found even in moments of strong disagreement with the Fathers. To reduce this to a platitude, we must learn from their mistakes. The only way to do that is to understand how and why they made their mistakes.

When we read Irenaeus, we must be aware that he is confronting Gnostics who are rejecting certain parts of Scripture under the name of apostolic tradition. Irenaeus counters these arguments by appealing to the unity of the Old and New Testaments based upon two authorities: the rule of faith (*regula fidei*) common to all Christian churches and the Scriptures. Because of their dependence on one another, whatever does not agree with these two authorities is heretical. The mutuality that exists between these two sources means that a person cannot cling to a tradition that is in opposition to Scripture any more than a person can advance a novel reading of Scripture that opposes the rule of faith common to all churches. Chemnitz pauses to emphasize the importance of this point for his readers in their own theological efforts. Rather than compromising the evangelical commitment to *sola scriptura*, this emphasis on the rule of faith is a bold assertion that Lutheran theology is in continuity with the faith of the Early Church Fathers. For Chemnitz, the rule of faith or tradition endorsed by

²³ The first edition of the Greek fragments of Irenaeus' work was not published until 1570 by Nicolas Des Gallars. On the use of Irenaeus during the sixteenth century and editions of his work, see Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity*, 134-152.

Irenaeus is comprehended in the Apostles' Creed. Although Irenaeus never cites the creed in exactly the same words that it would later assume, his various renderings of the rule of faith closely summarize its content.²⁴ Since the Apostles' Creed is a faithful and accurate summary of the scriptural witness about God and his saving work, it rightly serves as an authority in theological reflection.

After determining Irenaeus' historical context, Chemnitz turns to an appraisal of his theological contributions to the Church. He especially commends to the reader the valuable doctrinal points made by Irenaeus concerning the two natures in Christ, the Eucharist, and that the fathers in the Old Testament were saved by the same faith as the saints of the New Testament.²⁵ When Irenaeus is found lacking in points of doctrine, it is either the result of context or simply superficial statement. Because his Gnostic opponents wished to attribute the cause of sin to God, Irenaeus was forced to speak too ambitiously about free will and not say enough about the gravity of sin. Such statements, however, are easily accounted for because of his opponents. Chemnitz explains, "We can read these points in many places in Irenaeus and, when we see clearly both the cause and the occasion of what he says and why he speaks the way he does, then his words can be read without offense and with real profit."²⁶ Despite his understanding of free will, Irenaeus does in places make "a proper and careful statement concerning faith in Christ and justification."²⁷ Amidst these sound teachings, a few unfortunate things are found, such as Irenaeus' argument that Christ lived to be nearly fifty and his millenarianism.²⁸

²⁴ Chemnitz refers to Irenaeus' rule of faith as either tradition or the creed. It is true that Irenaeus often echoes parts of the Apostles' Creed but it should be noted that no verbal fixity exists for Irenaeus in recounting the rule of faith. For him content, not verbal fixity, is important. Chemnitz's reference is no doubt to *Against Heresies*, I.10; ANF, I, 330-332.

²⁵ Preus, *LT*, 29a (*Loci*, 1653, 2). The final point observed by Chemnitz is central to the whole of Irenaeus' treatise.

²⁶ Preus, *LT*, 29a (*Loci*, 1653, 2).

²⁷ Preus, *LT*, 29a (*Loci*, 1653, 2). On faith in Christ and justification, see *Against Heresies*, III.18-23; ANF, I, 445-458.

²⁸ Preus, *LT*, 29a (*Loci*, 1653, 3). For the reference concerning Christ's age and why Irenaeus makes this argument, see *Against Heresies*, II.22. Irenaeus did hold millenarian notions and these are found in the last five chapters of his long work. It is worth noting that most manuscripts of Irenaeus' text do not include these chapters because of the views contained in them. The Fathers began questioning and rejecting millenarianism not long after Irenaeus. The two principal opponents were Origen and Augustine. Chemnitz could not have known about these teachings first hand since they were not

Cyprian

Chemnitz highly praises the sanctity of Cyprian's life and the constancy of his confession.²⁹ He knows of four books of letters from Cyprian that were written during a time of persecution and are therefore filled with words of comfort and exhortation for those imprisoned. Although Cyprian in many places argues that theological disputes must be established on the basis of the Scriptures, his historical context led him to embrace certain errors. During times of persecution, many would deny their faith in order to spare their lives and then seek an easy return to the Church when the threat had subsided. If the threat returned, argues Chemnitz, they would not only be the first to renounce their faith but also betray others. To counter the destructive efforts of these individuals on the community at large, Cyprian required public satisfactions for the forgiveness of sins and suggested that sins could only be absolved by such satisfactions. Cyprian's false teaching and "harsh words" on satisfactions, although wrong and burdensome to the conscience, can be understood "if a person considers their cause and the thinking of those times."³⁰

Cyprian did involve himself in an error on a fundamental doctrine that cannot be explained away by appeal to historical circumstance. Cyprian, along with the Council of Carthage in 220, argued that "baptism is not valid unless it is administered by an orthodox and pious minister."³¹ If

published until 1575 by Francois Feu-ardent. See, Irena Backus, "Francois Feu-ardent éditeur d'Irénée: le triomphe de la Grande Église et le rejet du millénarisme," in *Tempus edax rerum. Le bicentenaire de la Bibliothèque nationale de Luxembourg (1798-1998)* ed. Luc Deitz (Luxembourg: Bibliothèque nationale, 2001), 11-25.

²⁹ Chemnitz's comment on the constancy of Cyprian's confession reflects a larger interest in the sixteenth century for martyr stories and confessions. There were, for example, martyrologies written by the Lutheran Ludwig Rabus (1551), the Calvinist Jean Crispin (1554), and the English Puritan John Foxe (1554). For a discussion of Ludwig Rabus and the role of saints and martyrs in the Lutheran tradition, see Robert Kolb, *For all the Saints: Changing Perceptions of Martyrdom and Sainthood in the Lutheran Reformation* (Macon, GA: Mercer Press, 1987).

³⁰ Preus, *LT*, 30a (*Loci*, 1653, 3).

³¹ Preus, *LT*, 30a (*Loci*, 1653, 3). Agrippinus summoned the Council of Carthage in 220 to debate the issue of whether those baptized outside the Catholic Church can be received with only the laying on of hands or if they must be received through catholic baptism. Agrippinus argued that they must be baptized. Similarly, Cyprian, who served as bishop of Carthage from 248-258, summoned annual councils to discuss the many theological and ecclesiological issues raised by the persecution of Christians under the Emperor Decius and the implications of Christian clergy renouncing or compromising their faith in order to avoid persecution. The Council of Carthage in 255 reaffirmed the rigid stance taken by Agrippinus in 220 that "heretics" must be received into the Catholic Church through (re)baptism. Cyprian further argued that any priest or deacon

anyone received baptism from a priest who subsequently demonstrated cowardice in the face of persecution and committed an act of apostasy, then the baptism was no longer valid and another must be administered. Cyprian's error meant that the efficacy of the sacrament rested with the priest performing the baptism and the state of his moral character. This error, notes Chemnitz, would be enthusiastically embraced by the Donatists in the fourth century and corrected by Augustine.

Chemnitz deliberately dwells on the manner in which Augustine corrected Cyprian's error. He appealed, explains Chemnitz, to the Scriptures and demonstrated that the efficacy of the Sacrament depends on the Word of God, not on human actions or words. For Chemnitz, Augustine's handling of Cyprian should serve as a paradigm for how a person reads the Fathers. In this case, the great African bishop, Cyprian, is corrected by a later and equally significant African bishop, Augustine. Both are towering figures in the world of the early Church. Cyprian falsely understands the efficacy of the sacraments and is gently corrected by Augustine with an appeal to an authority greater than both of them, the inspired Word of God. Augustine corrects Cyprian in a manner that preserves his honor and respects his pious contributions to the Christian faith.³² Cyprian the martyr is praised for the sanctity of his life and the constancy of his confession but is corrected for straying from the clear teaching of Scripture on baptism. His many theological contributions are neither rejected nor in any way compromised by the stain of this one false opinion. It is, argues Chemnitz, the responsibility and obligation of later theologians and students of Scripture to honor the efforts of Cyprian as a member of the body of Christ and correct his teaching in a brotherly way on baptism. This is what Augustine did and this is what Chemnitz would have his readers do in their own consideration of the Fathers.

The Fourth Century

The fourth century is, for Martin Chemnitz and all students of the Church Fathers, one of the most remarkable periods in the history of the Church. The historical landscape of the Christian community undergoes significant changes from the beginning of the century to the end. Christians enter the fourth century as a persecuted minority and leave it as

who compromised his faith during persecution should be received only as a layperson and must not be permitted to serve again as an ordained minister in the Church. See, Cyprian, *Epistle LXXI* (ANF, V, 378-79 and 565-72). For a good and accessible introduction to the life and thought of Cyprian, see J. Patout Burns Jr., *Cyprian the Bishop* (London: Routledge, 2002).

³² Preus, *LT*, 30a (*Loci*, 1653, 3).

the protected majority. Their worship space moves from private house churches to grand public basilicas. Memories of Christian martyrs are replaced with magnificent tales of desert monks. All of these changes were made possible by the Edict of Milan in 313. The Emperors Constantine and Licinius guaranteed with this Edict the toleration of all religious groups in the Roman Empire, the restoration of confiscated property to the Christians, and the public gathering of Christians for worship and theological discussion. The possibility of public theological debate providentially coincided, notes Chemnitz, with the flourishing of nearly all of the "greatest Fathers" in the early Church.³³ Chemnitz proceeds in his discussion to introduce the reader to the great works and labors of the major fourth-century writers. As we will see, however, his engagement with these Fathers is hindered on a number of occasions by lack of access to or familiarity with their writings.

Athanasius

Chemnitz begins his discussion of the fourth century with Athanasius the Great. According to Chemnitz, his biography is well known to all, but access to his writings is difficult.³⁴ Chemnitz is aware of a Latin translation of *Against the Nations* (*Contra Gentes*) and *On the Incarnation* (*De Incarnatione*) but offers no comment on their substance.³⁵ Despite the great

³³ Preus, *LT*, 31a (*Loci*, 1653, 4).

³⁴ A lengthy discussion of Athanasius and his defense of Nicene orthodoxy would have been available to Chemnitz in John Cario's *Chronica* which Melanchthon revised, to some degree, and which Luther referred to as *Chronicon Carionis Philippicum*. There is debate on how much of the *Chronica* comes from Melanchthon's pen and how much of it retains Cario's contribution. The material on the Early Church seems indebted to Melanchthon's historical endeavors and revision. For a discussion of these issues see, P. Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 53; E. Menke-Glückert, *Die Geschichtschreibung der Reformation und Gegenreformation* (Leipzig, 1912), 25; and G. Münch, *Das Chronicon Carionis Philippicum: Ein Beitrag zur Würdigung Melanchthons als Historiker* (Magdeburg, 1925). For a brief introduction to the *Chronicon Carionis*, see Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity*, 327-338.

For an impressive survey of the events and theological issues related to the Council of Nicaea, the major synodical gatherings from Nicaea (325) to Constantinople (381), the terminology deployed by the Arians, Photinians, and Pro-Nicenes, and the place of Athanasius in these debates, see *Chronicon Carionis*, pars II, book iii (CR 12:974-991).

³⁵ P. Fraenkel notes that a Latin translation of *Contra Gentes* was printed in 1532 in Wittenberg. See P. Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum*, 268. *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione* are two parts of a single treatise written by Athanasius sometime after the Council of Nicaea in 325. The dating for this treatise is greatly disputed, but I am persuaded by Khaled Anatolios that it should be dated somewhere in the late 320s or early 330s. See Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (London: Routledge, 1998), 26-30. For an excellent introduction to these works and the theology of Athanasius, see

reverence voiced by Chemnitz, he does not display any engagement with Athanasius' writings at this early stage of his theological career.³⁶

A recurring theme throughout Chemnitz's treatise is his limited knowledge of the Greek Fathers. That is to say, if the Father writes in Latin, he has some direct knowledge of his writings. If the Father writes in Greek, Chemnitz's knowledge is derivative; it comes by way of Latin writers, which, most of the time, means Augustine. We see this with Chemnitz's brief comment on Athanasius and also with such writers as Origen, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Epiphanius of Salamis; none of whom are discussed in this essay. It is difficult to explain exactly why this is the case. The answer may be a combination of things: it may be the result of the limited holdings at the ducal library in Königsberg; it may be a reflection of Chemnitz's facility with Greek at this early stage of his theological career; or it may simply be that his short tenure as librarian did not afford him the opportunity to read as widely as this treatise on the Fathers suggests.

Hilary of Poitiers

Chemnitz's knowledge of Hilary of Poitiers far exceeds his familiarity with Athanasius. He knows all of Hilary's major writings and displays an awareness of their main features. Hilary wrote a treatise on the Trinity (*De Trinitate*) and on eastern councils (*De Synodis*).³⁷ If not for Hilary, notes Chemnitz, our knowledge of the theological debates at these eastern councils would be seriously impoverished. Hilary also produced commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew and the Psalms. Most

Thomas Weinandy, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).

³⁶ Athanasius was a dominating personality in the trinitarian debates of the fourth century. He labored endlessly in support of the theological position advanced at the Council of Nicaea in 325. Along with many of the writers that follow, Athanasius articulated Nicene orthodoxy against the theological and polemical sympathies of those embracing the main lines of Arius' thought and the implications of his subordinationist theology. It is likely the broad outlines of this narrative that Chemnitz has in mind when he refers to Athanasius' biography. For a cautionary note on the tendency to exaggerate the biography of Athanasius into the "legend of Athanasius", see Francis Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 65-68. For a survey of the theological debates during the fourth century, see R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2005) and Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³⁷ For an introduction to Hilary's Trinitarian theology, see Carl L. Beckwith, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: From De Fide to De Trinitate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

importantly, Hilary is an early witness to justification and repeatedly asserts that we are "justified by faith alone."³⁸ With that said, there are problems with Hilary. Chemnitz warns the reader that Hilary often "speaks in an unsatisfactory way" in his commentaries and advances a fundamental Christological error on the suffering of Christ.

Chemnitz's warning about Hilary's unsatisfactory statements and his Christological error reveals his own historical indebtedness to the medieval reception of Hilary's writings. For example, Chemnitz argues that the unsatisfactory comments found in Hilary's commentaries, which he never identifies for us, are from the works of Origen. In a somewhat similar move, though with different motivation, Abelard, writing in the twelfth century, comments that anything of a questionable nature found in the writings of Hilary should be attributed to Origen.³⁹ Abelard, however, is not seeking to protect Hilary from association with Origen. On the contrary, he is making an argument for the salutary use of Origen by showing how most of the major Church Fathers, like Hilary, used him freely. Chemnitz follows a different strategy and seeks to insulate Hilary from unsatisfactory statements. What seems not to have occurred to Chemnitz, as it did for Abelard, is that such a defense of Hilary still leaves the reader wondering why he would have incorporated such careless statements from Origen into his own writings and passed them off as his own. Perhaps more problematic is the assumption that Hilary himself did not realize that they were unsatisfactory. It would seem that if Hilary "borrowed" from Origen, he must have been in sympathy with such statements. Chemnitz does not address any of this.

The second example of Chemnitz's indebtedness to the medieval reception of Hilary's writings deals with his awareness of Hilary's Christological assertion that Christ suffered on the Cross without experiencing pain. If removed from the overall theological context of the

³⁸ Preus, *LT*, 30b (*Loci*, 1653, 4). For an example of Hilary on justification by faith, see *De Trinitate*, IX.16.7-19 (*Sources Chrétiennes*, no. 462, p. 46; NPNF, ii, IX, 160). The text that Chemnitz likely has in mind, however, is from Hilary's *Commentary on Matthew*. This is the text he cites in his later *Enchiridion* and the text circulating among the Wittenberg theologians. See, for example, Johannes Brenz, *Confessio Wirttembergensis*, (Tübingen, 1590; first edition 1552), 4. Chemnitz shows no familiarity with the material on Hilary in Georg Major's *De Origine Et Autoritate Verbi Dei* (Wittenberg, 1550) f2.

³⁹ For example, Abelard wrote, "When we find some ideas [in Hilary's writing] that are out of harmony with truth or the writings of other saints, they are to be attributed to Origen rather than Hilary, even though Hilary himself does not make this distinction." Abelard, *Sic et Non*, prologue (PL 178:1342-43); quoted in Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, trans., Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 202.

fourth century and the argument developed by Hilary in the final books of *De Trinitate*, his Christology strikes us as sailing too close to the shores of Docetism. This particular argument by Hilary has endured more criticism throughout the history of the Church than any other aspect of his theology.⁴⁰ In the thirteenth century, Bonaventure was so troubled by Hilary's comments on Christ's suffering that he suggested they might be *contra fidem*.⁴¹ Attempts were made by Bonaventure, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas, among others, to reconcile Hilary's statements with the Church's teaching. Frustrated with efforts to recover an orthodox understanding of Hilary's Christology, someone, perhaps Bonaventure himself, relieved the situation by circulating a pious rumor. It was said that William of Paris had seen a statement of retraction in which Hilary corrected his unorthodox statements on Christ's suffering.⁴² This rumor freed the medieval writers from defending Hilary's seemingly untenable Christological position and preserved his orthodoxy and theological integrity for the medieval Church. It is this pious rumor that Chemnitz cites in his own comment on Hilary's Christology and, like his theological predecessors, uses to insulate Hilary from any association with unorthodox statements on Christ.⁴³

Basil the Great

Chemnitz tells us that Basil wrote many doctrinal treatises and letters well worth reading. Chemnitz offers high praise of Basil saying, "How expertly and reverently he spoke on the article of justification in his writing on humility and on many other subjects!"⁴⁴ Despite his strong

⁴⁰ For a charitable reading of Hilary's Christology, see Carl L. Beckwith, "Suffering Without Pain: the Scandal of Hilary of Poitiers' Christology," in *The Shadow of the Incarnation: Essays in Honor of Brian E. Daley, SJ*, ed. Peter Martens (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 71-96.

⁴¹ Kevin Madigan, "On the High-Medieval Reception of Hilary of Poitiers's Anti-"Arian" Opinion: A Case Study of Discontinuity in Christian Thought," *Journal of Religion* 78:2 (1998), 215, 221-222.

⁴² Bonaventure suggests that William of Paris had seen this letter. See, Madigan, "On the High-Medieval Reception," 223, n. 40-41.

⁴³ Preus, *LT*, 31a (*Loci*, 1653, 4).

⁴⁴ Preus, *LT*, 31b (*Loci*, 1653, 4). In Chemnitz's later work, the *Enchiridion*, he tells us exactly what he found so delightful in Basil's homily with respect to justification. Basil wrote, "This is perfect and unspoiled glorying in God, when one is not exalted because of his own righteousness, but acknowledges that he lacks righteousness and that he is justified alone by faith in Christ." Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, trans., Luther Poellot (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 78; Basil of Caesarea, *On Humility*, trans. Sister M. Monica Wagner, C. S. C., *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 9 (Washington D.C.: 1962), 479. Here is the full quote. (Note, I have slightly

statement on justification by faith, Chemnitz warns the reader that Basil spoke "in an unfortunate and improper way regarding free will and original sin."⁴⁵ It is not engagement with Basil that leads Chemnitz to this conclusion, but rather Augustine's own admonishment of Basil's statements. We see here, in a sense, Chemnitz's mediated knowledge of the Greek Fathers. When the writings of the Fathers are in Latin or a Latin translation, Chemnitz demonstrates first hand familiarity but at this stage of his theological development he does not seem to have engaged the Greek writers to a significant extent.

Ambrose

Chemnitz commends Ambrose for his various commentaries on Luke, Isaiah, and the Epistles of Paul. He acknowledges that the commentary on Isaiah was highly praised in antiquity but has since been lost.⁴⁶ The commentary on Paul's Epistles which, notes Chemnitz, is the "best" because it "speaks most accurately about justification," was not, however, written by Ambrose but by a figure known in the history of Christianity as Ambrosiaster.⁴⁷ That Chemnitz is thinking of Ambrosiaster here is confirmed by his later works where he actually cites material from this commentary under the name of Ambrose.⁴⁸ Chemnitz's confusion over the authorship of this commentary is a product of his own historical environment. Although Erasmus had argued that Ambrose was not the author of this commentary on Paul's letters, Chemnitz, even if he were familiar with Erasmus' position, may have been reluctant to concede the felicitous confusion of Ambrose with Ambrosiaster because of the polemical value of the commentary and its many fine statements on justification by faith.

altered the translation by rendering all instances of "δικαιοσύνη" as "righteousness" instead of "justice" as Sister Wagner translates.) Basil the Great writes, "The Apostle tells us: 'He that glorieth may glory in the Lord,' saying: 'Christ was made for us wisdom of God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption; that, as it is written: He that glorieth may glory in the Lord' (I Cor. 1:30-31). Now, this is the perfect and consummate glory in God: not to exult in one's own righteousness, but, recognizing oneself as lacking true righteousness, to be justified by faith in Christ alone. Paul gloried in despising his own righteousness and in seeking after the righteousness by faith which is of God through Christ..." Chemnitz is likely indebted to Melancthon for this quote. See, Philipp Melancthon, *De Ecclesia et de autoritate Verbi Dei*, CR 21:616.

⁴⁵ Preus, *LT*, 31b (*Loci*, 1653, 4).

⁴⁶ We have only a few fragments of the Isaiah commentary, which have been collected in CCL 14, 405-08.

⁴⁷ Preus, *LT*, 32a (*Loci*, 1653, 5).

⁴⁸ See, Martin Chemnitz, *Enchiridion*, 78. Cf. Johannes Brenz, *Confessio Wirtenbergensis* (1590), 4.

Chemnitz continues by warning the reader that there are many statements in Ambrose on free will and original sin that are unsatisfactory and were eagerly used by the Pelagians. He does not give any examples but comments that Augustine has explained how these troubling passages should be properly understood in his *Contra Julianum*. Chemnitz's remark raises two issues. The first is something we have already encountered and deals with the type of familiarity Chemnitz has with Ambrose. His brief comment suggests that his knowledge is derivative and based on citations. Did Chemnitz actually read the commentary on Paul's Epistles at this stage in his theological and pastoral development or is he simply familiar with citations from the commentary that serve his own theological agenda? Similarly, did Chemnitz himself read Ambrose and come away with dissatisfaction on his many statements dealing with free will and original sin, or is he only familiar with these because of his engagement with Augustine?

The second issue deals with the development of Chemnitz's historical methodology in addressing the unfortunate statements found in the writings of the Fathers. A guiding principle for Chemnitz is that the expressions of the Fathers written before a controversy must be dealt with in a spirit of generosity and forgiveness. That is not to say, however, that these statements should ever be defended by means of verbal gymnastics or rhetorical persuasions. If a person says something contrary to the gospel, such words are to be rejected. At the same time, if the great witnesses and saints of old utter things falling short of the gospel, what better lesson for Chemnitz's readers to learn and what greater need for humility in their own theological endeavors? That lesson, which we have observed above, seems to be somewhat forgotten or at least obscured here by Chemnitz. He does not say that Ambrose's statements on free will and original sin should be dismissed because he wrote before the Pelagian controversy. Indeed, the astute reader is left wondering why such a comment is not made. Instead the reader is pointed to Augustine's *Contra Julianum* to understand Ambrose's statements. A quick glance at Augustine suggests, though, a different course of action.⁴⁹ For Augustine,

⁴⁹ The Pelagian controversy was on one level an extended debate over the use of Ambrose. Both parties claimed the bishop of Milan to support their respective theological positions. The dispute often centered on Ambrose's commentary on Luke. Examples of Augustine's defense can be found in *On Nature and Grace*, 63.74-75 in *The Works of Saint Augustine* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press) I/23, 264-65; hereafter simply WSA. See also, *Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians*, 11.29-31 (WSA, I/24, 210-14); *Contra Julianum* (WSA, I/24) and *Contra Julianum opus imperfectum* (WSA, I/25) et passim.

the stakes are higher. Ambrose is the bishop who baptized him and from whom he heard the gospel. Certainly, it will not do to suggest that Ambrose spoke too casually on the topic of our salvation. A different explanation must be found, and Augustine devotes his efforts to establishing the point that Ambrose has been misunderstood and falsely claimed by the Pelagians. Put simply, he is not susceptible to Pelagianism; rather he is a pillar of the catholic tradition.⁵⁰

Jerome

Chemnitz highly praises Jerome's facility with languages, his knowledge of grammatical and historical matters, and his Latin translation of the Bible from Hebrew and Greek. He commends the reading of Jerome's commentaries but warns that his doctrinal works are inferior to his peers. Indeed, notes Chemnitz, Jerome clung so zealously to extreme discipline and the value of good works for the remission of sins in his early writings that he spent much of his later career altering and retracting these statements to avoid being claimed by the proponents of Pelagianism.

Chemnitz does express displeasure with Jerome's harsh and excessive rhetoric. Indeed, notes Chemnitz, Jerome spoke so outrageously against marriage in his work against the monk Jovinian that Augustine was forced to write in opposition to his views. What is noteworthy, though, is not that Augustine disagreed with Jerome, something he often did, but the manner in which Augustine refuted him. In his treatise *On the Good of Marriage* (*De Bono Conjugali*), Augustine writes about the blessings of marriage and opposes the harshness of Jerome's position. He does this, writes Chemnitz, "in such a winsome way" that readers hardly noticed whose "error" Augustine was correcting.⁵¹ Augustine's handling of Jerome seems to have made a strong impression on the young Chemnitz and becomes the model that he will follow in gently but resolutely correcting the theological positions of those as remote as the early Church Fathers and as near as his fellow Lutheran brothers.

⁵⁰ On this point of reinterpreting Ambrose along Augustinian lines, Neil McLynn has suggested that despite the prominent role of Ambrose in Augustine's spiritual autobiography, Augustine has perhaps exerted a greater influence over Ambrose by shaping the historical reception of him as a sympathetic Augustinian. Whether it is true or not that we read Ambrose through the lens of Augustine, it is clearly the case that the early Chemnitz did. See, *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed., Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S.A. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1999), 19. Cf. Neil McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1994), 370.

⁵¹ Preus, *LT*, 32b (*Loci*, 1653, 5). See, Augustine, *On the Good of Marriage*, NPNF, i, III, 399-413.

John Chrysostom

Chemnitz begins his comment by mentioning that many in his day greatly esteem John Chrysostom's commentaries on Genesis, Matthew, John, and the Pauline Epistles. At the same time, Chrysostom's eloquence and rhetorical flourishes led him to make "certain unfortunate statements" on free will and original sin.⁵² These statements were seized on by the Pelagians and forced Augustine to recover Chrysostom's intention in his *Contra Julianum*.⁵³ Given that Chemnitz never identifies these statements for the reader and given his citation of Augustine, it is likely that he has not directly engaged Chrysostom's writings.

In the above comment on Ambrose, we noted that Chemnitz's appeal to Augustine's *Contra Julianum* introduced a different methodological course than the one he himself advocates at the beginning of his treatise on the Fathers. That is to say, when a Father speaks in an incautious or unfortunate way prior to a theological controversy, we do not seek to reconcile his statements with the Scriptures but acknowledge that the presence of controversy forced subsequent Fathers to speak in a more concise manner. When we read Ambrose and Chrysostom, we esteem their labors but dismiss their unfortunate statements on free will and original sin. The reason for Chemnitz's methodological move is quite obvious. The Fathers are human authors whose statements are not binding or authoritative in and of themselves but rest entirely on the Scriptures—a point that echoes Thomas Aquinas' hierarchy of authorities in his question on *sacra doctrina*.⁵⁴ In the language of the theologian, Scripture is *norma normans*, the norming norm, the final and ultimate authority in all matters of doctrine and life. To approach the Scriptures in this way is nothing more than to confess *sola scriptura*. It is this confession that allows Chemnitz to approach the Fathers with esteem *and* discernment. He need not trouble himself with verbal gymnastics in order to preserve the sanctity or honor of the Fathers when they make unfortunate statements. It is also for this reason that Chemnitz's continued appeal to Augustine's *Contra Julianum* creates confusion for the attentive reader. Augustine does not, indeed cannot, take the approach advocated by Chemnitz. Augustine finds himself in the middle of controversy and is not in a position to yield any ground to the Pelagians. If Ambrose or Chrysostom speak in a manner that seems Pelagian, exegesis is required to demonstrate their agreement with

⁵² Preus, *LT*, 32b (*Loci*, 1653, 5).

⁵³ Augustine, *Contra Julianum*, I.6.21-30 (*WSA* I/24, 282-89).

⁵⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.1.8 ad 2.

Augustine and secure their catholic authority. From a historical perspective, Augustine had no other choice.

Augustine's approach to Ambrose and Chrysostom proceeds with very different theological assumptions than the method advocated by Chemnitz. It is here that we encounter confusion. Although Augustine is fully aware of the liberty he is taking with the disputed texts from his fellow contemporaries, he labors to convince his readers that the statements from writers like Ambrose and Chrysostom, when understood properly, which means in a manner consistent with Augustine, do not support the advocates of Pelagianism but rather confess what the Church catholic has always confessed about the necessity of grace, the depravity of sin, and the relationship between faith and good works. Augustine's theological assumption advances the idea that the Fathers spoke with a single catholic voice that is by implication always orthodox. Their sanctity and reputation suggest that they would not speak incautiously about an article of faith and therefore would at all times speak with a unified voice on the Scriptures and catholic Christianity. It is a short step from this false assumption to the establishment of a *consensus patrum* as a second and equal authority to Scripture. Chemnitz never acknowledges the tension caused by his approving use of Augustine's *Contra Julianum* and the different historical and theological approach to the Fathers introduced by such an appeal.

Augustine of Hippo

The comment on Augustine is the lengthiest one in the *Oratio* and reveals quite plainly the high regard and admiration that Chemnitz held for him. Here we encounter the Church Father who, "in the judgment of all," is given first place. Augustine lived during a time of many controversies on the chief articles of the faith. He devoted himself to answering these challenges and established the position of the Church on the foundation of the Scriptures. Augustine explained, writes Chemnitz, "the true position of the church more properly and clearly than the other Fathers, who spoke rather carelessly before the controversies had arisen, as Augustine himself admits."⁵⁵ There is a hint of self-reflection in Chemnitz's words; he sees himself living during a period of intense controversy when the article on which the Church stands or falls is under attack; an attack that Chemnitz sees from those outside of Lutheranism and within.

Augustine faced controversy on two fronts. He opposed those who would undermine Christianity and the City of God by blaming Christians

⁵⁵ Preus, *LT*, 32b-33a (*Loci*, 1653, 5-6).

for the destruction of Rome and those, like the Arians, who would undermine the gospel by arguing that Jesus Christ, the true Son of God, was not co-eternal and consubstantial with the Father. Augustine also opposed those closer to home. His disputes with the Pelagians, as we have seen, forced him to explain and interpret passages from Ambrose and Chrysostom in order to demonstrate that they were pillars of catholic orthodoxy and not supporters of Pelagius. Similarly, Augustine contended with the Donatists over what constituted, on one level, authentic African Christianity. Here the debate always found its way to a proper understanding of Cyprian and his more colorful statements on the Church and baptism.⁵⁶ Such statements led Cyprian, as we have noted, to argue that no heretic could administer a catholic baptism. It was at such critical moments as these that Augustine found the limit of his ability to explain away troubling statements by the Fathers, even Fathers as revered as the great Cyprian, about whom no African Christian in Augustine's day could speak casually or dismissively. On the question of baptism, Cyprian, Augustine tells us, was wrong because his teaching was contrary to the Scriptures. It is this move by Augustine, a move that must have caused a great deal of consternation for him, that Chemnitz praises so highly. From Chemnitz's perspective, his whole theological career was one staged on two fronts: against those outside of Lutheranism and those within. When Chemnitz turns to Augustine, he discovers a mentor, a person of faith who can guide him in his understanding of how to read the Fathers and who can help him navigate the troubled waters of sixteenth-century Christianity.

The historical method developed throughout Chemnitz's treatise is to begin with Scripture and then to read the Fathers as charitably as possible on any given theological question. It comes as no surprise to learn that Chemnitz attributes this approach to Augustine himself. Chemnitz explains,

Thus from Augustine we can learn with what judgment and openness we ought to read the writings of the Fathers. For he first sought out the true meaning from Scripture, and then if the Fathers held to the foundation, he would clarify their statements according to the analogy of faith, even when they said something that was not quite correct. But he did not allow such ideas to be put in opposition to the foundation. Rather, when there

⁵⁶ The Donatists gravitated to Cyprian's statements that "there is no salvation outside of the Church" or "one cannot have God as Father who does not have Church as Mother." See Cyprian, *Ep. LXI.4* (ANF, V, 358) and *De Unitate*, 6 (ANF, V, 423).

was an error in a fundamental doctrine, as in Cyprian on baptism, he does not attempt to interpret it but simply follows the meaning of Scripture.⁵⁷

Augustine's method for reading the Fathers was always to have recourse to Scripture. He not only corrected the unfortunate statements made by other Fathers by appealing to Scripture but also corrected his own statements by writing the *Retractions* toward the end of his life. Chemnitz argues that Augustine's reliance on the Scriptures as the sole authority in matters of theology was the result of too much authority being attributed to the Fathers prior to Augustine. Heretics would gravitate toward "less than felicitous statements from the Fathers" to the neglect of Scripture for their own distorted view of the faith. These practices led Augustine, writes Chemnitz, to advance the following axiom: "Articles of faith must be proved only on the basis of the canonical books."⁵⁸ It should be emphasized that this is Chemnitz's reading of Augustine's approach to the Fathers. As has already been noted, Augustine's use of Ambrose and Chrysostom in his *Contra Julianum* does not strictly conform to the method observed here by Chemnitz. Although Augustine freely invites correction according to Scripture alone for his own theological statements, the Pelagian controversy presented him with a different set of issues.

Despite the many praises of Augustine, Chemnitz does note a few problems. Augustine's lack of facility with biblical languages diminishes the value of his many commentaries and causes confusion with his theological vocabulary. Augustine does not understand "righteousness" or "to justify" in a biblical way. He assigns our righteousness to new obedience and "to justify" to the process of making us righteous in ourselves, rather than being declared righteous by a righteousness alien to us and proper to Christ alone. Augustine is also a product of his day in his hesitancy to reject prayers for the dead. This hesitancy, argues Chemnitz, was later exploited by Gregory the Great in order to establish purgatory as an article of faith. From this we learn, notes Chemnitz, how perilous it is to speak ambiguously or incautiously on matters outside of Scripture.

⁵⁷ Preus, *LT*, 33a (*Loci*, 1653, 6).

⁵⁸ Preus, *LT*, 33a (*Loci*, 1653, 6). On his invitation for correction, see Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, *WSA* I/5, I.1.5-6 (68-69). Similarly, in the prologue to Book Three, Augustine writes: "The reader will not, I trust, be fonder of me than of Catholic faith, nor the critic of himself than of Catholic truth. To the first I say: 'Do not show my works the same deference as the canonical scriptures. Whatever you find in scripture that you used not to believe, why, believe it instantly. But whatever you find in my works that you did not hitherto regard as certain, then unless I have really convinced you that it is certain, continue to have your doubts about it'" (*The Trinity*, 128).

III. Conclusions

There are a number of conclusions to draw concerning Chemnitz's exposure to the Fathers at this early stage of his pastoral and theological career. First, he demonstrates greater familiarity with texts in Latin than in Greek. Second, his commentary on these various early Church writers suggests that his access to the Fathers was not always through direct reading of their works—though he certainly did this to an extent. Chemnitz is indebted to the works of others in understanding the challenges raised by the Fathers. His comments on Ignatius and Hilary reveal this plainly.

Third, we discern from this early treatise what topics are of great theological interest to the young Chemnitz. Nearly every comment makes some reference to justification by faith, good works, free-will, or original sin. Put another way, Chemnitz measures every Church Father against the Lutheran commitment to justification by grace through faith alone.⁵⁹ We should not be surprised by this. Chemnitz has already had a taste of the theological struggles over the article of justification during his confrontation with Andreas Osiander at Königsberg. His treatise on the Fathers, published two years after this confrontation, demonstrates very clearly that although the young Chemnitz has only a limited knowledge of the Fathers, he has a solid grounding in and appreciation of the centrality of the article of justification in the task of the theologian and historian.

Despite the fact that Chemnitz reads the Fathers along this sixteenth-century polemical trajectory at this early stage of his career, he already displays a sophisticated understanding of history and the historical reception of the Fathers that attends to their own theological circumstance and context. He not only recognizes the various problems and challenges presented to the astute reader in dealing with apocryphal works, interpolated texts, or unacceptable theological opinions in normative writers but also demonstrates skill and sensitivity in reading these varied works that moves him beyond the narrow confines of polemical and apologetic reading. By approaching the Fathers in this constructive way, the young Chemnitz is able to read the witnesses who have gone before him with generosity and humility. This final virtue is of particular importance. If the Fathers, the giants of the past, could, at times, speak too

⁵⁹ Cf. Carl L. Beckwith, "Martin Chemnitz's Use of the Church Fathers in his *Locus on Justification*," *CTQ* 68 (2004): 271-290. On the relationship between justification and sanctification in Chemnitz's thought, see Carl L. Beckwith, "Looking into the Heart of Missouri: Justification, Sanctification, and the Third Use of the Law," *CTQ* 69 (2005): 297-302.

casually on theological issues, how much more likely are we, who stand on the shoulders of these giants, to do the same? Theology is a discipline not for the proud but the humble. Chemnitz learns this lesson very early on and displays it in his first published work.

At the Edge of Subscription: The *Abusus* Doctrine in the Formula of Concord – *Doctrina* or *Ratio*?

William C. Weinrich

I. The Person and Work of Christ in Luther

In his *Large Catechism*, Luther claims that the entire gospel depends on the birth, passion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. "If anyone asks, 'What do you believe in the second article about Jesus Christ?' answer as briefly as possible, 'I believe that Jesus Christ, true Son of God, has become my Lord.'" ¹ "Lord", Luther affirms, simply means Redeemer, for Christ has "brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and keeps us there."² With these simple words, we are introduced into the center of Luther's thinking. The God who is "for me and for my salvation" is and can be none other than the Jesus of the gospels. And in his work of redemption this Jesus is revealed to be none other than the God who created heaven and earth and brings eternal life to the sinful dead. To summarize: to be God is to redeem from sin, death, and the devil.

In this emphasis, Luther is at one with Irenaeus for whom the power of God lay in his will to create and bring the life of man to its consummation in union with himself. In the writings of Luther, this equation of power and the giving of life is nowhere more clearly put than in his Sermon on the Magnificat:

Just as God in the beginning of creation made the world out of nothing, whence He is called the Creator and the Almighty, so His manner of working continues unchanged. Even now and to the end of the world, all His works are such that out of that which is nothing, worthless, despised, wretched, and dead, He makes that which is something, precious, honorable, blessed and living. On the other hand, whatever is something, precious, honorable, blessed and living, He makes to be nothing,

¹ LC II:27.

² LC II:31.

worthless, despised, wretched, and dying. In this manner no creature can work; no creature can produce anything out of nothing.³

This passage is interesting because it sketches the work of Christ as a "manner of working" in which God forgives the sinner and gives life to the dead. In doing so, Christ reveals that he is the Creator and the Almighty. This theme is extensively worked out by Luther in his Galatians commentary of 1535. The will to redeem from the curse of the law gives form to the person of Christ. He is the one upon whom God placed all the sins of the world, so that Christ became the sinner. Indeed, Christ became the greatest and only sinner (*solus et maximus peccator*). However, to conquer sin, death, and the wrath of God is the work not of a creature but of the divine power. The work of Christ in his justifying, reconciling work is the work of God. To abolish sin, destroy death, give righteousness, and bring life to light—that is, to annihilate those and to create these—this is solely and alone the work of divine power. "Since Scripture attributes all these to Christ, therefore He Himself is Life, Righteousness, and Blessing, that is, God by nature and essence."⁴ Such passages as these represent Luther's fundamental definition of God and present the center of Luther's understanding of the revelation of God. God reveals himself to be God most clearly in the passion of Christ for the sinner. The humiliation of Christ is nothing other than the revelation of the majesty of God. The sufferings and death of Christ are works of God and are, therefore, victorious and life-creating. One might even say that the humanity of Christ expresses the human form of the divine majesty. Moreover, the unity of Christ's person is wholly necessary for the effectiveness of the redemptive work. Unless the humility of the man Jesus is at the same time the condescension of the divine Son of God, there can be no life out of death, no righteousness out of sin.

II. The Person and Work of Christ in the *Formula of Concord*

When, therefore, in the article on the person of Christ the *Formula of Concord* defines the divine nature in wholly different terms, the question arises whether the problem of Christology has not, in fact, shifted. "To be almighty, eternal, infinite, everywhere at the same time according to nature, that is, of itself to be present according to the property of the nature and its natural essence, and to know everything, are *essential* attributes of

³ 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), 21:299 [henceforth *LW*].

⁴ *LW* 26:282.

the divine nature."⁵ Did it happen that the intense confrontation with the Reformed concerning the Christological foundations of the real presence had brought to the fore another set of attributes that assumed importance as essential to our understanding of God? In any case, the attributes mentioned above are qualities of the *Deus nudus* or *Deus absconditus*, for such attributes do not constitute the redemptive work of Christ. Indeed, these attributes are set over against the natural characteristics of the human nature. These are: "being flesh and blood, being finite and circumscribed, suffering, dying, ascending, descending, moving from place to another, hunger, thirst, cold, heat, and the like" (Ep VIII.8). How do these two opposite and contrasting natures relate? To articulate an answer to this question was the purpose of what Werner Elert called "the most splendid memorial to the architectonics of the generation that brought the Formula of Concord into being,"⁶ namely, the doctrines of the communication of attributes and the three-fold *genera*. These served to ground the unity of Christ's person through the mutual relations that constituted Christ's person. Certainly, as one can easily see from the *Formula of Concord*, the personal union (*unio hypostatica*) of Christ is the central concern and determinative factor of Lutheran Christology. However, such an emphasis does raise the question to what extent God the Son is active and, therefore, revealed in the work of the incarnation. The same question may be asked in this way: to what extent is the humanity of Christ the instrument for the demonstration of the divine majesty of Christ and in what is this demonstration evinced?

The passage of Scripture that usually provided the outline of an answer to this question was Phil 2:5-11. This famous passage speaks of the Son, who, although in the form of God, "emptied himself" in that he assumed the "form of a servant, becoming in the likeness of men and having been found in form as a man," and "humbled himself becoming obedient unto death." Therefore, God highly exalted him and gave him a Name above every name. The economic schema of this passage is this: divine glory, incarnation, kenosis, exaltation. Martin Chemnitz and those around him distinguished between incarnation, self-emptying, and the exaltation in this way. Common to all Lutheran thinkers, they understood the incarnation to be that act by which the divine Son assumed into his person the man conceived and born of Mary. From the very moment of

⁵ SD VIII:9; Ep VIII.7; (emphasis added).

⁶ Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, vol. 1: *The Theology and Philosophy of Life of Lutheranism Especially in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis/London: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 229.

conception, therefore, the man Jesus was in full possession of the divine majesty and of all divine attributes. As the *Formula of Concord* puts it: "In him [Jesus] 'all the fullness of the deity dwells bodily.'"⁷ However, the Gospel narratives contain accounts in which Jesus appears to exercise divine power, such as in the water into wine miracle at Cana (John 2:1-11), and they also contain accounts in which Jesus appears to be without such divine power, such as when he says that only the Father knows the time of the end (Mark 13:32). The explanation of this apparent contradiction was to claim that the *kenosis* of the Son in his incarnation was a self-renunciation. That is, the humiliation (ταπείνωσις) of the Christ involved an *abusus* of (at least) certain of his divine attributes, that is, the non-use or non-employment of his divine attributes. From time to time, however, and as he willed, Christ could use and manifest his divine power and majesty, as when he raised up Lazarus from the dead. But such demonstrations of divine power were more or less infrequent and extraordinary. In sum, the humiliation/*kenosis* of Christ lay in the non-use of the divine attributes of majesty that he nevertheless possessed in full. According to this view, *possession but not use* is the short definition of the humiliation of Christ. It is this understanding of the non-use of divine attributes in the state of humiliation that will be examined below.

With this understanding of the *kenosis* of Christ, his exaltation is correspondingly interpreted to mean the resumption of the use, employment and manifestation of the divine majesty that Christ possessed from the beginning of the incarnation. Here is how Chemnitz expressed it: "By the ascension infirmities being laid aside and self-renunciation removed, he left the mode of life according to the conditions of this world, and departed from the world. Moreover, by sitting at the Right Hand of God, he entered upon the full and public employment and display of the power, virtue, and glory of the Godhead, which, from the beginning of the union, dwelt personally in all its fullness in the assumed [human] nature; so that he no longer, as in self-renunciation, withholds, withdraws, and, as it were, hides himself, but clearly, manifestly, and gloriously exercises it in, with and through the assumed human nature."⁸ *Possession and full and public use* is the short definition of the exaltation of Christ in relationship to his divine attributes.

⁷ Col 2:9; FC VIII:30.

⁸ Quoted in Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 3rd ed. revised and trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1899, 1961), 387-388. Schmid refers the quote to *de duab. nat.* 218.

III. The Relationship between the Person and Work of Christ after the *Formula of Concord*

In his *Doctrinal Theology*, Heinrich Schmid makes the claim that the doctrine of the renunciation and exaltation, as articulated by Chemnitz, was "not so clearly set forth" and "was still undecided" because the dogmaticians of that day "were not agreed upon it."⁹ Although Pieper is insistent to the contrary,¹⁰ it does seem true that Johannes Brenz and the theologians who followed him insisted on a different reading of the states of humiliation and exaltation. Brenz takes with full seriousness the implications of the claim that the incarnation consisted in the assumption of the man Jesus into the divine majesty. For Brenz this meant that even in his state of humiliation Christ was not only in full possession of the divine glory and majesty, but that he also exercised this divine majesty fully and at every moment, only not in an open manner but in secret. In no way did the humiliation of Christ lay in the fact of his flesh. Rather, the humiliation of Christ lay in the fact of Christ's servanthood in which the divine glory was ἐν κρύπτῃ, hidden and concealed. The lowliness of the Christ was the exercise of divine power in the manner of a servant, and in this sense the majesty that the human nature possessed from the incarnation was concealed and hidden. To give but one example of Brenz: "He lay dead in the sepulchre, in humiliation; living, he governed heaven and earth, in majesty; and this, indeed, during the time of his humiliation, **before** his resurrection."¹¹

This brings us to a brief consideration of the so-called "Crypto-Kenotic Controversy" of 1619.¹² The controversy was between the theology faculty of Tübingen and the theology faculty of Giessen,¹³ and the question was whether even in his humiliation Christ ruled the universe and all creatures fully and directly also according to his human nature. The question as it

⁹ Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology*, 388-389. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950-57), 2:300 n. 24 holds that Chemnitz and Brenz "taught the same doctrine"; therefore the "compromise" of the FC is only "alleged" and such opposing views "never existed" (also 2:296 n. 17).

¹⁰ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:300 n. 24.

¹¹ Quoted in Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology*, 389, emphasis mine, (quoted from Brenz, *De divina maiestate Domini nostri Jesu Christi*, 1562).

¹² For a thorough review of Lutheran Christological discussion leading to this controversy, see Jörg Bauer, "Auf dem Wege zur klassischen Tübinger Christologie. Einführende Überlegungen zum sogenannten Kenosis-Krypsis-Streit," in *Theologen und Theologie an der Universität Tübingen*, ed. Martin Brecht, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Evangelisch-Theologischen Fakultät (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1977), 195-269.

¹³ Tübingen: Lukas Osiander, Melchior Nikolai, Theodor Thummius; Giessen: Balthasar Mentzer, Justus Feuerborn.

was raised in this controversy concerned most specifically whether in his humiliation Christ possessed and exercised the attribute of omnipresence. It is helpful to remember that this controversy arose between Lutherans. The Lutheran assumption that the fullness of deity was possessed by the human nature of Christ even in the state of his humiliation was certain to raise difficulties in the reading of the various evangelical stories of the gospels. The faculties of both Tübingen and Giessen agreed that in the state of humiliation the divine nature of Christ in no sense suffered a diminution of the exercise of its power, nor did the humiliation consist of an actual surrender or diminution of the possession of the divine majesty given to the human nature of Christ at his incarnation.¹⁴ The Tübingen theologians, following the Christological outlines of Brenz, were, however, of the opinion that the attribute of omnipresence was a direct and necessary consequence of the personal union, and therefore the flesh of Christ was to be regarded as omnipresent from the moment of his conception. Where the person of the Word incarnated was, there must be also the human nature. Since the Godhead possesses an utterly absolute simplicity and is completely there wherever it is, there could be for the Tübingen theologians no question of a partial or temporary renunciation of Christ's omnipresence.

The distinction between the state of Christ's humiliation and of his exaltation, therefore, existed only in the manner in which Christ exercised his dominion. In the state of humiliation, on one hand, Christ exercised fully his divine majesty in the form of a servant, that is, in a hidden form. In the state of his exaltation, on the other hand, Christ exercised his dominion openly and in a manner corresponding to his divine majesty. From his conception on, according to the Tübingen theologians, Christ was at the right hand of the Father, for the incarnation means nothing other than this, that the man is assumed into the majesty of God. There was, therefore, no renunciation of the exercise of the majesty of the divine nature through the human nature but a concealment of it in the state of his humiliation. "Christ, according to his human nature, already from the first moment of his conception sat at the Right Hand of the Father, not indeed in a glorious majestic manner, but without that and in the form of a

¹⁴ No one of either faculty, Giessen or Tübingen, represented the view characteristic of 19th century kenoticism, namely, that the humiliation of the Word consisted in the actual divestment of his divine attributes. Among Lutheran theologians perhaps the most famous of such kenoticists was Gottfried Thomasius (1802-1875). In his treatment on *Christi Person und Werk*, 2 vols, one may find a thorough discussion of the Crypto-Kenotic Controversy of 1619.

servant."¹⁵ *Possession and concealed use* of the divine majesty in the state of humiliation with *possession and open and glorious use* of the divine majesty in the state of exaltation is the short definition of the Tübingen position.

The Giessen theologians opposed this view. They rejected the idea that in his state of humiliation Christ according to his human nature possessed absolute omnipresence, that is, that Christ was present to all things in heaven and on earth even in his human nature. Rather, they held, the Son of God exercises his divine rule only as the divine Word, not in and through the human nature. Omnipresence was defined as a divine work, and, therefore, the use of such an attribute by Christ was not based on the personal union but on the divine will of the Word. They virtually excluded the human nature of Christ entirely from his work of governing and preserving the world (*regnavit mundum non mediante carne*). The state of humiliation, therefore, involved a strict renunciation of the use of the attributes of divine majesty, but did so by referring the use of such attributes to the Word considered "outside" the human nature. Not surprisingly, the Tübingen theologians perceived in the Giessen position an unacceptable accommodation to the *extra calvinisticum* (that the deity of Christ exists also outside his human nature). In agreement with Chemnitz, however, the Giessen theologians held that the exaltation of Christ involved the human nature receiving the full exercise of the divine majesty. This reception of the full use, however, did not occur until the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

Eventually the controversy was mediated by Saxon theologians led by Höe von Höenegg. In the so-called *Decisio Saxonica* (1624), the Giessen theologians were in the main judged to be correct. For the most part, later Lutheran orthodoxy rendered the same judgment, although John Gerhard refused to concur with the *Decisio Saxonica*. The Tübingen position was judged deficient because it did not adequately distinguish between the state of humiliation and the state of exaltation and because its claim that in the state of humiliation Christ ruled the world by a direct presence also according to his human nature threatened to make the historical Jesus a mere docetic fantasy. Heinrich Schmidt summarizes the outcome of this controversy:

After the decision (1624) pronounced by the Saxon theologians, . . . those of Tübingen modified their views in this one respect, they also admitted a humiliation in a literal sense, with reference to the functions of the sacerdotal office, so that Christ renounced the use of the divine glory during his passion and death, and in connection with everything that he

¹⁵ Quoted in Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology*, 391.

did in behalf of the work of redemption. But *this* difference still continued between the two parties, that the Tübingen theologians so far as the prophetic and royal functions are concerned, regarded the humiliation as a mere concealment and regarded it as exceptional when Christ during his earthly life renounced the dominion belonging to his human nature. The Giessen theologians considered it, on the other hand, exceptional when Christ during his earthly life made use of his divine majesty through the human nature.¹⁶

In his own judgment of the matter, Karl Barth claims that "the basic view common to all Lutherans, that the man Jesus as such shares the totality of the divine attributes, undoubtedly points in the direction taken in Württemberg with the mere *κρύψις χρήσεως* [concealed use]."¹⁷ In this judgment I concur, although for Barth this merely demonstrates the wisdom all along of the Calvinistic *extra carnem*. It is a common wisdom of many modern historians of dogma to claim that the *abusus* doctrine, reinforced by the *Decisio Saxonica*, was but a preliminary step toward the kenoticism of the 19th century that affirmed that the incarnation of Christ was itself the humiliation of the divine Son whereby he renounced even the possession of his divine attributes. We need not render a judgment on this historical question, although it is certain that for early Lutheranism any thought of the divine Son divesting himself of his deity in the incarnation would have been wholly unthinkable. The gospel itself, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19), demanded that the man Jesus was none other than the divine Son enfleshed.

At the same time, a consideration of such a controversy may well suggest that under the press of polemic necessities Lutheran thinkers allowed themselves to develop a Christological construct in which the main thing is no longer the main thing. Francis Pieper, a Missouri Synod theologian, avers that the "Crypto-Kenotic Controversy should never have taken place," because it occurred only due to the fact that both parties "temporarily forgot" that one must not go beyond the "clear, certain testimonies in the Scriptures."¹⁸ However, Pieper is a partisan who interprets the controversy under the assumption that the *abusus* doctrine, which he believes is clearly and sufficiently articulated in the Formula of Concord, is in accord with the certain testimonies of the Scriptures. This assumption, however, deserves another look.

¹⁶ Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology*, 393. I have simplified the English somewhat.

¹⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV, 1.182.

¹⁸ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:300.

IV. Is the *Abusus* Doctrine in the Scriptures?

Werner Elert is of the opinion that the controversy between the Giessen and Tübingen theologians was waged on the basis of false conclusions drawn from the doctrine of the two natures. According to these conclusions, the essence of the divine and human natures consists in "an aggregate of attributes" that can be combined and differ from one another only quantitatively: the human nature knows something, the divine nature knows everything; the human nature is limited to a place, the divine nature is everywhere, and so forth. There had been, Elert concludes, "an involuntary adjustment to the Calvinistic contrasting of the finite with the infinite."¹⁹ "In what an altogether different manner," he wonders, "one could have met the attack on the 'finite capable of containing the infinite'" if in accordance with the impact of the Gospel God's inexhaustible will to confer grace had been made, not the *cause* but the *decisive content* of the 'assumption of the human nature.'²⁰ What Elert has in mind can be clearly seen if we remind ourselves of the adjustment the Tübingen theologians made consequent to the *Decisio Saxonica*. They conceded that in Christ's sacerdotal office, that is, in his passion and death Christ renounced the use of his divine attributes, while in his royal and prophetic offices he both possessed and used the attributes of his divine majesty.

Here then the question might well be raised: does this not make problematic Paul's claim that Christ the Crucified is the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:22) or that "God was in Christ reconciling the world" (2 Cor 5:18)? Does not such a renunciation in the sacerdotal office call into question the claim that precisely in his passion and death God was not only willing the sufferings of his Son but indeed effecting his rule in and through the death of his Son? Is not the death of Christ *the* great work of God? Is it not central to Biblical, and to Lutheran, concern that in the passion and death of Christ God is, as it were, most intensely at work and that therefore in this work God is to be confessed as most perfectly and completely revealed? Or, we might consider the apologetic claims of Francis Pieper that "the Lutheran Church simply presents the facts recorded in Scripture, namely, that Christ through the non-use of the divine majesty possessed it as though he did not possess it and thus became wholly like other men in life and death."²¹ This seems to me a wholly incautious comment. Is it true that the Lutheran Church wishes the

¹⁹ Elert, *Structure of Lutheranism*, 243-245.

²⁰ Elert, *Structure of Lutheranism*, 232; (emphasis mine).

²¹ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:295.

death of Christ to be "wholly like other men"? Of course, what Pieper most certainly means is true enough: the death of Christ was a true human death. However, does this theological commonplace demand the idea that the death of Christ is only consequent to the renunciation of divine attributes? Is the death of Christ not, in fact, the "revealed omnipotence" of the divine mercy and love?²²

The Reformation was precipitated over the definition of God. Who is God, and how is he known to be the God he is? That question led directly to the intense concern about the person of Christ and, as we have noted above, the fundamental importance of the hypostatic union. But that Christological consideration was itself in no way apart from the Gospel of justification and reconciliation. The true God is revealed as the justifying God: the Righteous God is revealed in the gospel. The *for us and for our salvation* was the guiding interest of Christological development.

And this is true not just for the Lutheran Church. It is also true of the Scriptures. We will take note only of a few passages, all from the Gospel of John. Despite John's talk of the descent and ascent of the Son of Man, this language cannot simply be translated into the categories of the hymn of Philippians 2. For in John's Gospel the ideas of descent and ascent are wholly transformed. As is well-known, in this Gospel the crucifixion of Jesus is his exaltation and in *this* exaltation Jesus is revealed to be the "I am" of God himself (John 8:28; cf. 3:14; 12:34; ὁψωθῆναι). It is the crucifixion which reveals Jesus to be the God of Israel and the Creator of the world and its Savior. Moreover, in John's Gospel this exaltation by crucifixion is said to be the glorification of the Son. According to Biblical diction, glorification is the making known of God by a visible manifestation. In the Gospel of John this manifestation is the passion and death of Christ. Indeed, in the Gospel of John the cross is depicted as the throne of God. In the perfect obedience of the man Jesus (perfect obedience is the mark of the Son), man assumes again the rule given to him at the beginning, and God assumes again his rule in man.

In sum: in the Gospel of John the crucifixion is the very form of the majesty of God. Here one may well speak of a concealment, but only in the sense of the Christ's own principle, that his power is perfected in weakness (2 Cor 12:9). Pieper follows an exegetical tradition when he writes that the words of John 17:5: "Now, O Father, glorify thou me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world was," "speak of a

²² The phrase comes from Elert, *Structure of Lutheranism*, 230.

glorification which began only with the exaltation."²³ He is thinking of the resurrection and ascension of Christ. However, in the Gospel of John, which reports these words of Christ, these words refer precisely to the crucifixion of Christ in which the glory of God is to be revealed. Elsewhere in the Johannine literature this glory will be named: it is love. We should remember that the right use of the Scriptures is not a mere balancing of their complex and apparently contrasting statements. The right use of the Scriptures is a reading of them according to their own genius (*analogia fidei*), that is, that we might know the one true God, that is, Jesus Christ whom he has sent (John 17:3).

V. Conclusion

Already in the second century Irenaeus affirmed that we do not know God according to his greatness, but we know him according to his love.²⁴ The gnostic opponents of Irenaeus understood God's transcendence to be beyond, outside, and above all things, so that no created thing, and no singular name, could in themselves denote the reality of God. God was, as it were, the summation of all names and at best could only be hinted at in the symbolic significance given to every thing and event. In no thing could God be known in his fullness as who he is. This spiritualizing tendency made the knowledge of God possible only by the transcending of the creation and the Creator. They seek a god above the Creator, and therefore they find no god at all. That is the accusation of Irenaeus. Rather, Irenaeus argues, the transcendence of God lies precisely in this, that God wills to be present in each creature, so that for each creature he is Creator, the Giver of life.

This is a doctrine of creation quite similar to that of Luther and is not unlike the notion, developed by Lutheran dogmatics, of immensity according to which God is transcendent above all categories of space.²⁵ God is not a conglomerate of attributes but is a person who is present where and when he wills. Here the notions of finitude and infinitude lose their meaning. As spatial terms God is neither finite nor infinite. Luther's famous words make the point: "Nothing is so small that God is not still smaller. Nothing is so large that God is not still larger. Nothing is so short that God is not still shorter. Nothing is so long that God is not still longer.

²³ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:298.

²⁴ Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 4. 20.1 (ANF 1:487).

²⁵ For a brief description, see Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 2: *God and His Creation* (St. Louis/London: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 79-85. It is interesting to note the importance that Preus gives to the *Decisio Saxonica* in early elaboration of God's immensity.

Nothing is so wide that God is not still wider. Nothing is so narrow that God is not still narrower."²⁶

In his own discussion of the topic, Werner Elert makes use of this aspect of Luther's thinking. "The Word became flesh." Such a statement, rather than suggesting a limitation of God, rather indicates the *locus* in which God chooses to be present and through which he chooses to work. The incarnation reveals "the inexhaustible will of God to confer grace."²⁷ If the incarnation was the assumption of the human nature into the majesty of God, therefore, it was also the assumption of the human nature into "God's will to exercise His rule through the man Christ."²⁸ "In Christ God's omnipotence, His omnipresence, and His omniscience are combined in the will to bring about a reconciliation; they enter the service of that will."²⁹ In this rule the man Christ is central and integral. "Just as it is impossible to separate Christ's humanity from the Logos, so one cannot separate the will to bring about a reconciliation and God's work of reconciliation from His omnipotence."³⁰ The death of Christ, therefore, is not given room by a certain non-use of God's majesty, it is rather that place where the participation of the man Jesus was most perfectly the instrument of the divine rule. One must think of God as he is in his Son. This means that one must think of God as he reveals himself in his will to save. The Son is nothing other than the incarnation of God's will to save. "The Logos born of God takes the form of a servant and renders the obedience of a servant unto death for the very purpose of carrying out the new rule of God that begins in the revelation of salvation."³¹

In the title of this paper, I wondered out loud whether the *abusus* doctrine is *vera doctrina* or *ratio*, an attempt at explanation of true doctrine. The task of dogmatic theology is to articulate and explain the truth of divine revelation. In this task, dogmatic theology gives human thought to divine truth. It is faith in search of understanding. The church must engage in this task, for it is through such thinking that the church answers the question, "What does this mean?" And in this task the church speaks of the truth itself, even as it attempts to give the best and most precise clarifications, explanations, and articulations. But to adopt once more an

²⁶ Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [Schriften], 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), 26:339.

²⁷ Elert, *Structure of Lutheranism*, 230.

²⁸ Elert, *Structure of Lutheranism*, 245.

²⁹ Elert, *Structure of Lutheranism*, 245.

³⁰ Elert, *Structure of Lutheranism*, 246.

³¹ Elert, *Structure of Lutheranism*, 246.

old distinction that I have also used in another context, there is *lex* and there is *ratio*. The *lex* stands firm and must be held for it belongs to the truth itself. It is this *lex* that is the perennial subject matter of dogmatic reflection. On the other hand, *ratio* is the human attempt to explain the *lex* and may be now good, now better, now less helpful. Within every *ratio* is the implicit question, how do we best think about the *lex*, the *vera doctrina*? Method, starting point, and fundamental working assumptions, therefore, are crucial aspects of every *ratio*.

In this paper I have tried to suggest that perhaps the *abusus* doctrine is in fact a *ratio* that attempts to give a sufficient explanation and defense of the *doctrina*. If so, then the *abusus* doctrine is not required of those who would wish to subscribe to the *Formula of Concord*. The essential doctrine of the *Formula*, and that to which all Lutherans are obligated, is the truth of the hypostatic union, the truth that the man born of Mary is none other than God the Son as man. In person, the Word of God and the son of Mary are identical. In thinking about that doctrine and its necessity for the revelation of God as the God who justifies the sinner, however, perhaps the hypostatic union leads more in the direction of Johannes Brenz than it does in the direction of Martin Chemnitz.

Research Notes

A Response to Jeffrey Kloha's Study of the Trans-Congregational Church¹

Jeffrey Kloha maintains that the New Testament uses “church” (ἐκκλησία) to refer to three identifiable entities—first, individual congregations; second, several local congregations conceived of corporately, that is, as a “trans-congregational church”; and third, the church universal (*una sancta*). It is Kloha's contention that far too many in our circles—and in modern, American Christianity in general—conceive of “church” at primarily the local level, and virtually not at all at the trans-congregational or universal levels. Hence, he spends most of the article demonstrating that the writers of Acts and the Pauline epistles placed great stock in geographically and ethnically distinct congregations cooperating together not only in externals (feeding the hungry, the Jerusalem collection, etc.), but much more in shared communication, shared doctrine and practice, and shared mission and confession. When there was division within the congregations regarding the necessity of circumcision for the Gentiles—as happened, for example, during events leading up to the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15)—the two groups met together to submit their respective understandings of the Scriptures to one another under the overall direction of the apostles. But not everyone's voice was heard at this conference and, somewhat oddly to us, no Gentiles were ever brought in to plead their case. Nevertheless,

consensus was reached under the guidance of the Spirit and the study of Scripture, as well as the example of the Spirit's obvious work through Peter, Paul, and Barnabas. Once the issue was settled, all sides agreed to submit to the shared understanding of God's will. This passage relates a major event in the narrative of Acts, one with significance beyond what is discussed here. But for our purposes, it does show that the congregations functioned in real and significant ways as a larger “church” (176).

Kloha makes the point again and again—with plenty of scriptural evidence—that individual clusters of congregations (which he calls the “trans-congregational” church²) shared concrete forms of fellowship with one another, cooperated in externals, strove for doctrinal unity also in controverted

¹ The following paper, a response to Jeffrey Kloha's article, “The Trans-Congregational Church in the New Testament” (*Concordia Journal* 34.3 [July 2008] 172–90), was delivered on March 6, 2009, before a joint meeting of the departments of Exegetical Theology of Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) and Concordia Theological Seminary (Fort Wayne) which occurred at the Theology Professors Convocation (March 5–8, 2009, Raleigh, NC).

² Suitable alternative terms may be “trans-parochial” or “trans-local” (187 n. 1). “The term ‘trans-congregational’ will be used in this essay to refer to the manifestations of church larger than the local congregation but not the *una sancta*” (187 n. 1).

points, and even remonstrated with errant congregations who, supposing themselves “autonomous,” were challenged by the *consensus omnium* “to return to the shared practices of the broader church” (182, on Corinth). He also dares to assert that terms like “district” and “synod”—admittedly foreign to the NT—nevertheless refer closely enough to ecclesiastical structures beyond the local congregation that all but resemble the trans-congregational nature of the church identified: “In this context, ‘trans-congregational church’ refers to any structural entity beyond the local congregation, be it circuit, district, synod, even international church organizations” (186).

At this point I should come clean and admit my own enthusiastic endorsement of Kloha’s article. In an e-mail I wrote to Kloha last August, I commended the author for having produced “a wonderful piece,” “timely” for the issues faced in Missouri, and exemplary also for its superior manner of “wrestling deeply with ancient social issues.”³ I will provide here some additional points that I believe support Kloha’s already well-substantiated article.

First, Kloha overlooks a detail in Acts that very much supports his idea that clusters of congregations—despite diversity as to geographical location, ethnicity, and giftedness—nevertheless exhibited a marvelous unanimity of purpose and doctrinal consensus that had been instilled in them through the Holy Spirit. Following the Jerusalem Council, Acts records that Paul and Silas—having just commenced the second journey (since Acts 15:39)—“strengthened” the churches (15:42; 16:5), delivering the decisions “reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey [παρεδίδουσαν αὐτοῖς φυλάσσειν τὰ δόγματα τὰ κεκριμένα ὑπὸ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ πρεσβυτέρων τῶν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὺμοις]” (16:4 NIV). The NIV’s “obey” may seem a too stringent equivalent for φυλάσσειν,⁴ though the basic sense seems clear enough: Paul and Silas were “handing over” (παρεδίδουσαν) directives reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the common Christians—if not to “obey” (see note 4), then at least to “hold on to” (i.e., “treasure,” “esteem highly”).⁵ Clearly the common Christians were not at liberty to treat “the directives” (τὰ δόγματα) as though these were indifferent or inconsequential matters;⁶ for at the

³ John G. Nordling to Jeff Kloha, 1 August 2008, 12:03 PM.

⁴ Cf. *tradebant eis custodire dogmata* (Vulg); “überantworteten sie ihnen zu halten den Spruch” (Heilig. Schrift); “they delivered them the decrees for to keep” (KJV); “they delivered to them the decrees to keep” (NKJV); “they delivered to them for observance” (RSV; NRSV); “they delivered the decisions... for the people to obey” (TNIV); “they delivered the decisions . . . for the people to keep” (GWN). Emphases are mine.

⁵ For this understanding of φυλάσσειν cf. BDAG 5a: “to continue to keep a law or commandment from being broken—a) act. *observe, follow*” (original emphasis). Other passages which support this meaning are (in order of citation) Matt 19:20; Luke 18:21; 1 Tim 5:21; Acts 7:53; 21:24; Gal 6:13; Rom 2:26; Luke 11:28; John 12:47; and Acts 16:4.

⁶ There must be a formal correspondence between “the directives” (τὰ δόγματα) and the third-person sing. aor. indic. act. vb. ἔδοξεν (“it seemed best”) which occurs four

convention the apostles and elders actually had the cheek to say *in conclavi*: "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us [ἔδοξεν . . . τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ καὶ ἡμῖν] not to burden you" with thus and so (15:28). Thus Acts 16:4 presents Paul and Silas as delivery men, "handing over" to the congregations—not physically present in Jerusalem—those matters which had been determined for them through in-depth study of the Scriptures which especially James (of all people!) had undertaken (15:16-18, 19-21). It goes without saying, of course, that many contemporaries would have been opposed to James's exegesis in such matters, to say nothing of Luke's reportage of the same; but it seems safe to assume that such resisters were not to be considered part of the church, neither in its local, trans-congregational, nor universal manifestations.⁷ At any rate, it was expected that all of the congregations to which Paul and Silas travelled during the second journey would accept without reservation the Jerusalem decree without rehashing the important work that had been done there. Summarizing this episode of Acts, Haenchen explains:

With the story of Timothy [cf. Acts 16:1ff] and the report of the delivery of the δόγματα of the Apostles and elders, it is evident that the mission now beginning [= second journey] is undertaken in complete concord with the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem. Luke thus sees the Pauline mission, which from now on becomes his real theme, as harmoniously integrated into the total work of the church.⁸

Second, I was reminded, while reading Kloha's article for the first time, of an assertion I made quite innocently in *Philemon* with respect to archaeological remains of buildings such as the early Christians may have inhabited in the Euphrates Valley (Dura-Europas) and Corinth (Anaploga villa).⁹ Such evidence, I surmised, suggests that while each congregation was vastly different as to size, domestic layout, and physical surroundings, it was nevertheless the case that each was to be vitally aware of and preserve the

times in Acts 15, three of which (15:22, 25, 28) describe formal pronouncements made by the apostles, elders, and entire gathering at the Jerusalem Council. So F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951) 308; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 479.

⁷ They may, perhaps, have reverted to the Judaism out of which early Christianity sprang (cf. J. Louis Martyn's discussion of "Christian Jews/Jewish Christians" in *Galatians* [Anchor Bible 33A; New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Doubleday, 1997] 38, 118 n. 96, 239, 588).

⁸ Haenchen, *Acts*, 482.

⁹ For Dura-Europas, see Floyd V. Filson, "The Significance of the Early House Churches" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 58 (1939) 107-08; Bradley Blue, "Acts and the House Church," in David W. J. Gill and Conrad Gempf, (eds.), *The Book of Acts in its Graeco-Roman Setting* (vol. 2 in the series *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 166-67; Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 261. For the Anaploga villa, see James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Harper Atlas of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 174-175.

"oneness" (ἡ ἐνότης) it shared with all other congregations in the Spirit, hope, lordship of Christ, doctrine (in the objective sense of the μία πίστις, Eph 4:5), Baptism, and God.¹⁰ I opined that each of the congregations unto whom Paul wrote—including, of course, Philemon's house congregation ("and to the church-throughout-your-house [καὶ τῇ κατ' οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ], Philemon 2b)—was supposed to be "an intentional Eucharistic fellowship" that met regularly to hear the Word and partake of the Lord's Supper in league with all of the other congregations to which Paul wrote.¹¹

But that was before reading Kloha's "Trans-Congregational Church in the New Testament"; I now suspect that the "oneness" (ἡ ἐνότης) so highly prized by the first Christians was not so much that enacted between individual members within local congregations as relations between the congregations themselves and congregational representatives of the same who would have operated in wider spheres of influence than prevailed at local levels. In such a scheme there must have been considerable scope given to pastors whose reach, even for us, typically extends beyond the one, two, or several congregations served. Debate swirls about what office the so-called "elders" (πρεσβύτεροι) held in Acts,¹² though Kloha finds it "not impossible" that the πρεσβύτεροι—at the Jerusalem conference, at least—were "the leaders of the individual 'house churches' which were under the overall direction of the 'apostles'" (176). Not that Acts and the Pauline epistles were ever nonchalant about lay participation at local levels; much more was it the case, however, that ancient persons in general, and perhaps the first Christians in particular, thought *collectively* of themselves and of the groups of which they were a part.¹³ Then, too,

¹⁰ John G. Nordling, *Philemon*, Concordia Commentary Series (St. Louis: Corcordia, 2004), 175. Paul exhorts Christians to make every effort "to keep the oneness of the Spirit [τὴν ἐνότητα τοῦ πνεύματος] in the bond of peace; [there is] one body and one Spirit [ἐν σώμα καὶ ἐν πνεύμα], just as you were called in the one hope of your calling—one Lord [εἷς κύριος], one faith [μία πίστις], one Baptism [ἐν βάπτισμα], one God [εἷς θεός] and Father of all" (Eph 4:3-6; my translation).

¹¹ Nordling, *Philemon*, 175. The following passages were "merely illustrative" (Nordling, *Philemon*, 175 n. 163) of the congregational fellowship presumed: 1 Cor 1:9; 10:16-17; 12:27; Eph 3:6; 4:4; Phil 2:1-4. Also Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:3, 6, 7.

¹² Was the usage in Acts derived from Judaism or from that of the Gentile congregations? Kloha opines ("Trans-Congregational," 189 n. 14) that there probably was overlap between the two; in the Hellenistic congregations the duties of πρεσβύτεροι included "exhortation and preaching in the church services" (BDAG, s.v. πρεσβύτεροι 2ba, on the basis of 2 Clement 17:3, 5). For πρεσβύτεροι in general cf. Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Tim 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1, 5.

¹³ "Anthropologically oriented social psychologists call the opposite pole of individualism collectivism. First-century persons like Timothy and Paul and Jesus were collectivistic personalities. A collectivistic personality is one who needs other persons to know who he or she is. Every person is embedded in another, in a chain of embeddedness [*sic*], in which the test of interrelatedness is crucial to self-understanding. A person's focus is not on himself or herself, but on the demands and expectations of others, who can grant or withhold acceptance and reputation. In other words,

Christianity was itself conceived of originally and broadcast to the world intentionally as a religion by and for the slaves—who possessed no personhood whatsoever. I have not the space here to elaborate,¹⁴ but suffice it to say that the work conducted at local levels would have consisted mainly in helping all the gathered to see—both great and small, both named Christian and anonymous person at lower societal level—that Jesus, the supreme Kyrios, had died a slave's death upon a cross, had risen triumphantly from the dead, and as a result of this salvific event there was now possible a new destiny "in Christ" for such as died to past sins baptismally and rose from the font in faith to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord in the Supper—actions conceived of more corporately than individualistically.¹⁵ Also urged on the indeterminate multitudes was "the cross" that God gives: "let him take up his cross and follow me," Jesus urges identically in both Matthew (16:24) and Mark (8:34), and Luke adds "daily" (καθ' ἡμέραν) to the saying (Luke 9:23). This "cross" is all but code for what we Lutherans call vocation: "The disciple of Jesus is a cross-bearer, and [this] he remains . . . his whole life."¹⁶

The activities documented in the preceding paragraph continue to take place in the church at local levels; Kloha has put many on notice, however, that "church" should also be conceived of trans-congregationally—that is, across the barriers erected by geography, giftedness, gender, ethnicity, social class and, I might add, historical location. Most of Kloha's insights fly in the face of the rampant autonomy and pragmatism that has made inroads into so many American congregations, including our own. Yet for that very reason, I submit, Kloha's article should be studied carefully by many and his conclusions heeded. He demonstrates, for example, that ἡ ἐκκλησία does not always have the same meaning lexically in the NT (173–174). Sometimes, to be sure, the word means local congregation, as in the expression "church-throughout-the-house" (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 2), and entry 3ba in BDAG supports this localized meaning of the word "church" on the basis of the following citations (in order of appearance): Matt 18:17; 1 Cor 11:18; 14:4–5, 12, 19, 28, 35; 14:34 (plural); 3 John 6; Acts 15:22. But in a distinct entry (3c), the editors of BDAG provide the meaning "the global community of

individuals do not act independently," Bruce J. Malina, *Timothy. Paul's Closest Associate* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008) 3–4. Cf. my review of this book in *Logia* 18.1 (Epiphany 2009): 56–57.

¹⁴ See John G. Nordling, "A More Positive View of Slavery: Establishing Servile Identity in the Christian Assemblies," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19.1 (2009): 63–84.

¹⁵ Nordling, "Positive View of Slavery," 78–80.

¹⁶ J. Schneider, *TDNT* 7:578. For my own thinking on the manifold ways biblical slavery anticipates Luther's doctrine of Christian vocation cf. Nordling, *Philemon*, 137–139; Nordling, "Slavery and Vocation" *Lutheran Forum* 42.2 (Summer 2008): 12–17; Nordling, "A More Positive View of Slavery," 81.

Christians, (*universal*) church" – what most call *una sancta*.¹⁷ Finally, however, there is a wide middle group which the editors of BDAG define as "the totality of Christians living and meeting in a particular locality or larger geographical area, but not necessarily limited to one meeting place" (BDAG 3bβ). This entry is supported by far more citations than the other two put together¹⁸ and, while Kloha cites several of these in the course of his article, he can not do justice to them all.¹⁹ These latter citations impress on one the realization that the first Christians attached the highest significance to outwardly diverse bodies of Christians who were inwardly united by the Spirit as to doctrine, practice, worship, hymnody, and a host of other markers that too many today dismiss as "adiaphora." The NT evidence everywhere suggests, however, that also in the so-called "indifferent matters" – which often are not so indifferent as many presume – there was in the Spirit a genuine meeting of hearts and minds, and the sense that "no congregation was an island unto itself" (181). Kloha's goal, with which I agree, is that our pastors and people turn once again to the NT to sharpen our sometimes quite dim understandings of "church" and then apply this scriptural understanding to whatever outward structures our synod may take. Let Kloha have the final word: "The goal is that the church so structured and blessed by the power of the Spirit might all the more clearly confess Jesus Christ as Lord, so that every tongue might make that same confession here in this life and again finally at their resurrection on the Last Day" (187).

¹⁷ Supported by the following passages (in order of appearance): Matt 16:18; Acts 9:31; 1 Cor 6:4; 12:28; Eph 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23–25, 27, 29, 32; Col 1:18, 24; Phil 3:6.

¹⁸ Acts 5:11; 8:3; 9:31; 11:26; 12:5; 13:1; 14:23; 15:3; 18:22; 20:17 (cf 12:1; 1 Cor 4:17; Phil 4:15; 1 Tim 5:16); James 5:14; 3 John 9–10; Acts 8:1; 11:22; **Rom 16:1; 1 Cor 1:2**; 2 Cor 1:1; Col 4:16; Rev 3:14; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Rev 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7. Plural: Acts 15:41; 16:5; Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 7:17; 2 Cor 8:18–19, 23–24; 11:8, 28; 12:13; Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 23, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 22:16. Of Christian communities in Judea (Gal 1:22; 1 Thess 2:14); Galatia (Gal 1:2; 1 Cor 16:1); Asia (**1 Cor 16:19**; Rev 1:4, 11, 20); Macedonia (2 Cor 8:1).

¹⁹ Kloha cites the bold font passages in n. 18.

Book Reviews

Freedom in Response—Lutheran Ethics: Sources and Controversies. By Oswald Bayer. Trans. by Jeffrey F. Cayzer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 275 pages. Hardcover. \$99.00.

The seventeen essays in this volume evince the comprehensive scope of Oswald Bayer's work in the realm of theological ethics. His topics range from investigation of biblical texts as represented in essays on the Sermon on the Mount, the renewal of the mind in Paul, and the first commandment as basis for ethics, to a variety of essays on ethical controversies that emerge out of the Enlightenment, to some essays on marriage.

Luther and Johann Georg Hamann figure most prominently in Bayer's work, as one would expect. In an essay entitled "Nature and Institution: *Luther's Doctrine of the Three Estates*," Bayer works from Luther's 1528 treatise, "Confession of Christ's Supper" to show that the "doctrine of the three estates" functions as a hermeneutic of Genesis to appropriate the social dimensions of creation and sin. Bayer argues that the three estates comprehend "the three basic forms of life which God's promise has ordained mankind" (93). As such, they are perhaps even more significant than the "two kingdoms" conceptuality in Luther's ethics. "Luther's Ethics as Pastoral Care" addresses the place of freedom in Luther's ethics and its consequences for the care of souls. Reviewing the way that the ethics of Jesus was constructed as "itinerant radicalism" by New Testament scholars such as G. Theissen in contrast with the so-called *Haustafeln* of the epistles, Bayer shows how Luther set the first commandment in the context of the worldly estates so that both faith and love are preserved. Bayer observes how Hamann carries forth key themes from Luther in his critique of the Enlightenment.

Three essays are devoted to marriage: "The Protestant Understanding of Marriage," "Luther's View of Marriage," and "Freedom and Law in Marriage." Writing against views of marriage shaped by both the Enlightenment and Romanticism, Bayer sets out an understanding of marriage as "institution" in keeping with his work on Luther's use of the three estates: "We cannot see our marriage simply as bought about by our own decision or just a contract that can be dissolved by mutual consent" (173). He maintains that Luther's understanding of marriage preserves its creational character while seeing it as the location for faith and love, and therefore the place of cross-bearing. In an age where marriage is seen as a more or less temporary arrangement entered into and maintained by the will of the couple, Bayer sounds this salutary note: "The quality of the marriage union – that it is not under the control of the married couple – means that it is entered into whole heartedly and without reservation, and of course means that there can be no term set to the duration of marriage. Thus the expressly included requirement of 'till death do us part'

is indispensable" (164). Also helpful is Bayer's treatment of the character of the one flesh union.

Several essays take up issues of philosophy and ethics. Here Bayer demonstrates a comprehensive grasp of the sources in his engagement with Kant, Feuerbach, Marx, and others. His essay on "Law and Freedom: A Metacritique of Kant" is especially helpful in getting to the heart of the persistence of the category of autonomy in contemporary thought.

There is little written these days that is distinctively Lutheran in the field of ethics. Bayer has distinguished himself as one who works deeply with Lutheran categories firmly centered in the doctrine of justification by faith alone (see his earlier books, *Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification* and *Theology the Lutheran Way*). For this reason alone, *Freedom in Response* is a most welcome book. Bayer's careful and demanding scholarship will serve pastors well as they seek to articulate ethics in such a way as not to minimize or overturn Article IV of the Augsburg Confession. My only regret concerning this book is that its price of \$99.00 will no doubt keep it out of the hands of most students and pastors. A less expensive paperback version would assure it a place as a required text in my course on theological ethics.

John T. Pless

The Courage to be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World. By David F. Wells. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. 253 pages. Hardcover. \$26.00.

David Wells has distinguished himself as one of the most astute and insightful observers of cultural trends and their impact on American Christianity especially of the conservative, evangelical variety. Beginning with his *No Place for the Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* in 1993, Wells has consistently tracked trends that have resulted in a reshaping of Evangelicalism, making it in his studied opinion less faithful to the biblical vision of church and increasingly acclimated to a worldview devoid of the category of absolute truth. In short, Wells, the Andrew Mutch Distinguished Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, has taken the pulse of Evangelicalism and finds it ailing, indeed, fatally so.

The Courage to be Protestant is best understood as a summation and addendum to his previous four books. His earlier books engage five main doctrinal themes: truth, God, self, Christ and the church. These themes form the five major sections of the current volume. Revisiting these themes without the scholarly apparatus of footnotes that characterized the first four volumes, Wells seeks to condense and focus the work that has engaged him for the last two decades.

Insofar as The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod sometimes finds itself on the periphery of American Evangelicalism, Wells' books have struck a responsive chord with those concerned about Lutheran identity in our midst. Many of his worries (i.e., loss of confessional integrity, cultural emptiness, psychological captivity of the church, mega-church marketing and the like) are also themes familiar to thoughtful Lutheran observers. Wells critique of "consumer driven Christianity" which seeks "buyers" rather than disciples is hard-hitting. He faults Evangelicalism for collapsing the visible church into an invisible church: "The invisible church becomes everything, and the visible church, in its local configuration, loses its significance and its place in the Christian life" (214).

A bit closer to home, Wells lifts up the 1991 book, *Churchless Christianity* by Missouri Synod missionary/professor, Herbert Hoefer (whose name he misspells as Hoefner) as example of a theology that is deficient from both a Christological and ecclesiological perspective because Hoefer's theology results in a disembodied church that cannot be distinguished from the unbelieving culture (see p. 215). The notion of "secret believers" is incongruent with the New Testament's call to baptism and confession. *The Courage to be Protestant* also advances the case against both the so-called "emerging church" and "The New Perspective on Paul" started in Wells' 2005 book, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs: Christ in a Postmodern World*.

Wells is no mere naysayer, hurling piercing jeremiads from the security of a protected academic environment. Through this book as in his previous works, he shows himself to be a thinker concerned with the health of the church and the vitality of its mission. Hence he argues that mission suffers where the truth claims of orthodox Christianity are minimized. Thus Wells calls for the reclaiming of Reformation theology as the remedy for a fatigued and listless Christianity infected with viruses of pragmatism and postmodernism. It is obvious that Wells tilts toward Geneva rather than Wittenberg in his understanding of what constitutes Reformation theology. For example, he fails to grasp the connection between baptismal regeneration and justification by faith in Luther (see p. 219). Nevertheless, Well's book more generally displays an appreciative use of Luther over and against tepid streams of contemporary theological adaptations of therapeutic and managerial paradigms for church and mission.

The Courage to be Protestant is a welcome contribution that deserves a thoughtful and critical reading by those who struggle to be faithful in a climate marked by pluralism.

John T. Pless

A Model for Marriage: Covenant, Grace, Empowerment and Intimacy. By Jack O. Balswick and Judith K. Balswick. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2006. 211 pages. Paperback. \$19.95.

Jack and Judith Balswick are both professors of family development and therapy at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. This book on families is filled with insights from more than thirty years of writing, teaching, and counseling.

In order to draw a relational model of marital spirituality, the Balswicks draw upon Miroslav Volf's (1998) *After our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*. As Volf uses a Trinitarian theology as a model of the Church as a Christian community, so the Balswicks borrow this model as a way of expressing their belief that God's ideal for marriage is found in a "differentiated unity" in marriage. They define differentiated unity as "the internal ability to have a secure sense of self (differentiation) in relation to significant others," and "... that process of finding balance, harmony, and interdependency" (35). In marriage then, differentiation is seen as the degree to which a spouse has developed a solid self in relation to family of origin. Developing a healthy degree of differentiation from family of origin, the Balswicks believe, is a crucial step in establishing a solid marital union. They go on to define differentiation as "developing and defining a secure self, validated in Christ" (13).

The Balswicks are wholeheartedly committed to the premise of their book that "two are better than one." Chapter one explains the dilemma of marriage: the clash between the primary value of self-fulfillment and marital fulfillment in relationship. The lofty goal of chapter two is to present a solution to the dilemma by offering a social theology of the marriage relationship. Here, the Balswicks attempt to meld biblical theology with a social scientific understanding of marriage. They draw an analogy from trinitarian theology to serve as the foundation for this integrative social theology. Simply put, trinitarian theology defines God as Three in One, a unity of three distinct divine Persons in relationship. In like manner, a social scientific understanding of marriage is seen as a unity formed by two distinctly differentiated spouses. The Balswicks contend that "God has created us to be in a mutually reciprocating relationship as two unique selves in relation to God and to each other. In this way marriage is meant to mirror the trinitarian relationships of holy loving between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (12-13).

Building on this trinitarian foundation, in chapters three to six, the Balswicks elaborate on four guiding principles that would contribute to a deeply fulfilling marriage: covenant (commitment and unconditional love), grace (acceptance and forgiveness), empowerment (mutuality and interdependency) and intimacy (knowing and being known). Their summary thesis is simply stated; "we believe the trinitarian model of relationality - that two become one without absorption - is God's ideal for marriage" (83).

While the Balswicks are mindful of the limits of using the trinitarian analogy in human relationships (29, 182), they fail to define those limits. The relationship between the three Persons in the Godhead remains a profound mystery to us fallible human beings. To use the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the model for the relationship between husband and wife takes a mental if not a spiritual leap of faith and understanding (Phil. 2:5-7). Besides, masculinity remains a characteristic of the three Persons of the Trinity. Their book really describes the relationality of people of the same gender, age, or position and not necessarily of the relationship of men and women in a Christian marriage. It does not reveal the true dynamics of husband and wife as "male and female" or what the "two shall become one flesh" (absorption) really means. The better model for the marriage relationship has always been Ephesians 5:21-33, Christ's relationship to His Church—which is also a mystery, but can be more easily grasped by our finite minds as the roles of man and woman come into clearer focus. As couples seek to be Christlike, the Balswicks speak of "mutual self-sacrifice" (70) in equal terms for both husband and wife when clearly, following the example of Christ, husbands are called to lead by their primary submission. In short, they push the gender neutrality button on numerous pages and in so doing neglect and disregard the scriptural teaching on "headship" and the order of creation. In rejecting any "traditionalist" views of marital roles, they would prefer the negotiation of spousal roles (53).

Despite this flaw, the Balswicks make many useful points. They pursue genuine "balance" and "harmony" for the marriage relationship. Even though the biblical concept of grace is never fully defined, chapter 4 on "The Gracing Marriage" keeps forgiveness at the center of the relationship. Chapter 9 on "Communication, Connection, Communion" was particularly excellent as it dealt with the realities of being married to the same person for life, with the goal being enrichment and greater depth over the seasons of marriage. And even though the role of the pastor is negated (confession is mentioned without absolution, and the term "therapist" is preferred), they point couples to the church (of whatever confession) as the "healing community" (190-191). Perhaps it is the church then and not Christ that fills out the trinitarian concept of equality with differentiation that the Balswicks hope to achieve?

Jack and Judith Balswick construct a theological model from *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations* and integrate it with the Bowen Natural Systems Theory. They also thoughtfully integrate their own marital journey in this monograph. They are plainly egalitarian in their view of marriage. I would recommend this book to seminarians and pastors for its practical guidance and not so much for its theological insights.

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A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark's Gospel. By Brendan Byrne. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008. 304 pages. Paperback. \$26.95.

For the past several years, I have had the great pleasure of teaching a course on the Gospel of Mark. Doing so has proven both frustrating and exhilarating. The frustration comes from two sources. First of all, most commentaries do not take Mark's theology seriously. For many, Mark is simply a "rough draft" that needed to be smoothed out and enhanced by the likes of Matthew and Luke. The second source of frustration hits closer to home. Namely, the church has long neglected the second gospel. The church fathers show little evidence of reading Mark, and the historic lectionary almost completely ignores the second gospel. However, as of late, there are signs of life on both the scholarly and the churchly front. Joel Marcus' scholarly *Mark 1-8* (Anchor Bible Series) takes Mark seriously, and demonstrates the evangelist's subtle and masterful use of the Old Testament. And, now, we have from Brendan Byrne a most excellent churchly commentary.

Byrne's *Costly Freedom* is perhaps the best work on Mark that I have ever read. It is clear that Byrne, an Australian Jesuit, writes with an experienced hand, drawing from his years of teaching and preaching for the church. Byrne introduces us to what he calls "the scariest" gospel, a world inhabited by demons, and plagued by misunderstanding and conflict (x). The gospel of Mark, as Byrne notes, offers no comforting vision of the risen Lord. Mark portrays the church not in its idyllic state, but from a very earthly perspective, with all of its blemishes. As Byrne writes, "Mark seems particularly designed to address failure in community leadership, and wider disillusionment and hopelessness to which that failure can give rise" (xi). Given our world, much of it seemingly "burnt out" by clay-footed church leaders, this message is timely indeed.

Refreshingly, Byrne offers a truly theological reading of Mark. To be sure, he knows the ins and outs of the exegetical trade, but he does not burden the reader with the details. He describes the Markan narrative as one in which the life of Jesus is "playing out on earth, for the benefit of humanity, of the communion of love that is the Trinity" (xi).

Structurally, Byrne divides the second gospel into three stories, having to do with 1) Jesus as God's Son, 2) who is destined to suffer and die in Jerusalem, 3) but will come again in glory to judge the world. What is most interesting is the way that the resurrection is downplayed in Byrne's reading. Yes, Mark would have us know, Jesus is risen. But, no, the church should not expect the glory here and now. Instead, we muddle through this world clinging to Christ and praying for faith. Mark's gospel, perhaps more than any other, is a theology of the cross. For example, the Baptism of Jesus leads directly to a time with the "wild beasts" in the desert. So, also the Christian life is baptismal, and often leads to hardship, danger, and isolation. The reference

to wild beasts, Byrne notes, would have been especially poignant given Nero's practice of throwing Christians to the lions (35).

After introducing us to his overall scheme, Byrne proceeds to walk us through the Gospel of Mark pericope by pericope. In the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (1:29-34), Byrne introduces us to life in the house church, and paints a portrait of the newly emerging Christian family (47). In the healing of the paralytic (2:1-12), the author speaks movingly about the relationship between healing and forgiveness, between sickness and sin (56-58). The author repeatedly speaks about the ways in which Jesus' ministry of touch has a sacramental dimension. So also in the feeding of the 5000, Byrne shows how Mark points both backward to Moses, David and Elisha, and also forward to the Supper that he will soon provide for the church. In words that should resonate with Lutherans, he describes the feeding in which there "now unfolds a 'word and sacrament duality' prefiguring the later ministry of the church" (115).

If you are not yet convinced about the benefits of the three-year lectionary, Byrne may very well change your mind. His work shows again and again that Mark's voice is not only distinctive and compelling, but also necessary. This book would be excellent for any preacher working his way through Series B, or for anyone offering a Bible study on the second gospel. All of this is not to say that the careful reader will not find weaknesses here or there. As far as writings on Mark go, though, I can think of no better. Byrne's book is an exhilarating commentary on an exhilarating gospel.

Peter J. Scaer

Christ in the Gospels of the Liturgical Year. By Raymond E. Brown. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008. 435 pages. Paperback. \$29.95.

Raymond E. Brown passed away in August 1998 shortly after the sixth and final fascicle in his series on liturgical preaching appeared in print.

John R. Donahue has brought them together in one book and along with Ronald D. Witherup given introductory essays in analyzing Brown's approach and providing resources for liturgical preaching. The Roman three year gospel series is not identical to the LCMS one, but close enough so that Brown's expertise in liturgy and gospel studies book can be rewarding. In the liturgical churches, the three series can never be a *lectio continua*, since the readings are adjusted for Christmas (chs. 5-15), Easter (chs. 16-26) and Pentecost (chs. 27-32) cycles. This amounts to half the calendar year. One chapter is devoted to each evangelist for the remainder of the year (chs. 33-36). The three year series follows the pattern inherent in each gospel and so the preacher is more likely to find that evangelist's unique intention. In comparing how one evangelist uses materials with another, the preacher discovers that evangelist's intentions and so finds a clue for preaching. Brown also brings the Old Testament and

epistle readings into the discussion. All this scholarship is presented in an easy-to-read style. No fluff here; it is well worth the small investment.

David P. Scaer

The Power of Images in Paul. By Raymond F. Collins. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008. 307 pages. Paperback. \$49.95.

The appearance of an object depends on your vantage point. Look at the biblical texts from a different perspective, and you will gain new insights. In this light, Raymond Collins' work is valuable. In *The Power of Images in Paul*, Collins looks at the Pauline Epistles through the lens of metaphor in Hellenistic rhetoric. For the purposes of this work, Collins sets Paul alongside of rhetoricians such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, and shows how Paul used the rhetorical arts to persuade his audience and convey his message.

The outline of the book is simple. Collins walks the reader through the epistles, commenting on Paul's use of metaphors. He concludes that Paul drew regularly upon such metaphors as kinship, the body, life cycles, walking and stumbling, running and fighting, occupations, agriculture, animals, construction, finances, social status, public life, the courtroom, and the cosmos. It is very notable, for instance, to see how Paul's description of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12 compares with similar metaphors used by the likes of Seneca. As Collins demonstrates, Paul used familiar topics, bending and shaping them into something new. Collins persuades the reader that "Paul was a man with a rich and varied experience," who "takes his figurative imagery not only from the Hellenistic culture within which he lived but also from the Jewish tradition in which he was reared" (257). In other words, Paul was a pastor who had one foot in Athens and another in Jerusalem. He sought to bring to people the richness of the gospel, within the context of the world where they lived.

If there is a downside to this book, it is that it too often treats metaphor as only a surface phenomenon, instead of something that is often intimately connected to Paul's subject matter. For instance, Collins speaks at length about Paul's use of metaphors such as kinship and body without showing how these "metaphors" are actually grounded in the reality of the Christian kinship established through Baptism. Again, he speaks of the courtroom scenes in Romans as metaphor, without driving home the point that the judgment of God is in itself true and real. As Collins concludes, "I can only hope that Paul's metaphors will continue to move those who read his words from their own status quo to the Transcendent Father" (263). What is missing in such a conclusion is the reality of the Incarnate Christ, who reveals a God whose Fatherhood is not metaphorical but upon whom our ideas of Fatherhood are based.

So, *The Power of Images in Paul* may not change your world or deepen your understanding, but it may open up a few doors and shed some new light, which is never a bad thing.

Peter J. Scaer

The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries. Edited by Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen and Stephen R. Spencer. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007. 280 pages. Paper. \$26.00.

This book's chapters were presented as lectures in a November 2007 conference at Wheaton College (Illinois) entitled "Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Classic Christian Resources for Moral Formation." They give an overview of how the significant theologians from John Chrysostom to John Paul II and John Stott have interpreted the Sermon on the Mount. A better word than "interpreted" might be used, given that these theologians seem less interested in determining the meaning of the Sermon than in showcasing their own theological perspectives. As a history of theology, then, readers will encounter few surprises, except perhaps in the case of Hugh of St. Victor, Spurgeon, and others largely unknown to Lutherans.

Evangelicals' commitment to biblical inspiration has not prevented them from determining what theologians over the past 1500 years have said about the Sermon on the Mount, but the catholic approach awakens a mild cynicism, since these ancient and modern luminaries do not agree on the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount. Luther imposed his two kingdom doctrine into its words. Calvin saw it as a spiritual law that was different from Old Testament national laws in which God accommodated himself to human weakness. Wesley saw it as an outline for perfectionism. Faith is only the front porch to true holiness. Of course we already knew all this. Another cause for cynicism is that a historical survey could be seen as a substitute in finding meaning in the Sermon itself, a task made even more remote by the critical scholars.

All that being said, the essays are delightful reading, even if at the end we are left at arm's length from the Sermon and its meaning.

David P. Scaer

Jesus and Philosophy: New Essays. Edited by Paul K. Moser. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 236 pages. Paperback. \$26.99.

Confessional Lutherans will no doubt find the title of this collection of essays rather curious. The question posed at the beginning—Is there any relationship between Jesus and philosophy?—might even elicit an angry Barthian "Nein!" But one should not, in confessional zeal, ignore this book. The ten different essays in *Jesus and Philosophy* authored by New Testament scholars and philosophers of religion are interesting and worth a perusal.

The first, Paul K. Moser's introduction, sets the tone. He begins by noting that most philosophers would not even consider Jesus' life and teachings worthy of professional consideration. Why? With Jesus, Mosher explains, the perennial questions of philosophy are not only addressed but also settled. He "cleanses the temple of philosophy and turns over our self-crediting tables of mere philosophical discussion. He pronounces judgment on this long-standing self-made temple, in genuine love for its wayward builders."

It is especially for this reason, Mosher suggests, that Jesus is relevant to philosophy. Before going any further, though, the first chapter written by Craig A. Evans examines all the possible historical sources for our knowledge of Jesus. His conclusion is perhaps predictable but nonetheless (considering theories advanced by others) refreshing. The New Testament, he argues, provides the clearest and most precise evidence for Jesus' teachings and understanding of himself.

Paul W. Gooch's "Paul, the Mind of Christ, and Philosophy" will surely challenge conventional theological thinking. He deals, in particular, with aspects of the Pauline epistles that are oftentimes interpreted as a blanket dismissal of philosophical endeavors, and concludes that, while Paul criticized human wisdom when it either wittingly or unwittingly trumped knowledge of God revealed by God, he certainly saw philosophy as a useful epistemological and evangelistic tool. Following along these lines, William Abraham's "The Epistemology of Jesus" is also quite intriguing. He suggests, from a Wesleyan perspective, the various ways the person and work of Christ might aid the Christian in philosophical reflection and ethical action.

A variety of other essays in the book will also be of interest to theologians. Chapters on Augustine and Thomas Aquinas and the role Jesus played in the development of what might be called their philosophical theology are must reads for the historical theologian. Essays on Jesus and forgiveness and the "meaning of life" by Nicholas Wolterstorff and Charles Taliaferro, respectively, will give pastoral theologians as well as university chaplains some food for thought. On the other hand, Luke Timothy Johnson's essay on Jesus from the perspective of philosophy and David F. Ford's explanation of the French phenomenologist Paul Ricoeur's "biblical philosophy" are probably more geared towards those whose interests are purely philosophical.

There are some challenging ideas throughout this book. However, some issues are raised that are not normally considered by pastors and theologians. As such, this book has some utility. It will undoubtedly provoke some serious reflection and perhaps open up some new lines of theological inquiry.

Adam S. Francisco

Believing in Preaching: What Listeners Hear in Sermons. By M. Mulligan, D. Turner-Sharazz, D. Wilhelm and R. Allen. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005. 216 pages. Paperback. \$24.99.

Preachers preach every Sunday—and every Sunday congregations listen. Works to assist preachers preach abound, but few offer critical insight into the minds of those who listen to sermons. *Believing in Preaching* offers academic research into the act of preaching from the hearer's perspective. Twenty-eight varying denominations supplied one hundred and twenty-eight churchgoers for interview on how they listen to sermons. Participants answered questions varying from the naming of a particular sermon that affected them to the hearer's perceived role of what God could do through a sermon. The results of these interviews were then compiled into ten chapters covering such areas as: the purpose of preaching, the hearer's relationship with the preacher, shaping of community, etc. The chapters discuss relevant interviewee responses and conclude by offering recommendations for preachers to consider when preaching.

As helpful as the approach is, for those with even a basic understanding of social statistics, the research design of this book may leave them unsatisfied. There is no fullness of questionnaire listed, the interviews cannot be found in their entirety, and a discussion is lacking as to why certain questions were asked and others were not. However, the greater difficulty might be with this work's central premise: that, to a certain extent, preachers can and should subject the preached Word to the whims, or at least the desires of, their congregations. Still, there are many other works in the field of Homiletics that commit the sin of overindulgence to a congregation far more than *Believing in Preaching* does.

That said, the majority of chapters in this work do offer insights that might be quite fruitful for preachers to consider. The stated goal of providing preachers with an insight into the mentality of those who listen to sermons stands well intact and profitable. The summation of theological interviews was done well and packaged nicely. Overall, this work does allow the preacher who preaches every week the ability to peek into the mind and soul of the faithful listener who listens every week.

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- Arnold, Clinton E. *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008. 280 Pages. Hardcover. \$24.99.
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